



CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



THE



FLOWERS
OF EVIL



NEW TRANSLATION *by* ANTHONY MORTIMER



The Flowers of Evil

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Charles Baudelaire

Translated by Anthony Mortimer



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The Flowers of Evil
(Les Fleurs du Mal, 1861)

AU POÈTE IMPECCABLE
AU PARFAIT MAGICIEN ÈS LETTRES FRANÇAISES
À MON TRÈS CHER ET TRÈS VÉNÉRÉ
MAÎTRE ET AMI

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

AVEC LES SENTIMENTS
DE LA PLUS PROFONDE HUMILITÉ
JE DÉDIE
CES FLEURS MALADIVES
C.B.

TO THE IMPECCABLE POET
TO THE PERFECT MAGICIAN OF FRENCH LETTERS
TO MY DEAREST AND MOST RESPECTED
MASTER AND FRIEND

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

WITH FEELINGS
OF THE MOST PROFOUND HUMILITY
I DEDICATE
THESE SICKLY FLOWERS
C.B.

Au Lecteur

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,
Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches ;
Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,
Et nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux,
Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté,
Et le riche métal de notre volonté
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent !
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas ;
Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,
Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent.

Ainsi qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange
Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,
Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin
Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

To the Reader

Folly and error, avarice and vice
Busy our minds and sap our bodies' force;
We feed our pleasant feelings of remorse
Like itchy beggars nourishing their lice.

Stubborn in sin and cowards in repentance,
We make confession for a lavish pay,
Then go back gaily to the muddy way,
As if cheap tears could wash out all our stains.

On evil's pillow Satan Trismegist
Lulls with long murmurs the enchanted soul,
A knowing chemist who dissolves our will
And turns its precious metal into mist.

The Devil holds the strings that make us move!
Now loathsome objects seem to please us well;
Each day we take one further step to Hell,
Without repugnance, down through stinking caves.

As some poor lecher with his raddled whore
Kisses and nibbles at her withered breast,
We steal clandestine pleasures, like the taste
Of an old orange squeezed for one drop more.

Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons,
Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons
Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,
N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins
Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,
C'est que notre âme, hélas ! n'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,
Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,
Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants,
Dans la ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde !
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,
Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde ;

C'est l'Ennui ! — l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
— Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère !

THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

Like seething millions of intestinal worms,
A race of Demons riots in our brains,
And with the air we breathe Death flows unseen
Into our lungs, a dull lamenting stream.

If rape and arson, poison or the knife
Have not yet graced the canvas where we please
To paint banal and petty destinies,
It is because we are not bold enough.

But amid jackals, panthers, the whole crew
Of mongrels, monkeys, scorpions, vultures, snakes,
Monsters that howl and scream and crawl and croak,
The chief among the vices in our zoo

Is one more foul, more vicious than the rest,
Who does not shout or make some great commotion,
Yet with a yawn would swallow all creation
And happily reduce the earth to dust;

This is Ennui! With a reluctant tear,
He dreams of scaffolds as he smokes his hookah.
You know him, reader, this fastidious monster
– Hypocrite reader – kindred spirit – brother!

SPLEEN ET IDÉAL

1

Bénédiction

Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,
Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé,
Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes
Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié :

— « Ah ! que n'ai-je mis bas tout un nœud de vipères,
Plutôt que de nourrir cette dérision !
Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères
Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation !

Puisque tu m'as choisie entre toutes les femmes
Pour être le dégoût de mon triste mari,
Et que je ne puis pas rejeter dans les flammes,
Comme un billet d'amour, ce monstre rabougri,

Je ferai rejaillir ta haine qui m'accable
Sur l'instrument maudit de tes méchancetés,
Et je tordrai si bien cet arbre misérable,
Qu'il ne pourra pousser ses boutons empestés ! »

Elle ravale ainsi l'écume de sa haine,
Et, ne comprenant pas les desseins éternels,
Elle-même prépare au fond de la Géhenne
Les bûchers consacrés aux crimes maternels.

SPLEEN AND THE IDEAL

1

Benediction

When, by decree of the great powers on high,
The Poet comes to this dull world, his mother
Dismayed, aghast, breaks out in blasphemy
And shakes her fist at God, who pities her:

– “Ah, why did I not spawn a nest of vipers
Rather than nurse this mockery of a thing!
Cursed be the night of my ephemeral pleasures
When I conceived this penance for my sin!

Since you have chosen me among all women
To make my husband loathe me as his shame,
And since I cannot throw this stunted monster,
Like some old love-letter, into the flames,

I shall pass on the burden of your hatred
To the cursed instrument of all your spite
And twist this wretched tree, so it can never
Put forth new buds and bear infected fruit.”

And thus, not grasping the eternal plan,
She chokes and swallows down her hatred’s foam;
She herself stokes the penal fires designed
Deep in Gehenna for maternal crime.

Pourtant, sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange,
L'Enfant déshérité s'enivre de soleil,
Et dans tout ce qu'il boit et dans tout ce qu'il mange
Retrouve l'ambroisie et le nectar vermeil.

Il joue avec le vent, cause avec le nuage,
Et s'enivre en chantant du chemin de la croix ;
Et l'Esprit qui le suit dans son pèlerinage
Pleure de le voir gai comme un oiseau des bois.

Tous ceux qu'il veut aimer l'observent avec crainte,
Ou bien, s'enhardissant de sa tranquillité,
Cherchent à qui saura lui tirer une plainte,
Et font sur lui l'essai de leur férocité.

Dans le pain et le vin destinés à sa bouche
Ils mêlent de la cendre avec d'impurs crachats ;
Avec hypocrisie ils jettent ce qu'il touche,
Et s'accusent d'avoir mis leurs pieds dans ses pas.

Sa femme va criant sur les places publiques :
« Puisqu'il me trouve assez belle pour m'adorer,
Je ferai le métier des idoles antiques,
Et comme elles je veux me faire redorer ;

Et je me soulerai de nard, d'encens, de myrrhe,
De génuflexions, de viandes et de vins,
Pour savoir si je puis dans un cœur qui m'admire
Usurper en riant les hommages divins !

Et, quand je m'ennuierai de ces farces impies,
Je poserai sur lui ma frêle et forte main ;
Et mes ongles, pareils aux ongles des harpies,
Sauront jusqu'à son cœur se frayer un chemin.

Yet, with an Angel as his unseen guide,
The disinherited Child enraptured tastes
The sunshine, and in all he eats and drinks
Finds nectar and ambrosia for his feast.

He plays upon the wind, confers with clouds
And sings the way of the cross in such a mood
Of bliss that his Attendant Spirit weeps
To see him happy like a forest bird.

All those he seeks to love look on with fear,
Or else, because his calm has made them brave,
See which of them can force him to cry out,
Testing what their ferocity can achieve.

Ashes and gobs of spit they mix into
The bread and wine intended for his mouth;
As hypocrites they throw out all he touches
And blame themselves for treading in his path.

His wife announces in the marketplace:
“Since he adores my beauty, I’ll make bold
To choose the trade those ancient idols practised,
And like them have myself covered in gold.

And I shall drug myself with nard and incense,
With myrrh and genuflections, meats and wine,
And laugh if in his loving heart I can
Usurp the homage owed to what’s Divine.

And when I tire of this impious farce,
I’ll bring my slender and strong hand to bear
Upon his flesh; my nails, like harpies’ claws,
Will cut the bleeding path that leads to where,

Comme un tout jeune oiseau qui tremble et qui palpite,
J'arracherai ce cœur tout rouge de son sein,
Et, pour rassasier ma bête favorite,
Je le lui jetterai par terre avec dédain ! »

Vers le Ciel, où son œil voit un trône splendide,
Le Poète serein lève ses bras pieux,
Et les vastes éclairs de son esprit lucide
Lui dérobent l'aspect des peuples furieux :

— « Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance
Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés
Et comme la meilleure et la plus pure essence
Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés !

Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poète
Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions,
Et que vous l'invitez à l'éternelle fête
Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations.

Je sais que la douleur est la noblesse unique
Où ne mordront jamais la terre et les enfers,
Et qu'il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique
Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers.

Mais les bijoux perdus de l'antique Palmyre,
Les métaux inconnus, les perles de la mer,
Par votre main montés, ne pourraient pas suffire
À ce beau diadème éblouissant et clair ;

Car il ne sera fait que de pure lumière,
Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs,
Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière,
Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs ! »

As if it were a trembling young bird,
I'll dig the bright red heart out of his breast;
And then, as meat to glut my favourite hound,
I'll toss it down with scorn into the dust!"

To Heaven, where he sees a shining throne,
The Poet lifts his pious arms; the light
And the vast flashes of his lucid mind
Cancel the raging nations from his sight:

"Be blessed, O God, who offers suffering
As heavenly cure for our impurities,
And as the finest and the purest essence
To train the strong for holy ecstasies.

I know that for the Poet you have kept
A place among the legions of the blessed,
Amid the Thrones and Virtues and Dominions,
Bidden to share in the eternal feast.

Sorrow alone is the nobility
That earth and hell, I know, shall not cast down,
And endless ages, this whole universe,
Must all be taxed to weave my mystic crown.

But the sea pearls and metals still unknown,
The vanished glory of Palmyra's gems,
Though mounted by your hand, would not suffice
To make this clear and dazzling diadem,

Made, as it will be, only of pure light,
Drawn from the first rays of the sacred fire,
Of which our mortal eyes, however bright,
Are only darkened melancholy mirrors."

2

L'Albatros

Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage
Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,
Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,
Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.

À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule !
Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid !
L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,
L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait !

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer ;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

3

Élévation

Au-dessus des étangs, au-dessus des vallées,
Des montagnes, des bois, des nuages, des mers,
Par-delà le soleil, par-delà les éthers,
Par-delà les confins des sphères étoilées,

Mon esprit, tu te meus avec agilité,
Et, comme un bon nageur qui se pâme dans l'onde,
Tu sillannes gaiement l'immensité profonde
Avec une indicible et mâle volupté.

2

The Albatross

Often, to pass the time of day, the crew
Catch those immense seabirds, the albatross,
Idle and gliding fellow-travellers who
Follow the ship across the bitter deep.

No sooner have they placed these airy kings
Upon the deck than, awkward and ashamed,
The albatross let down their great white wings
To drag beside them like unwieldy oars.

Winged voyager, how clumsy and how weak!
Once splendid, now how comic and how ugly!
One sailor sticks a clay pipe in his beak,
Another limps to mock his hampered flight.

The Poet is like this prince of the clouds
Who seeks the storm and scorns the archer's bow;
Exiled on earth, amid the jeering crowd,
With giant wings that will not let him walk.

3

Elevation

Above the mountains and above the clouds,
Above the valleys, woods and lakes and ocean,
Beyond the sun, beyond ethereal spaces
And starry spheres, beyond their utmost bounds,

Swift spirit, now you make your supple way,
And, like a swimmer ravished by the waves,
You gaily cleave the great unfathomed deeps
With an ineffable and virile joy.

Envole-toi bien loin de ces miasmes morbides ;
Va te purifier dans l'air supérieur,
Et bois, comme une pure et divine liqueur,
Le feu clair qui remplit les espaces limpides.

Derrière les ennuis et les vastes chagrins
Qui chargent de leur poids l'existence brumeuse,
Heureux celui qui peut d'une aile vigoureuse
S'élancer vers les champs lumineux et sereins ;

Celui dont les penses, comme des alouettes,
Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor,
— Qui plane sur la vie, et comprend sans effort
Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes !

4

Correspondances

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Fly far from these miasmic sickly places;
Arise and cleanse yourself in higher air,
And drink, as of a draught divine and pure,
The lucent fire that floods the sky-clear spaces.

Beyond the dreary cares and vast distress
That weigh upon our dim existence here,
Happy the man who with a vigorous wing
Can soar towards the shining fields of peace;

Happy the man whose thoughts, like larks, take wing
Freely towards the morning skies – who glides
Above this life and simply understands
The speech of flowers and of silent things.

4

Correspondences

In Nature's temple living columns rise
And sometimes yield confusing words; man wanders
Through forest glades of symbols that observe
His steps as those of one they recognize.

As the long echoes from afar resound
And mingle in one dark deep unity,
Vast as the night and clear as noonday, so
Do perfumes, sounds and colours correspond.

Some perfumes have the skinfresh smell of children,
Mellow as oboes, green as fields in spring
– And others are corrupted, rich, triumphant,

Exhaling widely like all infinite things,
Ambergris, musk, and benjamin and incense,
That hymn the ecstasies of soul and senses.

5

J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues,
 Dont Phœbus se plaisait à dorer les statues.
 Alors l'homme et la femme en leur agilité
 Jouissaient sans mensonge et sans anxiété,
 Et, le ciel amoureux leur caressant l'échine,
 Exerçaient la santé de leur noble machine.
 Cybèle alors, fertile en produits généreux,
 Ne trouvait point ses fils un poids trop onéreux,
 Mais, louve au cœur gonflé de tendresses communes,
 Abreuvait l'univers à ses tétines brunes.
 L'homme, élégant, robuste et fort, avait le droit
 D'être fier des beautés qui le nommaient leur roi ;
 Fruits purs de tout outrage et vierges de gerçures,
 Dont la chair lisse et ferme appelait les morsures !

Le Poète aujourd'hui, quand il veut concevoir
 Ces natives grandeurs, aux lieux où se font voir
 La nudité de l'homme et celle de la femme,
 Sent un froid ténébreux envelopper son âme
 Devant ce noir tableau plein d'épouvantement.
 Ô monstruosité pleurant leur vêtement !
 Ô ridicules troncs ! torses dignes des masques !
 Ô pauvres corps tordus, maigres, ventrus ou flasques,
 Que le dieu de l'Utile, implacable et serein,
 Enfants, emmaillota dans ses langes d'airain !
 Et vous, femmes, hélas ! pâles comme des cierges,
 Que ronge et que nourrit la débauche, et vous, vierges,
 Du vice maternel traînant l'hérédité
 Et toutes les hideurs de la fécondité !

Nous avons, il est vrai, nations corrompues,
 Aux peuples anciens des beautés inconnues :
 Des visages rongés par les chancres du cœur,

5

I love the memory of those naked days
 When Phoebus gilded statues with his rays.
 Women and men, without deceit or care,
 Basked in the joy of supple bodies there,
 Perfect machines, as gracious heaven above
 Caressed their backs with its health-giving love.
 Cybele's fruitful bounty was so great
 She did not find her sons a heavy weight,
 But, like the she-wolf, proved a tender nurse
 Whose teats gave suck to all the universe.
 Robust and handsome, man had cause for pride,
 Named as their king by beauties at his side,
 Pure fruits untainted and exempt from blight,
 With firm smooth flesh enticing one to bite!

Today the Poet, looking for the air
 Of native glory in those places where
 Women and men reveal their nakedness,
 Feels a dark chill invade his soul, oppressed
 By such a frightful spectacle – all those
 Poor freaks who must be crying out for clothes!
 Torsos and trunks fit only for burlesque,
 Twisted, pot-bellied, flabby and grotesque,
 Whom that implacable god, Utility,
 Swaddled with bronze to cramp their infancy.
 And women, pale as tapers, fed and fed on
 By their debauchery; and you virgins led on
 By that maternal vice, condemned to see
 The hideous fruits of your fertility!

It's true that we corrupted nations show
 Beauties that ancient peoples did not know:
 Faces that cankers of the heart consume,

Et comme qui dirait des beautés de langueur ;
Mais ces inventions de nos muses tardives
N'empêcheront jamais les races maladives
De rendre à la jeunesse un hommage profond,
— À la sainte jeunesse, à l'air simple, au doux front,
À l'œil limpide et clair ainsi qu'une eau courante,
Et qui va répandant sur tout, insouciant
Comme l'azur du ciel, les oiseaux et les fleurs,
Ses parfums, ses chansons et ses douces chaleurs !

6

Les Phares

Rubens, fleuve d'oubli, jardin de la paresse,
Oreiller de chair fraîche où l'on ne peut aimer,
Mais où la vie afflue et s'agite sans cesse,
Comme l'air dans le ciel et la mer dans la mer ;

Léonard de Vinci, miroir profond et sombre,
Où des anges charmants, avec un doux souris
Tout chargé de mystère, apparaissent à l'ombre
Des glaciers et des pins qui ferment leur pays ;

Rembrandt, triste hôpital tout rempli de murmures,
Et d'un grand crucifix décoré seulement,
Où la prière en pleurs s'exhale des ordures,
Et d'un rayon d'hiver traversé brusquement ;

Michel-Ange, lieu vague où l'on voit des Hercules
Se mêler à des Christs, et se lever tout droits
Des fantômes puissants qui dans les crépuscules
Déchirent leur suaire en étirant leurs doigts ;

Beauties perhaps that have a fading bloom;
But these inventions of our later muse
Will never make our sickly race refuse
Deep homage to the holiness of youth,
That pure untroubled brow, that air of truth;
Youth whose clear eyes are like a stream that flows
As equally on all things it bestows –
Careless like azure skies and birds and flowers –
Its perfumes, songs and mildly ardent powers.

6

The Beacons

Rubens, oblivious stream and idle garden,
Cool pillow of flesh where loving cannot be,
But where life's current stirs incessantly,
As wind and water do in sky and sea;

Dark Leonardo, mirror of the depths,
The haunt of angels whose sweet smile sustains
The burden of a mystery in the shade
Of pines and glaciers sealing their domain;

Rembrandt, sad hospice of half-heard complaints,
Bare walls where one great crucifix hangs alone,
Where tearful prayers arise, exhaled by filth,
Pierced by a fleeting ray of wintry sun;

And Michelangelo, a waste where figures
Of Christ and Hercules mingle; there upright
Stand powerful phantoms who stretch out their fingers
And rend their grave-clothes in the fading light;

Colères de boxeur, impudences de faune,
Toi qui sus ramasser la beauté des goujats,
Grand cœur gonflé d'orgueil, homme débile et jaune,
Puget, mélancolique empereur des forçats ;

Watteau, ce carnaval où bien des cœurs illustres,
Comme des papillons, errent en flamboyant,
Décors frais et légers éclairés par des lustres
Qui versent la folie à ce bal tournoyant ;

Goya, cauchemar plein de choses inconnues,
De fœtus qu'on fait cuire au milieu des sabbats,
De vieilles au miroir et d'enfants toutes nues,
Pour tenter les démons ajustant bien leurs bas ;

Delacroix, lac de sang hanté des mauvais anges,
Ombragé par un bois de sapins toujours vert,
Où, sous un ciel chagrin, des fanfares étranges
Passent, comme un soupir étouffé de Weber ;

Ces malédictions, ces blasphèmes, ces plaintes,
Ces extases, ces cris, ces pleurs, ces *Te Deum*,
Sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes ;
C'est pour les cœurs mortels un divin opium !

C'est un cri répété par mille sentinelles,
Un ordre renvoyé par mille porte-voix ;
C'est un phare allumé sur mille citadelles,
Un appel de chasseurs perdus dans les grands bois !

Car c'est vraiment, Seigneur, le meilleur témoignage
Que nous puissions donner de notre dignité
Que cet ardent sanglot qui roule d'âge en âge
Et vient mourir au bord de votre éternité !

A boxer's fury, impudent like a faun,
Scavenging beauty even in human dregs,
A strong proud heart, trapped in a feeble frame,
Puget, the gloomy emperor of old lags;

Watteau, this carnival where famous hearts
Wander like butterflies in a glittering trance,
Cool vaporous settings under chandeliers
That rain bright madness on the swirling dance;

Goya, a nightmare of unheard-of things –
A foetus cooked for witches' sabbath revels,
Old hags at mirrors, naked little girls
Pulling their stockings tight to tempt the devils;

Delacroix, lake of blood where fallen angels
Haunt the dark fir trees under dreary skies;
Strange fanfares echo in the evergreen wood
And fade away like Weber's muffled sighs;

These blasphemies and curses, these laments,
Raptures and tears, this chanting of *Te Deum*,
Are echoed onward through a thousand mazes –
For mortal hearts a heavenly opium!

It is an order blared by a thousand horns,
A call passed on by myriad sentinels,
A cry of hunters lost in the pathless wood,
The beacon of a thousand citadels.

For it is, truly, Lord, the surest witness
That we can cite to prove our dignity,
This ardent sob that rolls from age to age
And dies upon the strand of your eternity.

7

La Muse malade

Ma pauvre muse, hélas ! qu'as-tu donc ce matin ?
Tes yeux creux sont peuplés de visions nocturnes,
Et je vois tour à tour réfléchis sur ton teint
La folie et l'horreur, froides et taciturnes.

Le succube verdâtre et le rose lutin
T'ont-ils versé la peur et l'amour de leurs urnes ?
Le cauchemar, d'un poing despotique et mutin,
T'a-t-il noyée au fond d'un fabuleux Minturnes ?

Je voudrais qu'exhalant l'odeur de la santé
Ton sein de pensers forts fût toujours fréquenté,
Et que ton sang chrétien coulât à flots rythmiques,

Comme les sons nombreux des syllabes antiques,
Où règnent tour à tour le père des chansons,
Phœbus, et le grand Pan, le seigneur des moissons.

8

La Muse vénale

Ô muse de mon cœur, amante des palais,
Auras-tu, quand Janvier lâchera ses Borées,
Durant les noirs ennuis des neigeuses soirées,
Un tison pour chauffer tes deux pieds violets ?

Ranimeras-tu donc tes épaules marbrées
Aux nocturnes rayons qui percent les volets ?
Sentant ta bourse à sec autant que ton palais,
Récolteras-tu l'or des voûtes azurées ?

7

The Sick Muse

Poor muse, alas, what troubles you this morning?
Nocturnal visions haunt your sunken eyes,
Madness and horror, cold and taciturn,
Take turns upon your cheek; I see them rise.

Have the green succubus and rosy goblin
Poured urns of fear and love upon your brow?
Have you been plunged by nightmare's brutal hand
To drown in deep Minturno's fabled slough?

My wish would be that, redolent of health,
Your heart should house thoughts that are ever strong,
Your Christian blood flow with the rhythmic strain

Of ancient syllables and varying tones,
Where Phoebus reigns, the father of all song,
And, in his turn, the harvest-lord, great Pan.

8

The Venal Muse

Muse of my heart and lover of fine mansions,
In the long dreary nights of snow and sleet,
When winter has let Boreas loose, will you
Not find one brand to warm your purple feet?

Or will the moonbeams through the shutters warm
Your shivering shoulders, mottled with the cold?
With both your purse and palate dry, shall you
Run to the azure vaults to glean their gold?

Il te faut, pour gagner ton pain de chaque soir,
Comme un enfant de chœur, jouer de l'encensoir,
Chanter des *Te Deum* auxquels tu ne crois guère,

Ou, saltimbanque à jeun, étaler tes appas
Et ton rire trempé de pleurs qu'on ne voit pas,
Pour faire épanouir la rate du vulgaire.

9

Le Mauvais Moine

Les cloîtres anciens sur leurs grandes murailles
Étalaient en tableaux la sainte Vérité,
Dont l'effet, réchauffant les pieuses entrailles,
Tempérait la froideur de leur austérité.

En ces temps où du Christ florissaient les semailles,
Plus d'un illustre moine, aujourd'hui peu cité,
Prenant pour atelier le champ des funérailles,
Glorifiait la Mort avec simplicité.

— Mon âme est un tombeau que, mauvais cénobite,
Depuis l'éternité je parcours et j'habite ;
Rien n'embellit les murs de ce cloître odieux.

Ô moine fainéant ! quand saurai-je donc faire
Du spectacle vivant de ma triste misère
Le travail de mes mains et l'amour de mes yeux ?

Here's how you have to earn your evening bread:
You play the choirboy, don't spare the incense,
And sing *Te Deums* though you're racked with doubt;

Or like a starving acrobat, show your charms,
Your laughter steeped in tears unseen and meant
To split the sides of the unfeeling crowd.

9

The Bad Monk

The ancient cloisters used to illustrate
The holy Truth in paintings on the walls,
Which served to temper chill austerity,
Warming the bowels of all pious souls.

In those old times when Christ's seed grew and flourished,
Some famous monks, their names half-known today,
Would choose the graveyard as their studio,
Exalting death in all simplicity.

– My soul has ever been a tomb in which
I move and live, a fruitless cenobite;
Nothing adorns this cloister I despise.

O idle monk! When shall I learn to make
Out of this living show of my sad state
The work of my hands and the love of my eyes?

10

L'Ennemi

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage,
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils;
Le tonnerre et la pluie ont fait un tel ravage,
Qu'il reste en mon jardin bien peu de fruits vermeils.

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,
Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur ?

— Ô douleur ! ô douleur ! Le Temps mange la vie,
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le cœur
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie !

11

Le Guignon

Pour soulever un poids si lourd,
Sisyphé, il faudrait ton courage !
Bien qu'on ait du cœur à l'ouvrage,
L'Art est long et le Temps est court.

Loin des sépultures célèbres,
Vers un cimetière isolé,
Mon cœur, comme un tambour voilé,
Va battant des marches funèbres.

10

The Enemy

My youth was nothing but a darkling storm
Shot through at times by brilliant bursts of sun;
And in my garden few red fruits remain
After the thunder's ravages and the rain.

Now I have reached the time of autumn thoughts
When spade and rake are needed to reclaim
The flooded land where water has dug out
Holes in the earth, gaping as wide as tombs.

Who knows if the new flowers that I dream of
Will ever find in this poor soil, washed clean
Like some bleak strand, their mystic quickening food?

– O sorrow, sorrow! Time consumes our life;
The Enemy who gnaws our hearts unseen
Grows tall and waxes strong on our lost blood.

11

The Jinx

No one could lift this heavy weight
Without your courage, Sisyphus!
For though one works with right good will,
Still Art is long and Time is short.

Far from great monumental tombs,
Towards some churchyard's lonely plot
My heart beats out a funeral march,
Throbbing like a muffled drum.

— Maint joyau dort enseveli
Dans les ténèbres et l'oubli,
Bien loin des pioches et des sondes ;

Mainte fleur épanche à regret
Son parfum doux comme un secret
Dans les solitudes profondes.

12

La Vie antérieure

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

– Many a precious jewel stays
Buried in dark oblivion,
Untroubled by the probing spade;

Many a flower casts away
Its sweetly secret fragrance on
The wastes of deepest solitude.

12

A Former Life

I used to dwell beneath vast porticoes
That sea-born suns tinged with a thousand flames,
And that, in evening light, seemed basalt caves,
So straight and stately those grand columns rose.

The sea-swell rolled reflections of the skies
And fused in solemn mystical accord
The overwhelming tones of their rich music
With sunset hues reflected in my eyes.

And there I dwelt in a voluptuous calm
Amid those azure spaces, waves and splendours,
And naked slaves, imbued with fragrant oils,

Who, as they cooled my brow with waving palms,
Had but one care – more deeply to instil
The secret sorrow that has sapped my will.

13

Bohémiens en voyage

La tribu prophétique aux prunelles ardentes
Hier s'est mise en route, emportant ses petits
Sur son dos, ou livrant à leurs fiers appétits
Le trésor toujours prêt des mamelles pendantes.

Les hommes vont à pied sous leurs armes luisantes
Le long des chariots où les leurs sont blottis,
Promenant sur le ciel des yeux appesantis
Par le morne regret des chimères absentes.

Du fond de son réduit sablonneux, le grillon,
Les regardant passer, redouble sa chanson ;
Cybèle, qui les aime, augmente ses verdure,

Fait couler le rocher et fleurir le désert
Devant ces voyageurs, pour lesquels est ouvert
L'empire familial des ténèbres futures.

14

L'Homme et la mer

Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer !
La mer est ton miroir ; tu contemples ton âme
Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame,
Et ton esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer.

Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image ;
Tu l'embrasses des yeux et des bras, et ton cœur
Se distrait quelquefois de sa propre rumeur
Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage.

13

Gypsies on the Road

The tribe of prophets with their burning eyes
Has taken to the road, bearing their young
Upon their backs or offering the treasure
Of pendant breasts to those fierce appetites.

The men, with weapons shining, go on foot
Beside the wagons where their kinfolk huddle,
Scanning the heavens with a yearning gaze,
Heavy with old chimeras lost to sight.

The cricket watches from his sandy home
With song redoubled as he sees them pass;
Their friend Cybele puts on green for them,

Makes rocks gush water and the desert bloom
Before these travellers for whom lies open
The dark familiar realm of shades to come.

14

Man and the Sea

Free man, for ever you will love the sea:
The sea your mirror; you regard your soul
Reflected in its everlasting swell;
Your mind's abyss has no less bitter deeps.

Eager to plunge and join with your own image,
You hold it close with eyes and arms; your heart
Sometimes forgets the feel of its own beat
Drowned out by that lament, untamed and savage.

Vous êtes tous les deux ténébreux et discrets :
Homme, nul n'a sondé le fond de tes abîmes,
Ô mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes,
Tant vous êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets !

Et cependant voilà des siècles innombrables
Que vous vous combattez sans pitié ni remord,
Tellement vous aimez le carnage et la mort,
Ô lutteurs éternels, ô frères implacables !

15

Don Juan aux enfers

Quand Don Juan descendit vers l'onde souterraine
Et lorsqu'il eut donné son obole à Charon,
Un sombre mendiant, l'œil fier comme Antisthène,
D'un bras vengeur et fort saisit chaque aviron.

Montrant leurs seins pendants et leurs robes ouvertes,
Des femmes se tordaient sous le noir firmament,
Et, comme un grand troupeau de victimes offertes,
Derrière lui traînaient un long mugissement.

Sganarelle en riant lui réclamait ses gages,
Tandis que Don Luis avec un doigt tremblant
Montrait à tous les morts errant sur les rivages
Le fils audacieux qui railla son front blanc.

Frissonnant sous son deuil, la chaste et maigre Elvire,
Près de l'époux perfide et qui fut son amant,
Semblait lui réclamer un suprême sourire
Où brillât la douceur de son premier serment.

You are both discreet, both creatures of the shade:
Nobody, man, has fathomed your abyss;
Nobody, sea, can know your inmost riches;
Both jealous of the secrets that you guard.

Yet countless centuries have passed and still,
Remorseless, pitiless, you choose to fight,
In death and carnage finding such delight,
Eternal foes, brothers unreconciled!

15

Don Juan in Hell

When Don Juan went down to Hell and paid
Charon his coin to cross the infernal stream,
A beggar, eyeing him with Antisthenes' pride,
Seized both the oars with strong avenging arms.

With open gowns and drooping breasts on show,
Writhing beneath that subterranean sky,
A herd of women followed him and moaned
Like lowing cattle led to sacrifice.

Sganarelle jeered, his wages still unpaid,
While, on the shore, to all the wandering dead
Don Luis' trembling finger showed the son
Who dared to mock his reverend white head.

Elvira, gaunt and chaste beneath her veil
Of mourning, shivered by her faithless spouse
And lover, as if craving one last smile
Bright with the tenderness of his first vows.

Tout droit dans son armure, un grand homme de pierre
Se tenait à la barre et coupait le flot noir ;
Mais le calme héros, courbé sur sa rapière,
Regardait le sillage et ne daignait rien voir.

16

Châtiment de l'orgueil

En ces temps merveilleux où la Théologie
Fleurit avec le plus de sève et d'énergie,
On raconte qu'un jour un docteur des plus grands,
— Après avoir forcé les cœurs indifférents ;
Les avoir remués dans leurs profondeurs noires ;
Après avoir franchi vers les célestes gloires
Des chemins singuliers à lui-même inconnus,
Où les purs Esprits seuls peut-être étaient venus, —
Comme un homme monté trop haut, pris de panique,
S'écria, transporté d'un orgueil satanique :
« Jésus, petit Jésus ! je t'ai poussé bien haut !
Mais, si j'avais voulu t'attaquer au défaut
De l'armure, ta honte égalerait ta gloire,
Et tu ne serais plus qu'un fœtus dérisoire ! »

Immédiatement sa raison s'en alla.
L'éclat de ce soleil d'un crêpe se voila ;
Tout le chaos roula dans cette intelligence,
Temple autrefois vivant, plein d'ordre et d'opulence,
Sous les plafonds duquel tant de pompe avait lui.
Le silence et la nuit s'installèrent en lui,
Comme dans un caveau dont la clef est perdue.
Dès lors il fut semblable aux bêtes de la rue,
Et, quand il s'en allait sans rien voir, à travers
Les champs, sans distinguer les étés des hivers,
Sale, inutile et laid comme une chose usée,
Il faisait des enfants la joie et la risée.

A great stone man, upright in armour, steered
The boat that cut its way through the black flood;
But the calm hero, leaning on his sword,
Stared at the wake, deigned to see nothing else.

16

The Punishment of Pride

In times miraculous when theology
Flourished with greater sap and energy,
They say a Doctor of the Church one day
– Having brought lukewarm hearts under his sway
And stirred the human soul’s most deep recess;
Having climbed upward to celestial bliss
By strange paths, even to himself unknown,
Where only some pure spirits may have gone –
Seized by a transport of satanic pride
And panicking with vertigo, he cried
“O little Jesus, I’ve exalted you,
But if I’d chosen to attack you through
Your armour’s chink, how shameful, little Jesus!
You would be nothing but a wretched foetus.”

So said he; and at once his reason failed,
Like a sun covered with a black crape veil;
All chaos swirled in that unruly mind,
A temple once, well-ordered and refined,
Beneath whose roof such eloquence shone bright.
Now all it held was silence and the night,
As in a cellar where the key is lost.
Thereafter he was like an errant beast,
And when he walked unseeing through the fields,
Not knowing summer’s heat from winter’s cold,
Ugly and foul, he seemed a thing to mock,
Discarded junk, the children’s laughing stock.

17

La Beauté

Je suis belle, ô mortels ! comme un rêve de pierre,
Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière.

Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris ;
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes ;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.

Les poètes, devant mes grandes attitudes,
Que j'ai l'air d'emprunter aux plus fiers monuments,
Consumeront leurs jours en d'austères études ;

Car j'ai, pour fasciner ces dociles amants,
De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles :
Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles !

18

L'Idéal

Ce ne seront jamais ces beautés de vignettes,
Produits avariés, nés d'un siècle vaurien,
Ces pieds à brodequins, ces doigts à castagnettes,
Qui sauront satisfaire un cœur comme le mien.

Je laisse à Gavarni, poète des chloroses,
Son troupeau gazouillant de beautés d'hôpital,
Car je ne puis trouver parmi ces pâles roses
Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal.

17

Beauty

I am a lovely dream in stone, O mortals,
And my hard breast on which all men are bruised
Inspires the poet with a love that broods
As silent and eternal as pure matter.

I reign in space, a sphinx, unknowable;
I join a swanlike white to a snowcold heart;
Motion that breaks the perfect line I hate,
And never do I weep, and never smile.

With poses that recall proud monuments
I have a grandeur that makes poets turn
To rigorous studies till their days are spent;

Because, to charm my lovers, I possess
Mirrors that make all things more beautiful:
These eyes, wide eyes, shining with light eternal.

18

The Ideal

It will not be these beauties of vignettes,
The stale old products of a worthless age,
Feet in half-boots, fingers in castanets,
That ever satisfy a heart like mine.

Let Gavarni, anaemia's laureate, sound
The praise of twittering sanatorium belles;
Not amid such pale roses shall I find
A flower that reflects my red ideal.

Ce qu'il faut à ce cœur profond comme un abîme,
C'est vous, Lady Macbeth, âme puissante au crime,
Rêve d'Eschyle éclos au climat des autans ;

Ou bien toi, grande Nuit, fille de Michel-Ange,
Qui tords paisiblement dans une pose étrange
Tes appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans !

19

La Géante

Du temps que la Nature en sa verve puissante
Concevait chaque jour des enfants monstrueux,
J'eusse aimé vivre auprès d'une jeune géante,
Comme aux pieds d'une reine un chat voluptueux.

J'eusse aimé voir son corps fleurir avec son âme
Et grandir librement dans ses terribles jeux ;
Deviner si son cœur couve une sombre flamme
Aux humides brouillards qui nagent dans ses yeux ;

Parcourir à loisir ses magnifiques formes ;
Ramper sur le versant de ses genoux énormes,
Et parfois en été, quand les soleils malsains,

Lasse, la font s'étendre à travers la campagne,
Dormir nonchalamment à l'ombre de ses seins,
Comme un hameau paisible au pied d'une montagne.

What this deep heart's abyss requires is you,
Lady Macbeth, the very soul of crime,
Aeschylean dream, born in the stormy North;

Or you, great Night of Michelangelo,
Calmly contorting in that curious pose
Charms made for kisses from a Titan's mouth.

19

The Giantess

I wish that I had lived when Nature's verve
Daily conceived fresh monsters – to have been
Lying beside some youthful giantess,
Like a voluptuous cat at the feet of a queen;

To see her body flowering with her soul
And waxing strong and free in dreadful games;
To wonder if the damp mist in her eyes
Might veil a heart that shelters a dark flame;

To roam her splendid contours as I please,
To climb the slope of her enormous knees,
And sometimes, when the enfeebling summer sun

Stretches her out across the land at rest,
To drowse unthinking, shaded by her breasts,
Like a calm hamlet underneath a mountain.

20

Le Masque

Statue allégorique dans le goût de la Renaissance

À Ernest Christophe, statuaire

Contempons ce trésor de grâces florentines ;
Dans l'ondulation de ce corps musculeux
L'Élégance et la Force abondent, sœurs divines.
Cette femme, morceau vraiment miraculeux,
Divinement robuste, adorablement mince,
Est faite pour trôner sur des lits somptueux,
Et charmer les loisirs d'un pontife ou d'un prince.

— Aussi, vois ce souris fin et voluptueux
Où la Fatuité promène son extase ;
Ce long regard sournois, langoureux et moqueur ;
Ce visage mignard, tout encadré de gaze,
Dont chaque trait nous dit avec un air vainqueur :
« La Volupté m'appelle et l'Amour me couronne ! »
À cet être doué de tant de majesté
Vois quel charme excitant la gentillesse donne !
Approchons, et tournons autour de sa beauté.

Ô blasphème de l'art ! ô surprise fatale !
La femme au corps divin, promettant le bonheur,
Par le haut se termine en monstre bicéphale !

— Mais non ! ce n'est qu'un masque, un décor suborneur,
Ce visage éclairé d'une exquise grimace,
Et, regarde, voici, crispée atrocement,
La véritable tête, et la sincère face
Renversée à l'abri de la face qui ment.
Pauvre grande beauté ! le magnifique fleuve
De tes pleurs aboutit dans mon cœur soucieux ;

20

The Mask

An allegorical statue in the Renaissance manner

For Ernest Christophe, sculptor

Observe this treasury of Tuscan charms;
See how the holy sisters, Strength and Grace,
Thrive in the rippling of this muscular frame.
Surely the woman is a marvellous piece,
Divinely strong and admirably slim,
Designed to be enthroned in sumptuous beds,
Beguiling the spare hours of pope or prince.

– See also this refined voluptuous smile,
Its vain parade of fatuous ecstasy;
The steady languid look, mocking and sly,
The dainty features nestling in the veil,
Everything telling us with a conquering air:
“Pleasure invites me and I wear Love’s crown!”
See how seductive such a queen can be
When kindness is allied to majesty.
Let us draw near and see her in the round.

O blasphemy of art, O shock and horror!
The heavenly shape that promises such bliss
Ends at the top as a two-headed monster!

– But no! it’s just a mask, a visual trick,
This countenance lit with a refined grimace,
And look, look here, wincing in agony,
The true head and the undeceiving face
Thrown back and sheltered by the face that lies.
Poor splendid beauty, how my anxious heart
Is flooded by your mighty stream of tears!

Ton mensonge m'enivre, et mon âme s'abreuve
Aux flots que la Douleur fait jaillir de tes yeux!

— Mais pourquoi pleure-t-elle ? Elle, beauté parfaite
Qui mettrait à ses pieds le genre humain vaincu,
Quel mal mystérieux ronge son flanc d'athlète ?

— Elle pleure, insensé, parce qu'elle a vécu !
Et parce qu'elle vit ! Mais ce qu'elle déplore
Surtout, ce qui la fait frémir jusqu'aux genoux,
C'est que demain, hélas ! il faudra vivre encore !
Demain, après-demain et toujours ! — comme nous !

21

Hymne à la beauté

Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abîme,
Ô Beauté ? ton regard, infernal et divin,
Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime,
Et l'on peut pour cela te comparer au vin.

Tu contiens dans ton œil le couchant et l'aurore ;
Tu répands des parfums comme un soir orageux ;
Tes baisers sont un philtre et ta bouche une amphore
Qui font le héros lâche et l'enfant courageux.

Sors-tu du gouffre noir ou descends-tu des astres ?
Le Destin charmé suit tes jupons comme un chien ;
Tu sèmes au hasard la joie et les désastres,
Et tu gouvernes tout et ne réponds de rien.

Tu marches sur des morts, Beauté, dont tu te moques ;
De tes bijoux l'Horreur n'est pas le moins charmant,
Et le Meurtre, parmi tes plus chères breloques,
Sur ton ventre orgueilleux danse amoureusement.

Drunk with your lie, my soul absorbs the spate
That Sorrow has brought gushing from your eyes.

– But what can make her weep, whose perfect beauty
Could have mankind lie vanquished at her feet?
What secret sickness wastes the athletic body?

– She weeps, you fool, she weeps because she has lived!
And still is living! But the greater pain
That she deplores with trembling knees, alas,
Is that tomorrow she must live again.
Tomorrow, the day after, evermore! – like us!

21

Hymn to Beauty

Have you come here from heaven or the abyss?
Beauty, your glance, infernal and divine,
Pours out a mixture of good deeds and crime,
And this effect makes you resemble wine.

Your eye contains the sunset and the dawn;
Your fragrance is the stormy evening air;
Your kiss makes heroes cowards, children brave,
Like some strange potion from an ancient jar.

Are you star-born or risen from the pit?
Sowing your random tragedies and bliss,
You lead Fate like a dog who sniffs your skirt,
Answer for nothing, govern all that is.

Beauty, you walk upon the dead you mock,
Horror is not the least of your bright gems;
Murder, another trinket you hold dear,
Gilds your proud belly with its dancing charm.

L'éphémère ébloui vole vers toi, chandelle,
Crépète, flambe et dit : Bénissons ce flambeau !
L'amoureux pantelant incliné sur sa belle
A l'air d'un moribond caressant son tombeau.

Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,
Ô Beauté ! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu !
Si ton œil, ton souris, ton pied, m'ouvrent la porte
D'un Infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu ?

De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe ? Ange ou Sirène,
Qu'importe, si tu rends, — fée aux yeux de velours,
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine ! —
L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds ?

22

Parfum exotique

Quand, les deux yeux fermés, en un soir chaud d'automne
Je respire l'odeur de ton sein chaleureux,
Je vois se dérouler des rivages heureux
Qu'éblouissent les feux d'un soleil monotone ;

Une île paresseuse où la nature donne
Des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux ;
Des hommes dont le corps est mince et vigoureux,
Et des femmes dont l'œil par sa franchise étonne.

Guidé par ton odeur vers de charmants climats,
Je vois un port rempli de voiles et de mâts
Encor tout fatigués par la vague marine,

Pendant que le parfum des verts tamariniers,
Qui circule dans l'air et m'enfle la narine,
Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des mariniers.

The dazzled moth flutters to you, his candle,
Sizzles and burns and cries: Blessed be this flame!
Panting above his love, the lover seems
A dying man embracing his own tomb.

O fearsome simple Beauty, what does it matter
Whether your birth be devilish or divine,
If glance or smile or foot open the door
To an Infinite I love and have never known?

From Satan or from God, Angel or Siren?
No matter, if your perfume and the light
Of your dark eyes, my fairy queen, can make
The world less grim and ease the moment's weight!

22

Exotic Perfume

When, with eyes closed, some sultry autumn night,
I lie and breathe the scent of your warm breast,
I see the stretch of some long happy coast,
Dazzling in the sun's monotonous light;

A lazy languid isle where nature grants
Strange trees and fruits that yield a heady taste,
Robust slim-bodied men, women whose eyes
Astonish with a gaze direct and frank.

Towards enchanted climes your fragrance guides me;
I see a port crowded with masts and sails
Still weary from the buffeting of the sea,

While from green tamarinds a scent exhales
That, as it floods the air and fills the nostrils,
Blends with the seamen's shanties in my soul.

23

La Chevelure

Ô toison, moutonnant jusque sur l'encolure !
Ô boucles ! Ô parfum chargé de nonchaloir !
Extase ! Pour peupler ce soir l'alcôve obscure
Des souvenirs dormant dans cette chevelure,
Je la veux agiter dans l'air comme un mouchoir !

La langoureuse Asie et la brûlante Afrique,
Tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt,
Vit dans tes profondeurs, forêt aromatique !
Comme d'autres esprits voguent sur la musique,
Le mien, ô mon amour ! nage sur ton parfum.

J'irai là-bas où l'arbre et l'homme, pleins de sève,
Se pâment longuement sous l'ardeur des climats ;
Fortes tresses, soyez la houle qui m'enlève !
Tu contiens, mer d'ébène, un éblouissant rêve
De voiles, de rameurs, de flammes et de mâts :

Un port retentissant où mon âme peut boire
À grands flots le parfum, le son et la couleur ;
Où les vaisseaux, glissant dans l'or et dans la moire,
Ouvrent leurs vastes bras pour embrasser la gloire
D'un ciel pur où frémit l'éternelle chaleur.

Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse
Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé ;
Et mon esprit subtil que le roulis caresse
Saura vous retrouver, ô féconde paresse !
Infinis bercements du loisir embaumé !

Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues,
Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond ;

23

Her Hair

O fleece that tumbles down upon her neck,
O curls cascading, redolent of ease!
Rapture! To people our dim alcove with
The memories sleeping in this head of hair,
I shall wave it like a kerchief in the breeze.

All languid Asia, scorching Africa,
A distant, dying world, half-known in absence,
Lives in your depths, dark aromatic forest!
As other spirits drift on waves of music,
So mine, dear love, floats only on your fragrance.

I shall go hence, go to where trees and men
Are full of sap and drowse when heat prevails;
O heavy locks, be the sea-swell that lifts me.
Your ebony ocean holds a dazzling dream
Of masts and flaming pennants, oars and sails:

An echoing port that calls my soul to drink
Great draughts where perfume, sound and colour meet;
Where vessels gliding over gold and silk
Open their vast arms to embrace the glory
Of skies that quiver with eternal heat.

And I shall plunge my drunken amorous head
In this dark sea that hides the other sea;
My subtle mind, rocked by the heaving swell,
Will find you, O my fertile indolence,
Sweet-scented leisure's endless lullaby!

Blue hair, a spreading shady tent, you give me
The vast round of the sky, the azure air;

Sur les bords duvetés de vos mèches tordues
Je m'enivre ardemment des senteurs confondues
De l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron.

Longtemps ! toujours ! ma main dans ta crinière lourde
Sèmera le rubis, la perle et le saphir,
Afin qu'à mon désir tu ne sois jamais sourde !
N'es-tu pas l'oasis où je rêve, et la gourde
Où je hume à longs traits le vin du souvenir ?

24

Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne,
Ô vase de tristesse, ô grande taciturne,
Et t'aime d'autant plus, belle, que tu me fuis,
Et que tu me parais, ornement de mes nuits,
Plus ironiquement accumuler les lieues
Qui séparent mes bras des immensités bleues.

Je m'avance à l'attaque, et je grimpe aux assauts,
Comme après un cadavre un chœur de vermiseaux,
Et je chéris, ô bête implacable et cruelle !
Jusqu'à cette froideur par où tu m'es plus belle !

25

Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle,
Femme impure ! L'ennui rend ton âme cruelle.
Pour exercer tes dents à ce jeu singulier,
Il te faut chaque jour un cœur au râtelier.
Tes yeux, illuminés ainsi que des boutiques,
Et des ifs flamboyants dans les fêtes publiques,
Usent insolemment d'un pouvoir emprunté,
Sans connaître jamais la loi de leur beauté.

In downy fringes of your tangled locks
I drug myself with all the mingled scents,
The blend of coconut oil and musk and tar.

My hand will scatter rubies, sapphires, pearls,
Long, long, for ever, in your heavy mane,
Lest you should turn a deaf ear to my passion.
For are you not the oasis where I dream,
The gourd where I inhale deep draughts of memory's wine?

24

I love you as I love night's arching sky,
O silent urn where sorrow's ashes lie;
And even more I love you when you flee,
Grace of my nights, for the strange irony
That makes you seem to multiply the space
That bars the blue expanse from my embrace.

I press the attack, advance, mount an assault,
The way a choir of worms invades a corpse,
And, O you ruthless beast, I cherish still
Your coldness since it makes you beautiful.

25

You'd like the world to queue beside your bed,
You unclean thing – that's what Ennui has bred.
To be in form for this strange game you play
Your raking teeth need fresh hearts every day.
Your eyes, lit up as for some gaudy fair
Or like shopwindows that display their wares,
Boldly abuse a power that they borrow,
And never know the law their beauty follows.

Machine aveugle et sourde, en cruautés féconde !
 Salutaire instrument, buveur du sang du monde,
 Comment n'as-tu pas honte et comment n'as-tu pas
 Devant tous les miroirs vu pâlir tes appas ?
 La grandeur de ce mal où tu te crois savante
 Ne t'a donc jamais fait reculer d'épouvante,
 Quand la nature, grande en ses desseins cachés,
 De toi se sert, ô femme, ô reine des péchés,
 — De toi, vil animal, — pour pétrir un génie ?

Ô fangeuse grandeur ! sublime ignominie !

26

Sed non satiata

Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits,
 Au parfum mélangé de musc et de havane,
 Œuvre de quelque obi, le Faust de la savane,
 Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuits,

Je préfère au constance, à l'opium, au nuits,
 L'élixir de ta bouche où l'amour se pavane ;
 Quand vers toi mes désirs partent en caravane,
 Tes yeux sont la citerne où boivent mes ennuis.

Par ces deux grands yeux noirs, soupiraux de ton âme,
 Ô démon sans pitié ! verse-moi moins de flamme ;
 Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t'embrasser neuf fois,

Hélas ! et je ne puis, Mégère libertine,
 Pour briser ton courage et te mettre aux abois,
 Dans l'enfer de ton lit devenir Proserpine !

Blind deaf machine, fecund in cruel deeds,
A useful tool who drinks the whole world's blood,
Have you no shame, have mirrors never made
You stop and see how all your beauties fade?
And have you never shuddered at the thought
Of the vast evil you believe you sought,
When nature, mighty in her hidden plans,
Makes use of you, O woman, queen of sins
– Of you, vile beast – to shape a genius?

What slimy greatness! What sublime disgrace!

26

Sed non satiata

Outlandish deity, dusky as night, you wear
A scent of musk blended with rich havanna,
Work of some devil, Faust of the savannah,
Ebony witch, child of the midnight hour:

No drug or sweet Constantia wine compares
With love's elixir dancing on your lips;
Your eyes are cisterns where my caravan stops
To water my desires and quench my cares.

Pitiless demon, pour less liquid flame
From those great eyes, dark skylights to your soul;
I am no Styx to clasp you round nine times,

Lustful Maegera, nor can I instead
Become, to break your courage and your spell,
Proserpina in your infernal bed.

27

Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés,
Même quand elle marche on croirait qu'elle danse,
Comme ces longs serpents que les jongleurs sacrés
Au bout de leurs bâtons agitent en cadence.

Comme le sable morne et l'azur des déserts,
Insensibles tous deux à l'humaine souffrance,
Comme les longs réseaux de la houle des mers.
Elle se développe avec indifférence.

Ses yeux polis sont faits de minéraux charmants,
Et dans cette nature étrange et symbolique
Où l'ange inviolé se mêle au sphinx antique,

Où tout n'est qu'or, acier, lumière et diamants,
Resplendit à jamais, comme un astre inutile,
La froide majesté de la femme stérile.

28

Le Serpent qui danse

Que j'aime voir, chère indolente,
De ton corps si beau,
Comme une étoffe vacillante,
Miroiter la peau !

Sur ta chevelure profonde
Aux âcres parfums,
Mer odorante et vagabonde
Aux flots bleus et bruns,

27

In flowing robes of opalescent sheen,
Even her walk would make you think she dances,
Like those long snakes that charmers with their wands
Set swaying in their sacred rhythmic trances.

Like dreary desert sands and endless azure,
Unfeeling witnesses to human pain,
Or like the long slow surging of the sea,
She makes her way, indifferent and serene.

Her polished eyes are made of precious stone
And in this strange symbolic nature where
The unsullied angel and the sphinx are one,

Where all is gold and steel, diamonds and light,
There glints a useless star eternally,
The sterile woman's icy majesty.

28

The Dancing Snake

My languid darling, how I love
To see the silken sheen,
When your body stretches and ripples
Your shimmering skin!

I breathe the tang of the ocean
In the deeps of your hair,
A shifting mass of blue and brown,
A sea itself; and there,

Comme un navire qui s'éveille
Au vent du matin,
Mon âme rêveuse appareille
Pour un ciel lointain.

Tes yeux, où rien ne se révèle
De doux ni d'amer,
Sont deux bijoux froids où se mêle
L'or avec le fer.

À te voir marcher en cadence,
Belle d'abandon,
On dirait un serpent qui danse
Au bout d'un bâton.

Sous le fardeau de ta paresse
Ta tête d'enfant
Se balance avec la mollesse
D'un jeune éléphant,

Et ton corps se penche et s'allonge
Comme un fin vaisseau
Qui roule bord sur bord et plonge
Ses vergues dans l'eau.

Comme un flot grossi par la fonte
Des glaciers grondants,
Quand l'eau de ta bouche remonte
Au bord de tes dents,

Je crois boire un vin de Bohême,
Amer et vainqueur,
Un ciel liquide qui parsème
D'étoiles mon cœur !

THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

Like a sleeping ship that awakens
As the morning breezes rise,
My dreaming soul casts off and sets
Its course for distant skies.

Your eyes that speak of nothing,
No sweet or bitter end,
Are two cold precious jewels
Where gold and iron blend.

The loose and lovely cadence,
The rhythm of your walk,
Is like a snake who dances
At the end of a stick.

Your childish head lolls idly,
Heavy upon your neck,
As a young elephant's does,
Swaying softly and slack,

And your body bends and stretches
Like a slim ship that braves
The sea as it rolls and pitches,
With yards tipping the waves.

And when, like the glacier melting
To swell a mountain stream,
Saliva rises in your mouth
And brims your teeth, it seems

As if I drank Bohemian wine,
Tangy, invasive, tart,
A liquid sky that sends a rain
Of stardust on my heart!

29

Une charogne

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,
Ce beau matin d'été si doux :
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique,
Brûlante et suant les poisons,
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons.

Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture,
Comme afin de la cuire à point,
Et de rendre au centuple à la grande Nature
Tout ce qu'ensemble elle avait joint ;

Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe
Comme une fleur s'épanouir.
La puanteur était si forte, que sur l'herbe
Vous crûtes vous évanouir.

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague,
Ou s'élançait en pétillant ;
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,
Vivait en se multipliant.

29

A Carcass

Remember that fine summer morning, my soul,
That thing at a bend in the road:
On the verge a repulsive carcass sprawled
With pebbles and stones for a bed,

With legs in the air like a woman in heat,
And sweating out poisonous fumes,
She displayed in a careless and shameless pose
Her fetid and festering womb.

The rays of the sun cooked that mass of decay
As if roasting it till it was done,
And restoring to Nature a hundredfold
All things she had gathered in one;

And heaven observed the magnificent corpse
That bloomed like a flower in May:
And the stench was so strong that there on the grass
You thought you would faint away.

On that putrid belly the flies kept buzzing,
And thence, in a slow thick stream,
Black armies of maggots flowed out and along
The rags that seemed living with them.

And the whole thing rose and fell like a wave
Or a seething bubbling tide;
As if some strange breath were swelling the corpse
To live and be multiplied.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,
Comme l'eau courante et le vent,
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rythmique
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve,
Une ébauche lente à venir,
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève
Seulement par le souvenir.

Derrière les rochers une chienne inquiète
Nous regardait d'un œil fâché,
Épiant le moment de reprendre au squelette
Le morceau qu'elle avait lâché.

— Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,
À cette horrible infection,
Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,
Vous, mon ange et ma passion !

Oui ! telle vous serez, ô la reine des grâces,
Après les derniers sacrements,
Quand vous irez, sous l'herbe et les floraisons grasses,
Moisir parmi les ossements.

Alors, ô ma beauté ! dites à la vermine
Qui vous mangera de baisers,
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine
De mes amours décomposés !

And that world resounded with eerie music,
Like running water or wind,
Or grain when the winnower shakes his basket
With a steady rhythmical swing.

The forms were fading, a dream dissolving,
A sketch forgotten, left upon
A canvas till the artist's hand completes it,
Working from memory alone.

Behind the rocks a restless bitch was lurking,
Angry and anxious to retrieve
From that poor skeleton the precious morsel
Of flesh she had been forced to leave.

– And yet one day you will look like this filth,
Disgusting, infected and foul,
You star of my eyes and sun of my nature,
My angel and lust of my soul.

Yes, this is what you will be, queen of graces,
When the last rites are said and done
And you go under grass and fat fruition,
To moulder with a heap of bones.

Then, O my beauty, tell the amorous worm
Who consumes with the kisses he gives,
That I keep the essence divine and the form
Of my decomposed old loves.

30

De profundis clamavi

J'implore ta pitié, Toi, l'unique que j'aime,
Du fond du gouffre obscur où mon cœur est tombé.
C'est un univers morne à l'horizon plombé,
Où nagent dans la nuit l'horreur et le blasphème ;

Un soleil sans chaleur plane au-dessus six mois,
Et les six autres mois la nuit couvre la terre ;
C'est un pays plus nu que la terre polaire ;
— Ni bêtes, ni ruisseaux, ni verdure, ni bois !

Or il n'est pas d'horreur au monde qui surpasse
La froide cruauté de ce soleil de glace
Et cette immense nuit semblable au vieux Chaos ;

Je jalouse le sort des plus vils animaux
Qui peuvent se plonger dans un sommeil stupide,
Tant l'écheveau du temps lentement se dévide !

31

Le Vampire

Toi qui, comme un coup de couteau,
Dans mon cœur plaintif es entrée ;
Toi qui, forte comme un troupeau
De démons, vins, folle et parée,

De mon esprit humilié
Faire ton lit et ton domaine ;
— Infâme à qui je suis lié
Comme le forçat à la chaîne,

30

De profundis clamavi

From deep in the abyss that holds my heart
I beg your pity, you, my only love.
A dull horizon seals this universe
Where fear and blasphemy pervade the night;

A heatless sun hangs over half the year
And half the year darkness enfolds the earth;
No animals, no streams, no green, no woods:
The landscape of the pole is not more bare.

Indeed, no horror in the world is greater
Than the cold cruelty of this icy sun
And this vast night like Chaos come again;

I look with envy on the meanest creatures
Who can immerse themselves in stupid sleep:
So slowly, slowly, time unwinds its skein!

31

The Vampire

You came like the blade of a dagger
To my heart that was humbled and sad,
As bold as a pack of wild demons,
Dressed up for a pageant, and mad;

You made in my mortified spirit
Your bed and your private domain,
— You monster to whom I am shackled
As the convict is to his chain,

Comme au jeu le joueur têtue,
Comme à la bouteille l'ivrogne,
Comme aux vermines la charogne,
— Maudite, maudite sois-tu !

J'ai prié le glaive rapide
De conquérir ma liberté,
Et j'ai dit au poison perfide
De secourir ma lâcheté.

Hélas ! le poison et le glaive
M'ont pris en dédain et m'ont dit :
« Tu n'es pas digne qu'on t'enlève
À ton esclavage maudit,

Imbécile ! — de son empire
Si nos efforts te délivraient,
Tes baisers ressusciteraient
Le cadavre de ton vampire ! »

32

Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse Juive,
Comme au long d'un cadavre un cadavre étendu,
Je me pris à songer près de ce corps vendu
À la triste beauté dont mon désir se prive.

Je me représentai sa majesté native,
Son regard de vigueur et de grâces armé,
Ses cheveux qui lui font un casque parfumé,
Et dont le souvenir pour l'amour me ravive.

Car j'eusse avec ferveur baisé ton noble corps,
Et depuis tes pieds frais jusqu'à tes noires tresses
Déroulé le trésor des profondes caresses,

As the drunkard is to his bottle,
As the gambler is to his game,
As the vermin are to a carcass
– Accursed, accursed be your name!

I prayed to the sword to come swiftly
With the blow that would render me free,
And I asked if perfidious poison
Could succour a coward like me.

But alas, both the sword and the poison
Gave answer and said with disdain:
“Base slave, you are deeply unworthy
That we ever should shatter your chain;

You fool, if our efforts could grant you
The freedom from her that you crave,
Your kisses would soon give new life to
The corpse of your vampire-love!”

32

As if we were two corpses side by side,
I lay beside a foul Jewess one night;
That hired flesh brought back the rueful thought
Of beauty my desire has denied.

I pictured all her native majesty,
Her gaze unflinching, armed with power and grace,
Her hair, a fragrant casque around her face –
A vision still reviving love in me.

For fervently I would have kissed your body
And on the path from feet to raven hair
Lavished the treasure of my deep caress,

Si, quelque soir, d'un pleur obtenu sans effort
Tu pouvais seulement, ô reine des cruelles !
Obscurcir la splendeur de tes froides prunelles.

33

Remords posthume

Lorsque tu dormiras, ma belle ténébreuse,
Au fond d'un monument construit en marbre noir,
Et lorsque tu n'auras pour alcôve et manoir
Qu'un caveau pluvieux et qu'une fosse creuse ;

Quand la pierre, opprimant ta poitrine peureuse
Et tes flancs qu'assouplit un charmant nonchaloir,
Empêchera ton cœur de battre et de vouloir,
Et tes pieds de courir leur course aventureuse,

Le tombeau, confident de mon rêve infini
(Car le tombeau toujours comprendra le poète),
Durant ces grandes nuits d'où le somme est banni,

Te dira : « Que vous sert, courtisane imparfaite,
De n'avoir pas connu ce que pleurent les morts ? »
— Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords.

34

Le Chat

Viens, mon beau chat, sur mon cœur amoureux ;
Retiens les griffes de ta patte,
Et laisse-moi plonger dans tes beaux yeux,
Mêlés de métal et d'agate.

If only you, O queen of cruelty,
Some evening could have let a casual tear
Obscure the radiance of your clear cold eyes.

33

Posthumous Remorse

When you shall sleep, my dusky sullen love,
Deep in the marble blackness of a tomb,
When you have no retreat or private room
But some crude hollow pit or dripping cave;

And when the slab, pressing your fearful breast
And limbs once supple with such careless art,
Prevents the lusts and beating of the heart
And locks the wanton feet that could not rest,

The tomb, who knows the secret of my dream
(For the tomb always understands the poet),
In those long nights where slumber will not come,

Shall say: "Poor courtesan, where was your profit
In never knowing what the dead miss most?"
And the flesh-keen worm will gnaw you like remorse.

34

The Cat

Come here, my splendid cat, retract your claws,
Stretch out upon my loving heart,
And let me lose myself in your fine eyes,
Deep agate and metallic glint.

Lorsque mes doigts caressent à loisir
Ta tête et ton dos élastique,
Et que ma main s'enivre du plaisir
De palper ton corps électrique,

Je vois ma femme en esprit. Son regard,
Comme le tien, aimable bête,
Profond et froid, coupe et fend comme un dard,

Et, des pieds jusques à la tête,
Un air subtil, un dangereux parfum,
Nagent autour de son corps brun.

35

Duellum

Deux guerriers ont couru l'un sur l'autre ; leurs armes
Ont éclaboussé l'air de lueurs et de sang.
Ces jeux, ces cliquetis du fer sont les vacarmes
D'une jeunesse en proie à l'amour vagissant.

Les glaives sont brisés ! comme notre jeunesse,
Ma chère ! Mais les dents, les ongles acérés,
Vengent bientôt l'épée et la dague traîtresse.
— Ô fureur des cœurs mûrs par l'amour ulcérés !

Dans le ravin hanté des chats-pards et des onces
Nos héros, s'étreignant méchamment, ont roulé,
Et leur peau fleurira l'aridité des ronces.

— Ce gouffre, c'est l'enfer, de nos amis peuplé !
Roulons-y sans remords, amazone inhumaine,
Afin d'éterniser l'ardeur de notre haine !

When in their idle way my wandering fingers
 Caress your head and supple spine
And when my hand is drunken with the pleasure
 Of your electric body, then

My woman comes into my mind. Her gaze,
 Dear animal, is cold and deep,
A blade that cuts and penetrates, like yours;

 And still from head to foot she keeps
A subtle air, a dangerous scent that swims
 Around her dusky limbs.

35

Duellum

Two warriors clashed, bespattering the air
With gouts of blood and glints of steel. That strife,
Those rowdy games, that clanging racket came
From callow lovers waking into life.

Those blades are broken now, like our own youth,
But tooth and nail have taken on the parts
Once played by mordant sword and treacherous knife.
– Such rage in older love-embittered hearts!

Our heroes, locked in vicious combat, grapple
And roll in the ravine with leopard and lynx;
Scraps of their skin will flower on the brambles.

– That pit is hell, our friends are there; let us
Roll down remorseless to perpetuate,
Fierce Amazon, the ardour of our hate

36

Le Balcon

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
Ô toi, tous mes plaisirs ! ô toi, tous mes devoirs !
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses !

Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.
Que ton sein m'était doux ! que ton cœur m'était bon !
Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon.

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées !
Que l'espace est profond ! que le cœur est puissant !
En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,
Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.
Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées !

La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison,
Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,
Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur ! ô poison !
Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles.
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison.

Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses,
Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
Ailleurs qu'en ton cher corps et qu'en ton cœur si doux ?
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses !

36

The Balcony

Mother of memories, loveliest of lovers,
You, all my pleasures, all the debts I owe,
Remember that perfection of caresses,
The evening charm, the gentleness of home,
Mother of memories, loveliest of lovers.

Those evenings, soft-lit by the glowing coal,
Balcony evenings, veiled in rosy mist,
How sweet your breast to me, how kind your soul!
We often uttered such undying things,
Those evenings soft-lit by the glowing coal.

Those fine warm evenings in the setting sun!
How space grew deeper, how the heart was proud!
As I leaned over you, my only queen,
I seemed to breathe the fragrance of your blood.
Those fine warm evenings in the setting sun.

Night gathered thickly round us like a wall,
Yet in the dark my eyes discovered yours;
Sweet poison of your breath, I drank it all,
Your feet drowsed off in my fraternal hands;
Night gathered thickly round us like a wall.

I know how art recaptures happy moments
And see myself again, clasping your knees.
Where should I seek your beauty's soft enchantments
If not in your dear body and sweet heart?
I know how art recaptures happy moments.

Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,
Renaîtront-ils d'un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,
Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes ?
— Ô serments ! ô parfums ! ô baisers infinis !

37

Le Possédé

Le soleil s'est couvert d'un crêpe. Comme lui,
Ô Lune de ma vie ! emmitoufle-toi d'ombre ;
Dors ou fume à ton gré ; sois muette, sois sombre,
Et plonge tout entière au gouffre de l'Ennui ;

Je t'aime ainsi ! Pourtant, si tu veux aujourd'hui,
Comme un astre éclipsé qui sort de la pénombre,
Te pavaner aux lieux que la Folie encombre,
C'est bien ! Charmant poignard, jaillis de ton étui !

Allume ta prunelle à la flamme des lustres !
Allume le désir dans les regards des rustres !
Tout de toi m'est plaisir, morbide ou pétulant ;

Sois ce que tu voudras, nuit noire, rouge aurore ;
Il n'est pas une fibre en tout mon corps tremblant
Qui ne crie : *Ô mon cher Belzébuth, je t'adore !*

Those vows, those perfumes, kisses without end,
Will they be born again, revive like suns,
Mount from a gulf our plummet cannot sound,
Washed by the ocean depths, to meet the sky?
– O vows, O perfumes, kisses without end!

37

The Possessed

The sun is dressed in crape. So let me see
You also swathed in shadows, my life's moon;
Sleep now or smoke, be silent and withdrawn,
Submerged in deep recesses of Ennui;

I love you thus. Yet if you wish to glide
Starlike from this eclipse and then display
Your sudden charms where Folly throngs the way,
That's well done too! Leap from your sheath, sweet blade!

Light up your eyes from flaming chandeliers,
Light up the lust that burns in boorish leers:
Sprightly or sad, your moods are my delight.

Red sunrise or black night, be what you choose,
For every trembling nerve in me cries out:
O dear Beëlzebub, I worship you.

38

Un fantôme

I

Les Ténèbres

Dans les caveaux d'insondable tristesse
Où le Destin m'a déjà relégué ;
Où jamais n'entre un rayon rose et gai ;
Où, seul avec la Nuit, maussade hôtesse,

Je suis comme un peintre qu'un Dieu moqueur
Condamne à peindre, hélas ! sur les ténèbres ;
Où, cuisinier aux appétits funèbres,
Je fais bouillir et je mange mon cœur,

Par instants brille, et s'allonge, et s'étale
Un spectre fait de grâce et de splendeur.
À sa rêveuse allure orientale,

Quand il atteint sa totale grandeur,
Je reconnais ma belle visiteuse :
C'est Elle ! noire et pourtant lumineuse.

II

Le Parfum

Lecteur, as-tu quelquefois respiré
Avec ivresse et lente gourmandise
Ce grain d'encens qui remplit une église,
Ou d'un sachet le musc invétéré ?

Charme profond, magique, dont nous grise
Dans le présent le passé restauré !

38

A Phantom

I

Darkness

In crypts where not a ray of cheerful light
Comforts my soul's unfathomable pain,
Consigned by Destiny to stay alone,
But for that sullen landlady, the Night,

I'm like a painter whom God's mocking wit
Condemns to paint, alas! upon the shades,
Or like a manic cook with morbid tastes
Who boils his own heart and then dines on it;

Sometimes a spectral presence enters there,
Glowing in splendour, growing tall with grace:
And, by its dreaming oriental air,

As that bright lengthening vision fills the space,
I recognize the lovely visitor:
It must be Her! Dark and yet luminous.

II

The Perfume

My reader, have you ever known that hunger,
A savoury slow inhaling, keen to catch
The grain of incense that pervades a church,
Or how in a sachet the musk still lingers?

A magic and intoxicating power
That thrills the present with the past restored!

Ainsi l'amant sur un corps adoré
Du souvenir cueille la fleur exquise.

De ses cheveux élastiques et lourds,
Vivant sachet, encensoir de l'alcôve,
Une senteur montait, sauvage et fauve,

Et des habits, mousseline ou velours,
Tout imprégnés de sa jeunesse pure,
Se dégageait un parfum de fourrure.

III

Le Cadre

Comme un beau cadre ajoute à la peinture,
Bien qu'elle soit d'un pinceau très vanté,
Je ne sais quoi d'étrange et d'enchanté
En l'isolant de l'immense nature,

Ainsi bijoux, meubles, métaux, dorure,
S'adaptaient juste à sa rare beauté;
Rien n'offusquait sa parfaite clarté,
Et tout semblait lui servir de bordure.

Même on eût dit parfois qu'elle croyait
Que tout voulait l'aimer; elle noyait
Sa nudité voluptueusement

Dans les baisers du satin et du linge,
Et, lente ou brusque, à chaque mouvement
Montrait la grâce enfantine du singe.

Just so, upon the body he adores,
The lover gathers memory's fine flower.

As by a censer or sachet exhaled,
From her elastic heavy hair there rose
A whiff of something savage, something wild,

And from her muslin or her velvet robes,
All impregnated with her dense and pure
Essence of youth, there came a scent of fur.

III
The Frame

Even a master's painting stands to gain
A touch of something magical and strange
From isolation in the well-wrought frame
That severs art from nature's vast domain;

So jewels, metals, gilt and furniture
Combined to serve her beauty's radiance;
Nothing obscured the brightness of her glance
And all became a setting made for her.

Sometimes you would have said she seemed convinced
Everything had to love her; that was how
Voluptuously her nakedness embraced

The whispering touch of silk and satin kisses;
And every single movement, swift or slow,
Displayed a monkey's agile childish grace.

IV

Le Portrait

La Maladie et la Mort font des cendres
De tout le feu qui pour nous flamboya.
De ces grands yeux si fervents et si tendres,
De cette bouche où mon cœur se noya,

De ces baisers puissants comme un dictame,
De ces transports plus vifs que des rayons,
Que reste-t-il ? C'est affreux, ô mon âme !
Rien qu'un dessin fort pâle, aux trois crayons,

Qui, comme moi, meurt dans la solitude,
Et que le Temps, injurieux vieillard,
Chaque jour frotte avec son aile rude...

Noir assassin de la Vie et de l'Art,
Tu ne tueras jamais dans ma mémoire
Celle qui fut mon plaisir et ma gloire !

39

Je te donne ces vers afin que si mon nom
Aborde heureusement aux époques lointaines,
Et fait rêver un soir les cervelles humaines,
Vaisseau favorisé par un grand aquilon,

Ta mémoire, pareille aux fables incertaines,
Fatigue le lecteur ainsi qu'un tympanon,
Et par un fraternel et mystique chaînon
Reste comme pendue à mes rimes hautaines ;

Être maudit à qui, de l'abîme profond
Jusqu' au plus haut du ciel, rien, hors moi, ne répond !
— Ô toi qui, comme une ombre à la trace éphémère,

IV

The Portrait

Sickness and Death reduce to dust and ashes
Whatever made the fire where we burned.
Of those wide eyes, so tender in their passion,
And of that mouth in which my heart was drowned,

Of kisses that had power to make me whole,
Of raptures that no sudden sun could match,
What now is left? How it appals my soul!
Only a pale discoloured pastel sketch

That dies alone like me and fades away
And that injurious old Time rubs out
With his rough wing, a little every day...

Yet, dark assassin of both Life and Art,
You shall not kill the memory's inner sight
Of one who was my glory and delight.

39

I give these lines to you, hoping my name,
Like a ship favoured by a great north wind,
Might sail to distant epochs, come to land,
And grant some future minds an evening dream;

Your memory then, dim fable blurred by time,
Drumming into the tired reader's brain,
Will by some strange fraternal link remain
As if it hung upon my lofty rhymes;

Cursed creature, who in heaven and earth below
Receives no answering voice except my own!
— O traceless and ephemeral shade, you tread

Foules d'un pied léger et d'un regard serein
Les stupides mortels qui t'ont jugée amère,
Statue aux yeux de jais, grand ange au front d'airain !

40

Semper eadem

« D'où vous vient, disiez-vous, cette tristesse étrange,
Montant comme la mer sur le roc noir et nu ? »
— Quand notre cœur a fait une fois sa vendange,
Vivre est un mal. C'est un secret de tous connu,

Une douleur très simple et non mystérieuse,
Et, comme votre joie, éclatante pour tous.
Cessez donc de chercher, ô belle curieuse !
Et, bien que votre voix soit douce, taisez-vous !

Taisez-vous, ignorante ! âme toujours ravie !
Bouche au rire enfantin ! Plus encor que la Vie,
La Mort nous tient souvent par des liens subtils.

Laissez, laissez mon cœur s'enivrer d'un *mensonge*,
Plonger dans vos beaux yeux comme dans un beau songe
Et sommeiller longtemps à l'ombre de vos cils !

41

Tout entière

Le Démon, dans ma chambre haute,
Ce matin est venu me voir,
Et, tâchant à me prendre en faute,
Me dit : « Je voudrais bien savoir,

On foolish mortals who have judged you stern
With your light foot and your serene regard,
Statue with eyes of jet, angel with brazen brow!

40

Semper eadem

“Like the tide covering a bare rock,” you say,
“Your strange dark sadness, what’s the cause of it?”
– When once the heart has known its harvest day,
Life is an evil. That’s an open secret,

A simple sorrow, not mysterious,
As plain to everyone as are your joys:
Then, lovely girl, be not so curious
And hold your tongue, however sweet your voice.

Yes, hold your silly tongue, bright soul, whose laugh
Is ever gay and childish. More than Life,
Death uses subtle bonds to keep us tied.

Ah, let my heart be drunken with a *lie*,
Drown in a dream, the deep of your sweet eyes,
And slumber long in their long lashes’ shade.

41

All One

The Devil popped up to my room
One morning not so long ago,
And, hoping he might catch me out,
He said: “I’d really like to know,

Parmi toutes les belles choses
Dont est fait son enchantement,
Parmi les objets noirs ou roses
Qui composent son corps charmant,

Quel est le plus doux. » — Ô mon âme !
Tu répondis à l'Abhorré :
« Puisqu'en Elle tout est dictame,
Rien ne peut être préféré.

Lorsque tout me ravit, j'ignore
Si quelque chose me séduit.
Elle éblouit comme l'Aurore
Et console comme la Nuit ;

Et l'harmonie est trop exquise,
Qui gouverne tout son beau corps,
Pour que l'impuissante analyse
En note les nombreux accords.

Ô métamorphose mystique
De tous mes sens fondus en un !
Son haleine fait la musique,
Comme sa voix fait le parfum ! »

42

Que diras-tu ce soir, pauvre âme solitaire,
Que diras-tu, mon cœur, cœur autrefois flétri,
À la très belle, à la très bonne, à la très chère,
Dont le regard divin t'a soudain refléuri ?

Of all the fair components that
Her charming body has to offer,
The shady or the rosy parts,
That may enchant you as a lover,

Which is the sweetest." But my soul
Answered the Demon with these words:
"Since everything in her is balm,
There's nothing that can be preferred.

I cannot say what charms me so,
When everything gives such delight.
She dazzles like the brightest dawn
And still consoles me like the night;

The harmony is too refined
That rules a lovely form like this
For all its various accords
To yield to weak analysis.

O mystic fusion of my senses
Wherein, as one, they all rejoice:
Her breath becomes a subtle music
That wafts the fragrance of her voice!"

42

What shall you say tonight, poor lonely soul,
My sapless withered heart, what shall you say
To her, most lovely and most kind, most dear,
Whose sudden glance has made you bloom today?

— Nous mettrons notre orgueil à chanter ses louanges :
Rien ne vaut la douceur de son autorité ;
Sa chair spirituelle a le parfum des Anges,
Et son œil nous revêt d'un habit de clarté.

Que ce soit dans la nuit et dans la solitude,
Que ce soit dans la rue et dans la multitude,
Son fantôme dans l'air danse comme un flambeau.

Parfois il parle et dit : « Je suis belle, et j'ordonne
Que pour l'amour de moi vous n'aimiez que le Beau ;
Je suis l'Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone. »

43

Le Flambeau vivant

Ils marchent devant moi, ces Yeux pleins de lumières,
Qu'un Ange très savant a sans doute aimantés ;
Ils marchent, ces divins frères qui sont mes frères,
Secouant dans mes yeux leurs feux diamantés.

Me sauvant de tout piège et de tout péché grave,
Ils conduisent mes pas dans la route du Beau ;
Ils sont mes serviteurs et je suis leur esclave ;
Tout mon être obéit à ce vivant flambeau.

Charmants Yeux, vous brillez de la clarté mystique
Qu'ont les cierges brûlant en plein jour ; le soleil
Rougit, mais n'éteint pas leur flamme fantastique ;

Ils célèbrent la Mort, vous chantez le Réveil ;
Vous marchez en chantant le réveil de mon âme.
Astres dont nul soleil ne peut flétrir la flamme !

– We shall employ our pride to sing her praises;
No other sway could ever be so sweet;
Her flesh is spirit perfumed by the angels,
Her eye invests us with a robe of light.

Her presence haunts the long night's lonely watch,
It haunts the crowded street; she hovers there,
An airy spectre dancing like a torch.

She speaks and says: "Being beautiful, I order
That you love only Beauty for my sake,
Your Guardian Angel, Muse and your Madonna."

43

The Living Torch

They go before me, radiant Eyes to which
Some cunning Angel gave magnetic powers;
They go ahead, brothers divine, my brothers,
And dazzle me, shaking their diamond fires.

Preserving me from snares and grievous sin,
They lead my steps to follow Beauty's way;
They are my servants, I their slave; they are
This living torch that my whole being obeys.

Spellbinding Eyes, you have the mystic glow
Of candles burning in broad day; the sun
May blush, but cannot quench their magic flame;

But candles honour Death, while you proclaim
My soul's rebirth; you sing it as you go,
Stars that the sun itself cannot outshine.

44

Réversibilité

Ange plein de gaieté, connaissez-vous l'angoisse,
La honte, les remords, les sanglots, les ennuis,
Et les vagues terreurs de ces affreuses nuits
Qui compriment le cœur comme un papier qu'on froisse ?
Ange plein de gaieté, connaissez-vous l'angoisse ?

Ange plein de bonté, connaissez-vous la haine,
Les poings crispés dans l'ombre et les larmes de fiel,
Quand la Vengeance bat son infernal rappel,
Et de nos facultés se fait le capitaine ?
Ange plein de bonté, connaissez-vous la haine ?

Ange plein de santé, connaissez-vous les Fièvres,
Qui, le long des grands murs de l'hospice blafard,
Comme des exilés, s'en vont d'un pied traînard,
Cherchant le soleil rare et remuant les lèvres ?
Ange plein de santé, connaissez-vous les Fièvres ?

Ange plein de beauté, connaissez-vous les rides,
Et la peur de vieillir, et ce hideux tourment
De lire la secrète horreur du dévouement
Dans des yeux où longtemps burent nos yeux avides ?
Ange plein de beauté, connaissez-vous les rides ?

Ange plein de bonheur, de joie et de lumières,
David mourant aurait demandé la santé
Aux émanations de ton corps enchanté ;
Mais de toi je n'implore, ange, que tes prières,
Ange plein de bonheur, de joie et de lumières !

44

Reversibility

Angel of gaiety, do you know that anguish,
The sobbing, the remorse, the cares, the shame,
The ghastly nights of terrors without name
That leave the paper heart crumpled and crushed?
Angel of gaiety, do you know that anguish?

Angel of goodness, have you known that hate,
The fists clenched in the dark, the tears of gall,
When Vengeance drums its fierce infernal call
And all our faculties participate?
Angel of goodness, have you known that hate?

Angel of health, what do you know of Fevers,
The lingering sick exiled to hospitals
Who drag their feet between high dingy walls,
Moving their lips, seeking the sun's rare favours?
Angel of health, what do you know of Fevers?

Angel of beauty, do you know those lines
That come with fear of age, the hideous dread
Of that self-sacrifice waiting to be read
In eyes once no less thirsty than our own?
Angel of beauty, do you know those lines?

Angel of happiness and light and joy,
The dying David might have hoped to gain
From your enchanted body health again;
I only ask that you should pray for me,
Angel of happiness and light and joy.

45

Confession

Une fois, une seule, aimable et douce femme,
 À mon bras votre bras poli
S'appuya (sur le fond ténébreux de mon âme
 Ce souvenir n'est point pâli) ;

Il était tard ; ainsi qu'une médaille neuve
 La pleine lune s'étalait,
Et la solennité de la nuit, comme un fleuve,
 Sur Paris dormant ruisselait.

Et le long des maisons, sous les portes cochères,
 Des chats passaient furtivement,
L'oreille au guet, ou bien, comme des ombres chères,
 Nous accompagnaient lentement.

Tout à coup, au milieu de l'intimité libre
 Écluse à la pâle clarté,
De vous, riche et sonore instrument où ne vibre
 Que la radieuse gaieté,

De vous, claire et joyeuse ainsi qu'une fanfare
 Dans le matin étincelant,
Une note plaintive, une note bizarre
 S'échappa, tout en chancelant

Comme une enfant chétive, horrible, sombre, immonde,
 Dont sa famille rougirait,
Et qu'elle aurait longtemps, pour la cacher au monde,
 Dans un caveau mise au secret.

Pauvre ange, elle chantait, votre note criarde :
 « Que rien ici-bas n'est certain,

45

Confession

Once, and once only, mild and gracious lady,
 You laid your cool smooth arm on mine
(The memory of that touch has never faded
 In the dark chambers of my mind);

It was late; the moon, a newly minted medal,
 Diffused the fulness of its light,
And over sleeping Paris like a river
 Flowed the solemnity of night.

Past the tall houses, under carriage gates,
 Some furtive cats went slinking by,
Ears pricked, or else, like dear familiar ghosts,
 Gave us their stealthy company.

In the intimate mood of that dim pale air
 All of a sudden came your voice
Whose rich vibrations had always seemed
 To radiate happiness and rejoice,

Gay as a trumpet sounding in the morning
 To greet the glitter of the day –
Now it gave out a curious plaintive note
 That faltered and then fled away

Like a sickly, sullen, repulsive child
 That the parents blush to behold,
Secretly kept in a cellar for years
 And hidden away from the world.

Here's what it sang, poor angel, your harsh note:
 "That nothing here below is certain,

Et que toujours, avec quelque soin qu'il se farde,
Se trahit l'égoïsme humain :

Que c'est un dur métier que d'être belle femme,
Et que c'est le travail banal
De la danseuse folle et froide qui se pâme
Dans un sourire machinal ;

Que bâtir sur les cœurs est une chose sotte ;
Que tout craque, amour et beauté,
Jusqu'à ce que l'Oubli les jette dans sa hotte
Pour les rendre à l'Éternité ! »

J'ai souvent évoqué cette lune enchantée,
Ce silence et cette langueur,
Et cette confidence horrible chuchotée
Au confessionnal du cœur.

46

L'Aube spirituelle

Quand chez les débauchés l'aube blanche et vermeille
Entre en société de l'Idéal rongeur,
Par l'opération d'un mystère vengeur
Dans la brute assoupie un ange se réveille.

Des Cieux Spirituels l'inaccessible azur,
Pour l'homme terrassé qui rêve encore et souffre,
S'ouvre et s'enfonce avec l'attirance du gouffre.
Ainsi, chère Déesse, Être lucide et pur,

Sur les débris fumeux des stupides orgies
Ton souvenir plus clair, plus rose, plus charmant,
À mes yeux agrandis voltige incessamment.

And that, however it's dolled up, we see
The selfishness of what is human;

That beauty is a tough job for a woman,
Boring, banal, the same old toil
Of the cold, crazy dancing girl who swoons
With a fixed mechanical smile;

That only folly builds on human hearts,
That cracks appear in love and beauty,
Until Oblivion stuffs them in his hod
And hauls them to Eternity."

I often think of that enchanted moon,
And of that silent languid night,
And the horrible secret that you whispered
In the confessional of the heart.

46

The Spiritual Dawn

When rose-pale dawn invades the dens of rakes
And brings the nagging prod of the Ideal,
As if by some avenging mystery
Within the slumbering beast an angel wakes.

Then Spiritual Heavens open to allure
The stricken earthbound man who dreams and suffers;
That endless blue abyss still draws him in.
And so with you, dear Goddess, wise and pure,

Over the debris left by stupid orgies,
Your memory, rosier and clear and bright,
Hovers incessantly before my eyes.

Le soleil a noirci la flamme des bougies ;
Ainsi, toujours vainqueur, ton fantôme est pareil,
Âme resplendissante, à l'immortel soleil !

47

Harmonie du soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir ;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor !

48

Le Flacon

Il est de forts parfums pour qui toute matière
Est poreuse. On dirait qu'ils pénètrent le verre.
En ouvrant un coffret venu de l'Orient
Dont la serrure grince et rechigne en criant,

The sunshine dims the feeble candlelight;
Thus your all-conquering image must be one,
O shining soul, with that immortal sun.

47

The Harmony of Evening

Now comes the time when trembling on its stem
Each flower diffuses fragrance like a censer;
Perfumes and sounds swirl in the evening air;
Slow melancholy waltz and dizzy languor.

Each flower diffuses fragrance like a censer;
The violin trembles like a grieving heart,
Slow melancholy waltz and dizzy languor!
The sky is spread like an altar of repose.

The violin trembles like a grieving heart,
A tender heart that hates the vast dark void!
The sky is spread like an altar of repose;
The sun is drowned in its own thickening blood.

A tender heart that hates the vast dark void
Gathers each gleaming vestige of the past;
The sun is drowned in its own thickening blood...
Your memory shines in me like a monstrosity.

48

The Perfume Flask

Strong perfumes seem to make all matter porous,
As if they could seep through glass. For instance,
When you open some casket brought from the East
With a lock that grates and grumbles and creaks;

Ou dans une maison déserte quelque armoire
Pleine de l'âcre odeur des temps, poudreuse et noire,
Parfois on trouve un vieux flacon qui se souvient,
D'où jaillit toute vive une âme qui revient.

Mille pensers dormaient, chrysalides funèbres,
Frémissant doucement dans les lourdes ténèbres,
Qui dégagent leur aile et prennent leur essor,
Teintés d'azur, glacés de rose, lamés d'or.

Voilà le souvenir enivrant qui voltige
Dans l'air troublé ; les yeux se ferment ; le Vertige
Saisit l'âme vaincue et la pousse à deux mains
Vers un gouffre obscurci de miasmes humains ;

Il la terrasse au bord d'un gouffre séculaire,
Où, Lazare odorant déchirant son suaire,
Se meut dans son réveil le cadavre spectral
D'un vieil amour ranci, charmant et sépulcral.

Ainsi, quand je serai perdu dans la mémoire
Des hommes, dans le coin d'une sinistre armoire
Quand on m'aura jeté, vieux flacon désolé,
Décrépit, poudreux, sale, abject, visqueux, fêlé,

Je serai ton cercueil, aimable pestilence !
Le témoin de ta force et de ta virulence,
Cher poison préparé par les anges ! liqueur
Qui me ronge, ô la vie et la mort de mon cœur !

Or, rummaging through a dark dank cupboard where
A musty time-brewed smell pervades the air,
When you pick up some old flask that recalls
A world whose scent brings back a living soul.

A thousand gloomy chrysalid thoughts were kept
In darkness, trembling softly as they slept,
That now sprout wings and take their shining flight,
Rose-glazed and azure, burnished in golden light.

In troubled air the heady memory hovers;
Eyes close; a sudden vertigo takes over,
Manhandles the lost soul towards the pit,
Darkened with a miasmic human mist;

To that primeval brink the vapours crowd;
Like stinking Lazarus breaking from his shroud,
The spectral corpse of some old rancid love
Wakes with sepulchral charm and starts to move.

Thus, even when my very name is lost
To human memory and idly tossed
Into some gloomy cupboard, an old flask,
Dusty and dirty, useless, slimy, cracked,

– Then I shall be your coffin, cherished plague,
The witness to your power and your rage,
Dear poison brewed by some angelic art,
My life and death, corrosion of my heart!

49

Le Poison

Le vin sait revêtir le plus sordide bouge
D'un luxe miraculeux,
Et fait surgir plus d'un portique fabuleux
Dans l'or de sa vapeur rouge,
Comme un soleil couchant dans un ciel nébuleux.

L'opium agrandit ce qui n'a pas de bornes,
Allonge l'illimité,
Approfondit le temps, creuse la volupté,
Et de plaisirs noirs et mornes
Remplit l'âme au-delà de sa capacité.

Tout cela ne vaut pas le poison qui découle
De tes yeux, de tes yeux verts,
Lacs où mon âme tremble et se voit à l'envers...
Mes songes viennent en foule
Pour se désaltérer à ces gouffres amers.

Tout cela ne vaut pas le terrible prodige
De ta salive qui mord,
Qui plonge dans l'oubli mon âme sans remords,
Et, charriant le vertige,
La roule défaillante aux rives de la mort !

50

Ciel brouillé

On dirait ton regard d'une vapeur couvert ;
Ton œil mystérieux (est-il bleu, gris ou vert ?)
Alternativement tendre, rêveur, cruel,
Réfléchit l'indolence et la pâleur du ciel.

49

Poison

Wine clothes the most disgusting hovel with
 Miraculous luxuries,
Evoking fabulous porticoes that rise
 In its red vapour's gold,
Diffuse like sunset in the misty skies.

Opium magnifies what has no bounds,
 Extends the limitless,
Explores the sensual, deepens time's abyss
 And overflows the soul
With gloomy pleasures and with sombre bliss.

All this is nothing to the poison that
 Flows from your eyes, green lakes
Where my soul trembles and its image wakes...
 And in these bitter depths
My dreams come thronging and their thirst is slaked;

All this is nothing to the dreadful wonder
 Of your saliva's tang,
Relentless tide that floods my spirit and
 Whose dizzying onrush swirls
My fainting soul to death's oblivious strand.

50

Misty Sky

Your face seems covered by a vaporous screen;
Those eyes a mystery (blue or grey or green?);
Dreaming or soft or pitiless, your gaze
Reflects the lazy pallor of the skies;

Tu rappelles ces jours blancs, tièdes et voilés,
Qui font se fondre en pleurs les cœurs ensorcelés,
Quand, agités d'un mal inconnu qui les tord,
Les nerfs trop éveillés raillent l'esprit qui dort.

Tu ressembles parfois à ces beaux horizons
Qu'allument les soleils des brumeuses saisons...
Comme tu resplendis, paysage mouillé
Qu'enflamment les rayons tombant d'un ciel brouillé!

Ô femme dangereuse, ô séduisants climats!
Adorerai-je aussi ta neige et vos frimas,
Et saurai-je tirer de l'implacable hiver
Des plaisirs plus aigus que la glace et le fer?

51

Le Chat

I

Dans ma cervelle se promène,
Ainsi qu'en son appartement,
Un beau chat, fort, doux et charmant.
Quand il miaule, on l'entend à peine,

Tant son timbre est tendre et discret;
Mais que sa voix s'apaise ou gronde,
Elle est toujours riche et profonde.
C'est là son charme et son secret.

Cette voix, qui perle et qui filtre
Dans mon fonds le plus ténébreux,
Me remplit comme un vers nombreux
Et me réjouit comme un philtre.

Recalls the hazy mildness of white days
That make enchanted hearts dissolve in tears,
When jangled nerves, fraught by some hidden ache,
Compel the sleeping spirit to awake.

Sometimes you seem to glow like those horizons
Lit by the nebulous sun of cloudy seasons...
A watery landscape, and yet how you shine
Under the slanting rays of a misty sky!

Dangerous woman, will your weather's spell
With snow and frost seduce me just as well,
And shall I relish pleasures even sharper
Than ice or iron in your ruthless winter?

51

The Cat

I

Inside my brain he strolls around
And makes himself at home, a cat,
Handsome and charming, gentle, strong;
When he miaows the tender sound

Is hardly heard; but whether calm
Or growling and cantankerous,
The timbre's always rich and deep.
That is his secret and his charm.

This voice that to my dark abyss,
My deepest caves, comes filtering down,
Delights me like a magic potion,
Fulfil me like a measured verse.

Elle endort les plus cruels maux
Et contient toutes les extases ;
Pour dire les plus longues phrases,
Elle n'a pas besoin de mots.

Non, il n'est pas d'archet qui morde
Sur mon cœur, parfait instrument,
Et fasse plus royalement
Chanter sa plus vibrante corde,

Que ta voix, chat mystérieux,
Chat séraphique, chat étrange,
En qui tout est, comme en un ange,
Aussi subtil qu'harmonieux !

II

De sa fourrure blonde et brune
Sort un parfum si doux, qu'un soir
J'en fus embaumé, pour l'avoir
Caressée une fois, rien qu'une.

C'est l'esprit familier du lieu ;
Il juge, il préside, il inspire
Toutes choses dans son empire ;
Peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu ?

Quand mes yeux, vers ce chat que j'aime
Tirés comme par un aimant,
Se retournent docilement
Et que je regarde en moi-même,

Je vois avec étonnement
Le feu de ses prunelles pâles,
Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales,
Qui me contemplent fixement.

All suffering sleeps where it is heard,
Its tone contains all ecstasies;
To speak the longest sentences
It has no need of words.

No bow could ever touch a string
In that fine instrument, my heart,
To bring such royal music forth
And make the chord's vibration sing,

As does, mysterious cat, your voice;
Strange and seraphic cat, where all
Is merged in some angelic whole,
Both subtle and harmonious.

II

His tawny fur has such intense
And sweet aroma that I felt
Almost embalmed one evening when
I bent to stroke it (yes, just once).

The genius of this place, the guide
Who governs, judges and inspires
All things within his chosen realm,
Is he an elf-king or a god?

Drawn by magnetic force, I gaze
Upon this cat I love, and when
Meekly at last I turn and look
Into myself, I am amazed

To see the fire in his eyes,
How pale and clear his pupils seem,
Live opals, lucid lamps, with beams
Unwaveringly fixed on me.

52

Le Beau Navire

Je veux te raconter, ô molle enchanteresse !
Les diverses beautés qui parent ta jeunesse ;
 Je veux te peindre ta beauté,
Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité.

Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
 Chargé de toile, et va roulant
Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.

Sur ton cou large et rond, sur tes épaules grasses,
Ta tête se pavane avec d'étranges grâces ;
 D'un air placide et triomphant
Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant.

Je veux te raconter, ô molle enchanteresse !
Les diverses beautés qui parent ta jeunesse ;
 Je veux te peindre ta beauté,
Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité.

Ta gorge qui s'avance et qui pousse la moire,
Ta gorge triomphante est une belle armoire
 Dont les panneaux bombés et clairs
Comme les boucliers accrochent des éclairs ;

Boucliers provoquants, armés de pointes roses !
Armoire à doux secrets, pleine de bonnes choses,
 De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs
Qui feraient délirer les cerveaux et les cœurs !

52

The Splendid Ship

Let me spell out, soft siren, every grace
That now adorns your youthful loveliness,
 And paint for your delight that beauty
Where childhood meets and weds maturity.

When your wide-billowing skirt goes sweeping by,
You seem a splendid ship that puts to sea
 Under full sail, swayed to and fro,
Keeping a gentle rhythm, languid, slow.

On the strong shoulders and firm neck, your head
Has the same elegance as your regal tread;
 With placid and triumphant pride
You pass upon your way, majestic child.

Let me spell out, soft siren, every grace
That now adorns your youthful loveliness,
 And paint for your delight that beauty
Where childhood meets and weds maturity.

Surging beneath the shimmering silk, your breast –
Uplifted and superb, a treasure chest,
 Whose panels, bright round shields, invite
And then deflect the sudden shafts of light;

Provoking shields, armed with sharp rosy tips,
A cupboard full of secrets and good things,
 Perfumes, liqueurs, and precious wines
For the delirium of hearts and minds.

Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
Chargé de toile, et va roulant
Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.

Tes nobles jambes, sous les volants qu'elles chassent,
Tourmentent les désirs obscurs et les agacent,
Comme deux sorcières qui font
Tourner un philtre noir dans un vase profond.

Tes bras, qui se joueraient des précoces hercules,
Sont des boas luisants les solides émules,
Faits pour serrer obstinément,
Comme pour l'imprimer dans ton cœur, ton amant.

Sur ton cou large et rond, sur tes épaules grasses,
Ta tête se pavane avec d'étranges grâces;
D'un air placide et triomphant
Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant.

53

L'Invitation au voyage

Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

When your wide-billowing skirt goes sweeping by,
You seem a splendid ship that puts to sea
 Under full sail, swayed to and fro,
Keeping a gentle rhythm, languid, slow.

Your noble legs, beneath the silk, inspire
Strange lusts and aggravate obscure desire,
 Like witches weaving spells who stir
Some black concoction in a deep old jar.

Your arms, a match for infant Hercules,
Are like two glistening boas, whose embrace
 Seems to compress and print for ever
Upon your heart the image of a lover.

On the strong shoulders and firm neck, your head
Has the same elegance as your regal tread;
 With placid and triumphant pride,
You pass upon your way, majestic child.

53

Invitation to the Voyage

My sister, my child,
How sweet and how mild
It would be to go there, we two;
 To live for the day,
 To love and to die
In the land that resembles you!
 For the wet suns there
 In that watery air
Have a magic I always hold dear,
 A secret that lies
 In your dangerous eyes
And shines through the veil of their tears.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Des meubles luisants,
Polis par les ans,
Décoreraient notre chambre ;
Les plus rares fleurs
Mêlant leurs odeurs
Aux vagues senteurs de l'ambre,
Les riches plafonds,
Les miroirs profonds,
La splendeur orientale,
Tout y parlerait
À l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Dont l'humeur est vagabonde ;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
— Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,
D'hyacinthe et d'or ;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

There all is beauty, all is measure,
Richness, serenity and pleasure.

In our quiet room
The tables would gleam
With the polish of sedulous years;
Rare flowers, vague amber,
Pervading our chamber
Would mingle their scents in the air;
The ornate ceilings
And mirrors revealing
The boundless splendour of the east
Would whisper in secret
Their news to the spirit
In its own gentle native speech.

There all is beauty, all is measure,
Richness, serenity and pleasure.

Ships made to plough the deep,
See where they lie asleep
In these canals with canvas furled;
It is to satisfy
Your slightest wish that they
Have come from the ends of the world.
See, from the glowing west
The setting sun has dressed
Canals and fields in its soft gown
Of hyacinth and gold,
As that warm light enfolds
The quiet country and the sleeping town.

There all is beauty, all is measure,
Richness, serenity and pleasure.

54

L'Irréparable

Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords,
 Qui vit, s'agite et se tortille,
Et se nourrit de nous comme le ver des morts,
 Comme du chêne la chenille ?
Pouvons-nous étouffer l'implacable Remords ?

Dans quel philtre, dans quel vin, dans quelle tisane,
 Noierons-nous ce vieil ennemi,
Destructeur et gourmand comme la courtisane,
 Patient comme la fourmi ?
Dans quel philtre ? — dans quel vin ? — dans quelle tisane ?

Dis-le, belle sorcière, oh ! dis, si tu le sais,
 À cet esprit comblé d'angoisse
Et pareil au mourant qu'écrasent les blessés,
 Que le sabot du cheval froisse,
Dis-le, belle sorcière, oh ! dis, si tu le sais,

À cet agonisant que le loup déjà flaire
 Et que surveille le corbeau,
À ce soldat brisé ! s'il faut qu'il désespère
 D'avoir sa croix et son tombeau ;
Ce pauvre agonisant que déjà le loup flaire !

Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir ?
 Peut-on déchirer des ténèbres
Plus denses que la poix, sans matin et sans soir,
 Sans astres, sans éclairs funèbres ?
Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir ?

L'Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l'Auberge
 Est soufflée, est morte à jamais !

54

The Irreparable

Can we stifle the rooted long Remorse
 That lives and works and winds
And feeds on us like the worms on a corpse
 Or the grubs on the oak?
Can we stifle the rooted long Remorse?

What wine, what potion, or what drug will serve
 To drown this enemy,
Deadly and grasping like a harlot's love
 And patient as the ant?
What wine? – what potion? – or what drug will serve?

O tell him, if you know, fair sorceress,
 Tell this tormented mind,
Crushed like a dying man under the press
 Of hoofs and wounded men,
O tell him, if you know, fair sorceress;

When the hungry wolf already sniffs the air,
 And the raven waits his turn,
Say if the broken soldier should despair
 Of having cross and tomb,
When the hungry wolf already sniffs the air.

Who is it that can rend the pitch-black pall,
 Light up the starless sky
Where no dawn comes and evening never falls,
 Nor fateful lightnings flash?
Who is it that can rend the pitch-black pall?

Hope's lamp is out; the windows of the inn
 Are dark. Without a moon,

Sans lune et sans rayons, trouver où l'on héberge
Les martyrs d'un chemin mauvais!
Le Diable a tout éteint aux carreaux de l'Auberge!

Adorable sorcière, aimes-tu les damnés?
Dis, connais-tu l'irrémissible?
Connais-tu le Remords, aux traits empoisonnés,
À qui notre cœur sert de cible?
Adorable sorcière, aimes-tu les damnés?

L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite
Notre âme, piteux monument,
Et souvent il attaque, ainsi que le termite,
Par la base le bâtiment.
L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite!

— J'ai vu parfois, au fond d'un théâtre banal
Qu'enflammait l'orchestre sonore,
Une fée allumer dans un ciel infernal
Une miraculeuse aurore;
J'ai vu parfois au fond d'un théâtre banal

Un être, qui n'était que lumière, or et gaze,
Terrasser l'énorme Satan;
Mais mon cœur, que jamais ne visite l'extase,
Est un théâtre où l'on attend
Toujours, toujours en vain, l'Être aux ailes de gaze!

55

Causerie

Vous êtes un beau ciel d'automne, clair et rose!
Mais la tristesse en moi monte comme la mer,
Et laisse, en refluant, sur ma lèvre morose
Le souvenir cuisant de son limon amer.

How can we find a place to take us in,
Martyrs of this rough road?
The Devil has snuffed the candles at the inn!

Do you then love the damned, fair sorceress?
Say, do you know the sin
That finds no pardon? Do you know Remorse
That poisons wounded hearts?
Do you then love the damned, fair sorceress?

The Irreparable gnaws with its cursed teeth
Our soul's sad monument,
And often, termite-like, from underneath
Attacks foundations first.
The Irreparable gnaws with its cursed teeth.

— In tawdry theatres I have often seen,
Urged by the blaring band,
A fairy in some hellish sky come down
To light miraculous dawn;
In tawdry theatres I have often seen

A creature of mere light and gauze who brings
Gigantic Satan low;
But my heart's stage, starved of such rapturous things,
Always awaits in vain,
In vain, that creature with the gauzy wings.

55

Conversation

You are an autumn sky, rosy and clear;
But sadness like a tide in me wells up,
And as it ebbs it leaves an aftertaste
Of bitter lime upon my sullen lip.

— Ta main se glisse en vain sur mon sein qui se pâme ;
Ce qu'elle cherche, amie, est un lieu saccagé
Par la griffe et la dent féroce de la femme.
Ne cherchez plus mon cœur ; les bêtes l'ont mangé.

Mon cœur est un palais flétri par la cohue ;
On s'y soûle, on s'y tue, on s'y prend aux cheveux !
— Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue !...

Ô Beauté, dur fléau des âmes, tu le veux !
Avec tes yeux de feu, brillants comme des fêtes,
Calcine ces lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes !

56

Chant d'automne

I

Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres ;
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts !
J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres
Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.

Tout l'hiver va rentrer dans mon être : colère,
Haine, frissons, horreur, labeur dur et forcé,
Et, comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,
Mon cœur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glacé.

J'écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe ;
L'échafaud qu'on bâtit n'a pas d'écho plus sourd.
Mon esprit est pareil à la tour qui succombe
Sous les coups du bélier infatigable et lourd.

Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone,
Qu'on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part.

—In vain your hand glides on my fainting breast,
Since what it looks for, love, is now a pit
Ravaged by woman's tooth and claw, laid waste.
Seek not my heart: wild beasts have eaten it.

The mob has wrecked the palace of my heart,
Swilling and killing, tearing each other's hair
— Ah, perfume that pervades your naked throat!...

Soul-scourging Beauty, still you want that heart!
Then let your fiery eyes that shine like feasts
Burn up these wretched scraps spared by the beasts.

56

Autumnal

I

Soon we shall plunge into the chilly shade;
Farewell to summer's light, dimmed all too soon.
Already from the courtyard I can hear
The ominous thud of logs on cobblestones.

Winter will take possession of me: anger,
Horror and hate, forced labour, shivering work,
And like the infernal arctic sun, my heart
Will be no more than one red frozen block.

I shudder as I hear each log that falls;
Scaffolds are raised with echoes not so grim.
My mind is like a tower that gives way
Before the untiring heavy battering ram.

This beat goes dully on like someone nailing
A coffin down. But whose? I cannot tell.

Pour qui ? — C'était hier l'été ; voici l'automne !
Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ.

II

J'aime de vos longs yeux la lumière verdâtre,
Douce beauté, mais tout aujourd'hui m'est amer,
Et rien, ni votre amour, ni le boudoir, ni l'âtre,
Ne me vaut le soleil rayonnant sur la mer.

Et pourtant aimez-moi, tendre cœur ! soyez mère,
Même pour un ingrat, même pour un méchant ;
Amante ou sœur, soyez la douceur éphémère
D'un glorieux automne ou d'un soleil couchant.

Courte tâche ! La tombe attend ; elle est avide !
Ah ! laissez-moi, mon front posé sur vos genoux.
Goûter, en regrettant l'été blanc et torride,
De l'arrière-saison le rayon jaune et doux !

57

À une madone

Ex-voto dans le goût espagnol

Je veux bâtir pour toi, Madone, ma maîtresse,
Un autel souterrain au fond de ma détresse,
Et creuser dans le coin le plus noir de mon cœur,
Loin du désir mondain et du regard moqueur,
Une niche, d'azur et d'or tout émaillée,
Où tu te dresseras, Statue émerveillée.
Avec mes Vers polis, treillis d'un pur métal
Savamment constellé de rimes de cristal,
Je ferai pour ta tête une énorme Couronne ;
Et dans ma Jalousie, ô mortelle Madone,
Je saurai te tailler un Manteau, de façon

Summer was yesterday, now autumn's here.
The eerie noise resounds like a farewell.

II

I love the greenish light in your long eyes,
Sweet beauty, but all's bitter now for me,
And nothing, neither love nor hearth nor home,
Can match the sunshine shimmering on the sea.

Yet love me still, dear heart, be mother even
To this ungrateful and unworthy son;
Lover or sister, be the transient sweetness
Of glorious autumn or of setting sun.

Brief task! The tomb awaits me, gaping wide.
Ah, let me lay my head upon your lap
To savour, as I mourn the white-hot summer,
The soft gold ray of summer's aftermath.

57

To a Madonna

Ex-Voto in the Spanish Style

Deep in my anguish, mistress and Madonna,
I mean to build an altar in your honour,
And in the darkest corner of my heart,
Where mocking looks and lusts can have no part,
Carve out a fine enamelled niche to hold
Your Statue in a frame of silvered gold.
With polished Verse forged from the purest ore
Spangled with crystal rhymes, I'll fashion for
Your queenly head a grand majestic Crown;
Then Jealousy, to keep you for my own,
Will cut a Cloak that's stiff, outlandish, stout,

Barbare, roide et lourd, et doublé de soupçon,
 Qui, comme une guérite, enfermera tes charmes ;
 Non de Perles brodé, mais de toutes mes Larmes !
 Ta Robe, ce sera mon Désir, frémissant,
 Onduleux, mon Désir qui monte et qui descend,
 Aux pointes se balance, aux vallons se repose,
 Et revêt d'un baiser tout ton corps blanc et rose.
 Je te ferai de mon Respect de beaux Souliers
 De satin, par tes pieds divins humiliés,
 Qui, les emprisonnant dans une molle étreinte,
 Comme un moule fidèle en garderont l'empreinte.
 Si je ne puis, malgré tout mon art diligent,
 Pour Marchepied tailler une Lune d'argent,
 Je mettrai le Serpent qui me mord les entrailles
 Sous tes talons, afin que tu foules et railles,
 Reine victorieuse et féconde en rachats,
 Ce monstre tout gonflé de haine et de crachats.
 Tu verras mes Pensers, rangés comme les Cierges
 Devant l'autel fleuri de la Reine des Vierges,
 Étoilant de reflets le plafond peint en bleu,
 Te regarder toujours avec des yeux de feu ;
 Et comme tout en moi te chérit et t'admire,
 Tout se fera Benjoin, Encens, Oliban, Myrrhe,
 Et sans cesse vers toi, sommet blanc et neigeux,
 En Vapeurs montera mon Esprit orageux.

Enfin, pour compléter ton rôle de Marie,
 Et pour mêler l'amour avec la barbarie,
 Volupté noire ! des sept Péchés capitaux,
 Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept Couteaux
 Bien affilés, et, comme un jongleur insensible,
 Prenant le plus profond de ton amour pour cible,
 Je les planterai tous dans ton Cœur pantelant,
 Dans ton Cœur sanglotant, dans ton Cœur ruisselant !

Lined with suspicion, padded thick with doubt,
 Brocaded not with Pearls but with my tears,
 To lock away your charms and calm my fears.
 Your Gown will be my trembling vague Desire,
 Lust that descends only to mount up higher,
 Clothing your body as my kisses go
 From rosy peaks to shady vales below.
 Respect will be the satin I shall use
 To offer you a dainty pair of Shoes,
 Which, since they love the feet that they enfold,
 Will keep the imprint like a faithful mould.
 Then if I cannot forge, for all my skill,
 A silver Moon to be your Pedestal,
 From my own tortured entrails I shall tear
 The gnawing Serpent out and place him there,
 Footstool for your victorious holy tread;
 Your saving heel shall bruise his venomous head.
 Before your altar shall my Thoughts be seen,
 Set out like Candles for the Virgin Queen,
 Their light reflected on the ceiling's blue,
 Sharp stars that fix their fiery gaze on you;
 And since I worship you with every sense,
 All shall dissolve in Myrrh and Frankincense,
 The vapours of my stormy soul that seeks
 The calm of your immaculate snowy peak.

Another Mary! And to make you such
 I'll season love with a barbaric touch,
 And, darkly savouring the power of words,
 Change Seven Deadly Sins to Seven Swords;
 I'll plunge their well-honed blades with perfect aim
 In that deep part of you that hides love's flame –
 Yes, plant them all down in your throbbing Heart,
 Your sobbing Heart, your naked dripping Heart!

58

Chanson d'après-midi

Quoique tes sourcils méchants
Te donnent un air étrange
Qui n'est pas celui d'un ange,
Sorcière aux yeux alléchants,

Je t'adore, ô ma frivole.
Ma terrible passion !
Avec la dévotion
Du prêtre pour son idole.

Le désert et la forêt
Embaument tes tresses rudes,
Ta tête a les attitudes
De l'énigme et du secret.

Sur ta chair le parfum rôde
Comme autour d'un encensoir ;
Tu charmes comme le soir,
Nymphé ténébreuse et chaude.

Ah ! les philtres les plus forts
Ne valent pas ta paresse,
Et tu connais la caresse
Qui fait revivre les morts !

Tes hanches sont amoureuses
De ton dos et de tes seins,
Et tu ravis les coussins
Par tes poses langoureuses.

Quelquefois, pour apaiser
Ta rage mystérieuse,

58

Song of the Afternoon

Your frowning eyebrows give your gaze
A sullen, half-unearthly air,
Though there's no angel who could share
The witchcraft in those tempting eyes.

And yet I love you, careless maid,
My fearsome passion and my pain,
With all the fervour that sustains
A pious priest before his god.

The desert and the pathless woods
Perfume your tangled rebel locks,
And some enigma seems to lurk
In every motion of your head.

Your flesh exudes the potent charm
Of incense wafting over all,
Seductive, as when evening falls,
Dear nymph so shadowy and warm.

No drug or potion ever could
Excite me like your idleness;
You know the art of the caress
That breathes new life into the dead.

Your thighs and back and breasts create
New lines and harmonies of love,
With languid limbs that stretch and leave
The cushions swooning with delight.

Often, as if to find release
For some dark rage that burns within,

Tu prodigues, sérieuse,
La morsure et le baiser ;

Tu me déchires, ma brune,
Avec un rire moqueur,
Et puis tu mets sur mon cœur
Ton œil doux comme la lune.

Sous tes souliers de satin,
Sous tes charmants pieds de soie,
Moi, je mets ma grande joie,
Mon génie et mon destin,

Mon âme par toi guérie,
Par toi, lumière et couleur !
Explosion de chaleur
Dans ma noire Sibérie !

59

Sisina

Imaginez Diane en galant équipage,
Parcourant les forêts ou battant les halliers,
Cheveux et gorge au vent, s'enivrant de tapage,
Superbe et défiant les meilleurs cavaliers !

Avez-vous vu Théroigne, amante du carnage,
Excitant à l'assaut un peuple sans souliers,
La joue et l'œil en feu, jouant son personnage,
Et montant, sabre au poing, les royaux escaliers ?

Telle la Sisina ! Mais la douce guerrière
A l'âme charitable autant que meurtrière ;
Son courage, affolé de poudre et de tambours,

You mix some serious biting in
The lavish sweetness of your kiss.

Sometimes you tear my soul apart
Because you laugh at me in scorn;
But then your eye, mild as the moon,
Puts balsam on my wounded heart.

Under your lovely silken feet,
Under your dainty satin shoes,
I place the greatest of my joys,
My genius and my fate,

My soul, restored by you at last,
Healed by your colour and your light,
The vast explosion of your heat
In my black Siberian waste.

59

Sisina

Picture Diana, heated in the chase,
Clad for the sport, blown hair and naked breast,
Beating the thickets, roaming forest ways,
And putting other riders to the test!

Or have you seen Théroigne, mad for blood,
Rousing a barefoot mob with fiery glare
And burning cheeks, or how she takes the lead,
Sabre in fist, climbing the royal stair?

Such is Sisina. But this warrior maid
Is merciful no less than murderous;
Her valiant heart that war has scarred and seared

Devant les suppliants sait mettre bas les armes,
Et son cœur, ravagé par la flamme, a toujours,
Pour qui s'en montre digne, un réservoir de larmes.

60

Franciscæ meæ laudes

*Novis te cantabo chordis,
O novelletum quod ludis
In solitudine cordis.*

*Esto sertis implicata,
O femina delicata
Per quam solvuntur peccata!*

*Sicut beneficum Lethe,
Hauriam oscula de te,
Quæ imbuta es magnete.*

*Quum vitiorum tempestas
Turbabat omnes semitas,
Apparuisti, Deitas,*

*Velut stella salutaris
In naufragiis amaris...
Suspendam cor tuis aris!*

*Piscina plena virtutis,
Fons æternæ juventutis,
Labris vocem redde mutis!*

*Quod erat spurcum, cremasti;
Quod rudius, exæquasti;
Quod debile, confirmasti.*

Lays down its arms when suppliants beg for peace,
And for all those who have deserved such grace
Reserves a deep unfailing well of tears.

60

Franciscæ meæ laudes

With new chords I shall sing your praise,
Young blossomer who sweetly plays
In my heart's deep solitude.

Accept the crown that I have woven
Of vernal flowers, tender woman,
By whom my sins shall be absolved.

All that kind Lethe holds of bliss
Let me savour in your kiss
That draws me with magnetic force.

Beset by storms of evil ways,
I missed the path and went astray;
Then you, Divinity, appeared,

Like the redemptive star that saves
The shipwrecked sailor from the waves...
My heart shall hang upon your altar.

Well of all virtues and of truth,
And fountain of eternal youth,
Endow my silent lips with speech.

What once was foul you purified;
What once was weak you fortified,
You polished what was rough and rude.

*In fame mea taberna,
In nocte mea lucerna,
Recte me semper guberna.*

*Adde nunc vires viribus,
Dulce balneum suavibus
Unguentatum odoribus!*

*Meos circa lumbos mica,
O castitatis lorica,
Aqua tinctorum seraphica;*

*Patera gemmis corusca,
Panis salsus, mollis esca,
Divinum vinum, Francisca!*

61

À une dame créole

Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse,
J'ai connu, sous un dais d'arbres tout empourprés
Et de palmiers d'où pleut sur les yeux la paresse,
Une dame créole aux charmes ignorés.

Son teint est pâle et chaud ; la brune enchanteresse
A dans le cou des airs noblement maniérés ;
Grande et svelte en marchant comme une chasseresse,
Son sourire est tranquille et ses yeux assurés.

Si vous alliez, Madame, au vrai pays de gloire,
Sur les bords de la Seine ou de la verte Loire,
Belle digne d'orner les antiques manoirs,

You, my tavern when I hunger,
You, my lantern when I wander,
Rightly ever guide my soul.

Now to my powers add your power,
Soft soothing bath and fragrant shower;
Anoint me with your precious balm.

O gird my loins and guard my breast,
Bright armour that will keep me chaste,
Tempered in some seraphic stream;

Bread and salt and savoury taste,
A jewelled goblet for the feast,
My Francisca, heavenly wine!

61

To a Creole Lady

A fragrant land that loves the sun's caress,
And there, beneath a canopy of palms
And purple leaves that rain down idleness,
A Creole lady shades her secret charms.

Dark-haired enchantress, how the noble neck
Exalts her head! her skin is pale and warm;
A tall slim huntress with a supple walk,
Her glance is confident, her smile is calm.

Dear lady, in that land where glory reigns,
Beside the fresh green banks of Loire or Seine,
Your beauty well might grace some old domain

Vous feriez, à l'abri des ombreuses retraites,
Germer mille sonnets dans le cœur des poètes,
Que vos grands yeux rendraient plus soumis que vos noirs.

62

Mœsta et errabunda

Dis-moi, ton cœur parfois s'envole-t-il, Agathe,
Loin du noir océan de l'immonde cité,
Vers un autre océan où la splendeur éclate,
Bleu, clair, profond, ainsi que la virginité ?
Dis-moi, ton cœur parfois s'envole-t-il, Agathe ?

La mer, la vaste mer, console nos labeurs !
Quel démon a doté la mer, rauque chanteuse
Qu'accompagne l'immense orgue des vents grondeurs,
De cette fonction sublime de berceuse ?
La mer, la vaste mer, console nos labeurs !

Emporte-moi, wagon ! enlève-moi, frégate !
Loin ! loin ! ici la boue est faite de nos pleurs !
— Est-il vrai que parfois le triste cœur d'Agathe
Dise : Loin des remords, des crimes, des douleurs,
Emporte-moi, wagon, enlève-moi, frégate ?

Comme vous êtes loin, paradis parfumé,
Où sous un clair azur tout n'est qu'amour et joie,
Où tout ce que l'on aime est digne d'être aimé,
Où dans la volupté pure le cœur se noie !
Comme vous êtes loin, paradis parfumé !

Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines,
Les courses, les chansons, les baisers, les bouquets,
Les violons vibrant derrière les collines,

Where, in a sheltered grove, you would inspire
Sonnets from poets whom your eyes would render
Still more subservient than the blacks you own.

62

Mæsta et errabunda

Agatha, tell me, does your heart take flight
From this black city's oceanic slime
Towards another ocean's shimmering light,
Blue, deep and clear, as is virginity?
Agatha, tell me, does your heart take flight?

The sea consoles our toil, the endless sea,
Hoarse singer who accompanies the wind's
Deep-roaring organ with a lullaby,
What demon chose it for that noble task?
The sea consoles our toil, the endless sea.

Carriage or frigate, come, take me away!
Far, far away! This mud is made with tears.
– Does Agatha's sad heart not sometimes say:
Far from remorse, from suffering and crime,
Carriage or frigate, come, take me away?

How far, that paradise of fragrant groves
Where all is joy and love beneath the sky,
Where all one loves is worthy to be loved
And hearts lie drowned in pure voluptuousness!
How far, that paradise of fragrant groves!

But the green paradise of childish loves,
The games, the songs, the garlands and the kisses,
The violins throbbing in the hills above,

Avec les brocs de vin, le soir, dans les bosquets,
— Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines,

L'innocent paradis, plein de plaisirs furtifs,
Est-il déjà plus loin que l'Inde et que la Chine ?
Peut-on le rappeler avec des cris plaintifs,
Et l'animer encor d'une voix argentine,
L'innocent paradis plein de plaisirs furtifs ?

63

Le Revenant

Comme les anges à l'œil fauve,
Je reviendrai dans ton alcôve
Et vers toi glisserai sans bruit
Avec les ombres de la nuit ;

Et je te donnerai, ma brune,
Des baisers froids comme la lune
Et des caresses de serpent
Autour d'une fosse rampant.

Quand viendra le matin livide,
Tu trouveras ma place vide,
Où jusqu'au soir il fera froid.

Comme d'autres par la tendresse,
Sur ta vie et sur ta jeunesse,
Moi, je veux régner par l'effroi.

The jugs of wine at evening in the woods,
– But the green paradise of childish loves,

That guiltless paradise of furtive joys,
More distant now than India or Cathay,
Can we recall it with our plaintive cries,
Or resurrect it with a silvery voice,
That guiltless paradise of furtive joys?

63

The Ghost

With bestial angelic eyes
I shall return and make no noise,
And slip into your quiet room
And glide towards you in the gloom;

My dusky love, I shall bestow
Moon-cold kisses on your brow,
With coiled caresses writhing round
Like snakes that haunt a burial ground.

Morning will not reveal my face,
You'll wake to find an empty place,
Though when night comes I shall be there.

Others endeavour to possess
Your life and youth through tenderness –
Not me: I choose to rule by fear.

64

Sonnet d'automne

Ils me disent, tes yeux, clairs comme le cristal :
« Pour toi, bizarre amant, quel est donc mon mérite ? »
— Sois charmante et tais-toi ! Mon cœur, que tout irrite,
Excepté la candeur de l'antique animal,

Ne veut pas te montrer son secret infernal,
Berceuse dont la main aux longs sommeils m'invite,
Ni sa noire légende avec la flamme écrite.
Je hais la passion et l'esprit me fait mal !

Aimons-nous doucement. L'Amour dans sa guérite,
Ténébreux, embusqué, bande son arc fatal.
Je connais les engins de son vieil arsenal :

Crime, horreur et folie ! — Ô pâle marguerite !
Comme moi n'es-tu pas un soleil automnal,
Ô ma si blanche, ô ma si froide Marguerite ?

65

Tristesses de la lune

Ce soir, la lune rêve avec plus de paresse ;
Ainsi qu'une beauté, sur de nombreux coussins,
Qui d'une main distraite et légère caresse
Avant de s'endormir le contour de ses seins,

Sur le dos satiné des molles avalanches,
Mourante, elle se livre aux longues pâmoisons,
Et promène ses yeux sur les visions blanches
Qui montent dans l'azur comme des floraisons.

64

Autumn Sonnet

They speak to me, your eyes as clear as crystals:
“Strange love, what is it that you find in me?”
– Be still and charming! Hush! I take no joy
But in the primal lust of animals;

There is a secret in my jaded heart,
A legend writ in flame that I would keep
From you, whose hand would rock me to long sleep.
Reason means pain, passion is what I hate.

Let us love gently. Love the god awaits
Darkly in ambush with his fatal bow.
His deadly weapons I already know:

Horror and crime and madness! – Are you not,
Pale flower, an autumn sun, as I am too,
So white and O so cold, my Marguerite?

65

Sorrows of the Moon

Tonight the moon dreams lazily, reclined
Like a woman sinking into cushioned rest,
Who, on the edge of sleep, with casual hand,
Explores the contours of her perfect breast;

Dozing on this soft avalanche of pillows,
Expiring, she surrenders to long swoons,
Dazed by white visions of the clouds that billow
Up in the azure sky like flowers in bloom.

Quand parfois sur ce globe, en sa langueur oisive.
Elle laisse filer une larme furtive,
Un poète pieux, ennemi du sommeil,

Dans le creux de sa main prend cette larme pâle,
Aux reflets irisés comme un fragment d'opale,
Et la met dans son cœur loin des yeux du soleil.

66

Les Chats

Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
Qui comme eux sont frileux et comme eux sédentaires.

Amis de la science et de la volupté,
Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres ;
L'Érèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres,
S'ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté.

Ils prennent en songeant les nobles attitudes
Des grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes,
Qui semblent s'endormir dans un rêve sans fin ;

Leurs reins féconds sont pleins d'étincelles magiques,
Et des parcelles d'or, ainsi qu'un sable fin,
Étoilent vaguement leurs prunelles mystiques.

When sometimes in her languor she lets fall
Upon this earth a furtive tear like one
Bright shard of opal, iridescent, pale,

The pious poet, enemy of sleep,
Will catch it in his hand and place it deep
Within his heart to shield it from the sun.

66

Cats

Fierce lovers and stern scholars growing old
Vie with each other in the love they bear
To strong soft cats, pride of the house, who share
Their sedentary tastes and feel the cold.

Friends of both questing mind and sensual joy,
They seek a dreadful silence in the shade;
Dark Erebus would choose them for his steeds
If they could bend their pride to slavery.

They take on noble poses as they rest
Like sphinxes in their solitary waste,
Lost in a desert dream that never ends;

A magic current fills their fecund loins,
And in their mystic eyes vague stardust shines
Like particles of gold, fine grains of sand.

67

Les Hiboux

Sous les ifs noirs qui les abritent,
Les hiboux se tiennent rangés,
Ainsi que des dieux étrangers,
Dardant leur œil rouge. Ils méditent.

Sans remuer ils se tiendront
Jusqu'à l'heure mélancolique
Où, poussant le soleil oblique,
Les ténèbres s'établiront.

Leur attitude au sage enseigne
Qu'il faut en ce monde qu'il craigne
Le tumulte et le mouvement ;

L'homme ivre d'une ombre qui passe
Porte toujours le châtiment
D'avoir voulu changer de place.

68

La Pipe

Je suis la pipe d'un auteur ;
On voit, à contempler ma mine
D'Abyssinienne ou de Cafrine,
Que mon maître est un grand fumeur.

Quand il est comblé de douleur,
Je fume comme la chaumine
Où se prépare la cuisine
Pour le retour du laboureur.

67

Owls

The owls stand in a row and wait
Under the sheltering dark yews
Like alien gods; they dart around
Their small red eyes. They meditate.

All day, not budging, they remain
Until the melancholy hour
When, pushing out the slanting sun,
The shades of night restore their reign.

This teaches us, the wise man says,
That in this wide world we should fear
All kinds of bustling and noise;

But, drunk with shadows, man must bear
A punishment that will not pass
For having wanted to change place.

68

The Pipe

I am a writer's pipe; you see
How I am blackened by my work;
The Kaffir look it gives to me
Proves that he's smoking like a Turk.

When cares crowd on him, then my smoke
Goes gently curling in the air
As from some cottage where they cook
The workman's homely evening fare.

J'enlace et je berce son âme
Dans le réseau mobile et bleu
Qui monte de ma bouche en feu,

Et je roule un puissant dictame
Qui charme son cœur et guérit
De ses fatigues son esprit.

69

La Musique

La musique souvent me prend comme une mer !
Vers ma pâle étoile,
Sous un plafond de brume ou dans un vaste éther,
Je mets à la voile ;

La poitrine en avant et les poumons gonflés
Comme de la toile,
J'escalade le dos des flots amoncelés
Que la nuit me voile ;

Je sens vibrer en moi toutes les passions
D'un vaisseau qui souffre ;
Le bon vent, la tempête et ses convulsions

Sur l'immense gouffre
Me bercent. D'autres fois, calme plat, grand miroir
De mon désespoir !

And from my fiery mouth I send
A shifting net of blue that winds
Around the soul it lulls to rest;

With pungent rolling rings I blend
A balm that heals his troubled breast
And cures his tired mind.

69

Music

There are times when music takes me like a sea,
 Moments when I set sail
Through boundless space or cloudy pall to where
 My star shines pale;

Lungs taut like canvas catching the salt breeze,
 Chest fronting the swell,
I climb and ride the rolling waves that night
 Hides with its veil;

The strains and violent throbbing of a ship
 Also vibrate in me;
Fair wind and frantic storm rock me to sleep

 On this unfathomed sea.
In seasons of dead calm, that mirror stares
 With my despair.

70

Sépulture

Si par une nuit lourde et sombre
Un bon chrétien, par charité,
Derrière quelque vieux décombre
Enterre votre corps vanté,

À l'heure où les chastes étoiles
Ferment leurs yeux appesantis,
L'araignée y fera ses toiles,
Et la vipère ses petits ;

Vous entendrez toute l'année
Sur votre tête condamnée
Les cris lamentables des loups

Et des sorcières faméliques,
Les ébats des vieillards lubriques
Et les complots des noirs filous.

71

Une gravure fantastique

Ce spectre singulier n'a pour toute toilette,
Grotesquement campé sur son front de squelette,
Qu'un diadème affreux sentant le carnaval.
Sans éperons, sans fouet, il essouffle un cheval,
Fantôme comme lui, rosse apocalyptique,
Qui bave des naseaux comme un épileptique.
Au travers de l'espace ils s'enfoncent tous deux,
Et foulent l'infini d'un sabot hasardeux.
Le cavalier promène un sabre qui flamboie

70

Burial

If on a dark and sultry night
Some charitable Christian soul
Should find a rubbish dump and put
Your once proud body in a hole,

When the chaste stars no longer watch
And sleep has weighed their eyelids down,
There will the spider weave her webs
And the viper bear her spawn;

Above your cursed head you will hear
Wolves with their long lamenting howls
Night after night, throughout the year,

And starving witches mumbling spells,
Old lechers playing dirty games,
And shady ruffians plotting crimes.

71

A Fantastical Engraving

A naked spectral form, he only wears
A frightful crown, the relic of some fair,
Perched weirdly on his skull. He runs his course
With neither spurs nor whip to drive his horse,
Ghostly like him, apocalyptic steed,
With epileptic froth to show his speed;
Both rushing headlong through unbounded space,
Hoofs trampling the infinite in their race.
Above the ruck of mangled nameless hordes,

Sur les foules sans nom que sa monture broie,
Et parcourt, comme un prince inspectant sa maison,
Le cimetière immense et froid, sans horizon,
Où gisent, aux lueurs d'un soleil blanc et terne,
Les peuples de l'histoire ancienne et moderne.

72

Le Mort joyeux

Dans une terre grasse et pleine d'escargots
Je veux creuser moi-même une fosse profonde,
Où je puisse à loisir étaler mes vieux os
Et dormir dans l'oubli comme un requin dans l'onde.

Je hais les testaments et je hais les tombeaux ;
Plutôt que d'implorer une larme du monde,
Vivant, j'aimerais mieux inviter les corbeaux
À saigner tous les bouts de ma carcasse immonde.

Ô vers ! noirs compagnons sans oreille et sans yeux,
Voyez venir à vous un mort libre et joyeux ;
Philosophes viveurs, fils de la pourriture,

À travers ma ruine allez donc sans remords,
Et dites-moi s'il est encor quelque torture
Pour ce vieux corps sans âme et mort parmi les morts !

73

Le Tonneau de la haine

La Haine est le tonneau des pâles Danaïdes ;
La Vengeance éperdue aux bras rouges et forts
A beau précipiter dans ses ténèbres vides
De grands seaux pleins du sang et des larmes des morts,

The rider brandishes his flaming sword
And, like a prince inspecting his domain,
Surveys the endless cold of this vast plain,
A graveyard where, beneath a pale white sun,
Lie peoples of past ages and our own.

72

The Happy Corpse

In a fat soil where snails proliferate
I mean to make a ditch and dig it deep,
And, like a shark submerged, stretch out at ease
My old forgotten bones and fall asleep.

I hate all testaments, I hate all tombs;
Rather than ask the world to shed a tear,
I'd rather beg the crows to come and bleed
My carcass while I'm still alive and here.

O worms, with neither ears nor eyes, be glad
To greet a free and happy corpse, black mates;
Festive philosophers, children of decay,

Work gaily through my putrid wreck and say
If there is any pain that still awaits
This soulless body, dead among the dead.

73

The Cask of Hate

Hate is the cask of the pale Danaïds;
And so, when frantic red-armed Vengeance pours
Into the empty darkness down below
Great buckets full of dead men's blood and tears,

Le Démon fait des trous secrets à ces abîmes,
Par où fuiraient mille ans de sueurs et d'efforts,
Quand même elle saurait ranimer ses victimes,
Et pour les pressurer ressusciter leurs corps.

La Haine est un ivrogne au fond d'une taverne,
Qui sent toujours la soif naître de la liqueur
Et se multiplier comme l'hydre de Lerne.

— Mais les buveurs heureux connaissent leur vainqueur,
Et la Haine est vouée à ce sort lamentable
De ne pouvoir jamais s'endormir sous la table.

74

La Cloche fêlée

Il est amer et doux, pendant les nuits d'hiver,
D'écouter, près du feu qui palpite et qui fume,
Les souvenirs lointains lentement s'élever
Au bruit des carillons qui chantent dans la brume.

Bienheureuse la cloche au gosier vigoureux
Qui, malgré sa vieillesse, alerte et bien portante,
Jette fidèlement son cri religieux,
Ainsi qu'un vieux soldat qui veille sous la tente !

Moi, mon âme est fêlée, et lorsqu'en ses ennuis
Elle veut de ses chants peupler l'air froid des nuits,
Il arrive souvent que sa voix affaiblie

Semble le râle épais d'un blessé qu'on oublie
Au bord d'un lac de sang, sous un grand tas de morts,
Et qui meurt, sans bouger, dans d'immenses efforts.

The Devil pierces holes in that abyss
Through which the years of toil are rendered vain,
Even though Hate brings victims back to life,
So he can bleed their bodies dry again.

Hate is a drunk, squatting in some low dive,
Whose thirst is multiplied by what he drinks,
Growing as Hydra's heads do in the fable.

– But in Hate's armour there's a fatal chink
That happy drunks know well: the fact that he
Can never fall asleep under the table.

74

The Cracked Bell

How bittersweet it is on winter nights,
Around the smoky fire's crackling log,
To hear old memories rising with the sound
Of distant church bells ringing through the fog.

Blessèd indeed is the strong-throated bell
That in robust old age is still intent
To fling out faithfully its holy call
Like an old sentinel watching from his tent!

My soul is cracked, and when, beset by cares,
Its music seeks to throng the cold night air,
The wounded voice sounds like a man who groans

Beside a lake of blood, under a pile
Of corpses where, forgotten and alone,
He dies unmoving in tremendous toils.

75

Spleen [I]

Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière,
De son urne à grands flots verse un froid ténébreux
Aux pâles habitants du voisin cimetière
Et la mortalité sur les faubourgs brumeux.

Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière
Agite sans repos son corps maigre et galeux ;
L'âme d'un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière
Avec la triste voix d'un fantôme frileux.

Le bourdon se lamente, et la bûche enfumée
Accompagne en fausset la pendule enrhumée,
Cependant qu'en un jeu plein de sales parfums,

Héritage fatal d'une vieille hydropique,
Le beau valet de cœur et la dame de pique
Caudent sinistrement de leurs amours défunts.

76

Spleen [II]

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.

Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
De vers, de billets-doux, de procès, de romances,
Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,
Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.
C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.
— Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,
Où comme des remords se traînent de longs vers
Qui s'acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers.

75

Spleen [I]

Vexed with the city, Pluvius voids his urn
In chilling showers from a murky sky
Upon the local graveyard as he soaks
The foggy suburbs with mortality.

On the tiled floor my cat, seeking a litter,
Twitches its mangy body without rest;
The soul of some old poet haunts the gutter
With the faint accents of a shivering ghost.

The great bell groans its bass, the smoking log
Adds its falsetto to the wheezing clock,
While, in a fetid-smelling pack of cards

(Noxious bequest of some hydroptic hag),
The dandy Knave of Hearts and the Queen of Spades
Trade sordid stories of deceased old loves.

76

Spleen [II]

A thousand years of memories... I have more.

Think of a massive chest: stuffed in a drawer
Lie summons, love letters, verses, balance sheets,
Old songs, thick locks of hair wrapped in receipts –
But far more secrets cram my sorry brain.
It is a pyramid whose vast vault contains
More corpses than a common grave could own.
– I am a graveyard hated by the moon,
Where, like remorse, the long worms wind their way
And batten on the dead most dear to me.

Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,
Où gît tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,
Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses journées,
Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses années
L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,
Prend les proportions de l'immortalité.
— Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante !
Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,
Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux ;
Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

77

Spleen [III]

Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux,
Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très vieux,
Qui, de ses précepteurs méprisant les courbettes,
S'ennuie avec ses chiens comme avec d'autres bêtes.
Rien ne peut l'égayer, ni gibier, ni faucon,
Ni son peuple mourant en face du balcon.
Du bouffon favori la grotesque ballade
Ne distrait plus le front de ce cruel malade ;
Son lit fleurdelisé se transforme en tombeau,
Et les dames d'atour, pour qui tout prince est beau,
Ne savent plus trouver d'impudique toilette
Pour tirer un souris de ce jeune squelette.
Le savant qui lui fait de l'or n'a jamais pu
De son être extirper l'élément corrompu,

I am a boudoir where the withered rose
Lies on a heap of old outmoded clothes,
Where only plaintive pastels, pale Bouchers,
Breathe in the stale sweet scent of yesterday.

Nothing is longer than these limping days,
Snowed under by the flakes of wintry years,
When, fruit of dull indifference, Ennui
Can loom as large as immortality.
— Henceforth, O stuff of life, you are no more
Than some great rock, wrapped in a nameless fear,
A sphinx that drowns in Saharan mist,
Forgotten by the world, unmapped and lost
In sullen silence that is only won
To sing by slanting rays from the setting sun.

77

Spleen [III]

I am like the king of a rainy country,
Rich but impotent, young yet old already,
Who scorns his tutors bowing from the waist
And idles with his hounds and other beasts.
What cheers him up? Not falcons, not the chase,
Not even subjects dying at his gates.
His favourite jester's most outrageous song
Can't please this cruel invalid for long;
For all its fleurs-de-lis, his bed's a tomb,
Where ladies, sensitive to princely charm,
Find that no loose attire, however wanton,
Will draw a smile from this young skeleton.
His alchemist makes gold, but can't invent
A purge for this corrupted element;

Et dans ces bains de sang qui des Romains nous viennent,
Et dont sur leurs vieux jours les puissants se souviennent,
Il n'a su réchauffer ce cadavre hébété
Où coule au lieu de sang l'eau verte du Léthé.

78

Spleen [IV]

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle
Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,
Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle
Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits ;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,
Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,
S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide
Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris ;

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées
D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,
Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées
Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie
Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,
Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie
Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement.

— Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique,
Défilent lentement dans mon âme ; l'Espoir,
Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,
Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir.

Nor do those baths of blood from Roman times,
Still favoured by new tyrants past their prime,
Warm the unfeeling corpse, whose veins are fed
With Lethe's cool green water, not with blood.

78

Spleen [IV]

When the low sky weighs like a heavy lid
Upon the careworn mind that groans and frets,
And when from the horizon's round it sheds
On us a day darker than any night;

When earth is changed to a dank prison cell
Where, like a frantic bat inside its cave,
Hope scrapes its fragile wings upon the wall
And knocks its head against the rotting roof;

When spreading downpours seem to imitate
A monstrous prison with huge bars of rain,
And when foul hordes of silent spiders set
The webs they weave deep in our troubled brains,

Bells suddenly swing into angry life
And hurl a dreadful howling to the sky,
Like homeless wandering souls who, in their grief,
Launch on the air a long relentless cry.

Hearses with no funereal drum or music
Move in a slow procession through my soul,
Hope weeps defeated while despotic Anguish
Plants his black flag on my submissive skull.

79

Obsession

Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales ;
Vous hurlez comme l'orgue ; et dans nos cœurs maudits,
Chambres d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles,
Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*.

Je te hais, Océan ! tes bonds et tes tumultes,
Mon esprit les retrouve en lui ; ce rire amer
De l'homme vaincu, plein de sanglots et d'insultes,
Je l'entends dans le rire énorme de la mer.

Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit ! sans ces étoiles
Dont la lumière parle un langage connu !
Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu !

Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
Où vivent, jaillissant de mon œil par milliers,
Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers.

80

Le Goût du néant

Morne esprit, autrefois amoureux de la lutte,
L'Espoir, dont l'éperon attisait ton ardeur,
Ne veut plus t'enfourcher ! Couche-toi sans pudeur,
Vieux cheval dont le pied à chaque obstacle bute.

Résigne-toi, mon cœur ; dors ton sommeil de brute.

Esprit vaincu, fourbu ! Pour toi, vieux maraudeur,
L'amour n'a plus de goût, non plus que la dispute ;
Adieu donc, chants du cuivre et soupirs de la flûte !
Plaisirs, ne tentez plus un cœur sombre et boudeur !

79

Obsession

Great woods, your winds oppress me like the heft
Of great cathedral organs; and our hearts,
Shaken with dying groans, are echo chambers,
Vaults where your *De profundis* still vibrates.

I hate you, Ocean! All your bounding tumults
I find within: the bitter laughter of
A man defeated, all his sobs and insults,
I hear resounding in the sea's vast laugh.

How you would please me, Night, without those stars
Whose light speaks in a language that I know!
I only seek what's empty, black and bare.

But darkness is itself a canvas where
My eyes project a thousand vanished souls
Who look at me with a familiar air.

80

Longing for Nothingness

Sad spirit, once so ready for the fight,
Hope, who so often spurred you on your way,
Rides you no longer. Have no shame, lie down;
Old horse, the stones have lamed your stumbling feet.

Let go, my heart, and sleep your brutish sleep.

Defeated weary mind, you old marauder,
Now neither love nor combat can arouse you;
Farewell, the trumpet's call, the sighing flute!
Old pleasures, tempt this brooding heart no longer!

Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur !

Et le Temps m'engloutit minute par minute,
Comme la neige immense un corps pris de roideur ;
Je contemple d'en haut le globe en sa rondeur
Et je n'y cherche plus l'abri d'une cahute.

Avalanche, veux-tu m'emporter dans ta chute ?

81

Alchimie de la douleur

L'un t'éclaire avec son ardeur,
L'autre en toi met son deuil, Nature !
Ce qui dit à l'un : Sépulture !
Dit à l'autre : Vie et splendeur !

Hermès inconnu qui m'assistes
Et qui toujours m'intimidas,
Tu me rends l'égal de Midas,
Le plus triste des alchimistes ;

Par toi je change l'or en fer
Et le paradis en enfer ;
Dans le suaire des nuages

Je découvre un cadavre cher,
Et sur les célestes rivages
Je bâtis de grands sarcophages.

The fragrance of the spring is gone for ever.

Minute by minute, Time engulfs my soul
As snowdrifts swallow up a stiffening corpse;
I contemplate the round globe from above
And seek no hut to shelter from it all.

Come, Avalanche, take me with you in your fall!

81

Alchemy of Suffering

Nature, one man may lend you fire,
Another dulls you with his grief.
What says to one: Here is the grave,
Says to the other: Glory, Life!

Hermes, my unknown helper whom
I always fear, you now enlist
Me as a second Midas here,
The saddest of all alchemists.

Gold becomes iron through your spell
And paradise a living hell;
In heavy sheets of cloud I see

The shrouded corpse of all I love,
And on celestial shores above
I build immense sarcophagi.

82

Horreur sympathique

De ce ciel bizarre et livide,
Tourmenté comme ton destin,
Quels pensers dans ton âme vide
Descendent ? réponds, libertin.

— Insatiablement avide
De l'obscur et de l'incertain,
Je ne geindrai pas comme Ovide
Chassé du paradis latin.

Cieux déchirés comme des grèves,
En vous se mire mon orgueil ;
Vos vastes nuages en deuil

Sont les corbillards de mes rêves,
Et vos lueurs sont le reflet
De l'Enfer où mon cœur se plaît.

83

L'Héautontimorouménos

À J.G.F.

Je te frapperai sans colère
Et sans haine, comme un boucher,
Comme Moïse le rocher !
Et je ferai de ta paupière,

Pour abreuver mon Sahara,
Jaillir les eaux de la souffrance.
Mon désir gonflé d'espérance
Sur tes pleurs salés nagera

82

Congenial Horror

Down from this monstrous livid sky,
Tormented like your destiny,
Into your vacant soul descend
What thoughts? Freethinking rake, reply.

– Seeking insatiably to feed
On darkness and uncertainties,
I shall not groan as Ovid did,
Banned from his Latin paradise.

Torn streaming skies, like wild sea shores,
You mirror my proud restless soul;
The long dim hearses of my dreams

Are draped with your vast cloudy pall;
And in your lightning flash I seem
To glimpse the Hell my heart adores.

83

Heautontimoroumenos

For J.G.F.

I shall strike you with no anger,
No hatred, as a butcher strikes,
Even as Moses smote the rock.
And from your eyes I'll conjure

A stream of suffering that flows
To make my parched Sahara bloom.
Desire, swelled by hope, shall swim
In your salt tears as on it goes

Comme un vaisseau qui prend le large,
Et dans mon cœur qu'ils souleront
Tes chers sanglots retentiront
Comme un tambour qui bat la charge !

Ne suis-je pas un faux accord
Dans la divine symphonie,
Grâce à la vorace Ironie
Qui me secoue et qui me mord ?

Elle est dans ma voix, la criarde !
C'est tout mon sang, ce poison noir !
Je suis le sinistre miroir
Où la mégère se regarde !

Je suis la plaie et le couteau !
Je suis le soufflet et la joue !
Je suis les membres et la roue,
Et la victime et le bourreau !

Je suis de mon cœur le vampire,
— Un de ces grands abandonnés
Au rire éternel condamnés,
Et qui ne peuvent plus sourire !

84

L'Irremédiable

I

Une Idée, une Forme, un Être
Parti de l'azur et tombé
Dans un Styx bourbeux et plombé
Où nul œil du Ciel ne pénètre ;

Like some great vessel setting sail,
And to my sated heart will come
Your sobs resounding like the drum
That beats for the assault.

For am I not a dissonant chord
In the celestial symphony,
Thanks to voracious Irony
Who gnaws and buffets me?

Her shrill reproach is in my voice,
She's in my blood, black toxic brew!
I am the mirror where this shrew
Beholds her own grim face.

I am the knife, I am the wound,
I am the slap and the cheek,
I am the wheel and the limbs that break,
The victim who tortures himself.

I am the vampire of my heart
– Like those great men the world casts off,
Condemned eternally to laugh,
Who can no longer smile.

84

The Irremediable

I

An Idea, a Form, a Being
Come down and fallen from the blue
Into the Styx, a leaden slough
Where Heaven's eye is never-seeing;

Un Ange, imprudent voyageur
Qu'a tenté l'amour du difforme,
Au fond d'un cauchemar énorme
Se débattant comme un nageur,

Et luttant, angoisses funèbres !
Contre un gigantesque remous
Qui va chantant comme les fous
Et pirouettant dans les ténèbres ;

Un malheureux ensorcelé
Dans ses tâtonnements futiles,
Pour fuir d'un lieu plein de reptiles,
Cherchant la lumière et la clé ;

Un damné descendant sans lampe,
Au bord d'un gouffre dont l'odeur
Trahit l'humide profondeur,
D'éternels escaliers sans rampe,

Où veillent des monstres visqueux
Dont les larges yeux de phosphore
Font une nuit plus noire encore
Et ne rendent visibles qu'eux ;

Un navire pris dans le pôle,
Comme en un piège de cristal,
Cherchant par quel détroit fatal
Il est tombé dans cette geôle ;

— Emblèmes nets, tableau parfait
D'une fortune irrémédiable,
Qui donne à penser que le Diable
Fait toujours bien tout ce qu'il fait !

An angel-traveller, unwary,
Tempted to love deformity,
Flailing in some nightmarish sea
Like a rash swimmer who grows weary,

Striving in pain against his doom,
Fighting the mighty current's swirl
That sings a madman's song and whirls
Its pirouettes amid the gloom;

A man ill-fated and bewitched,
Groping without a light or key,
Seeking in vain to find a way
That leads out of the snake-filled pit;

A damned soul on the stairs that go
Down with no handrail from the brink
To the abyss that smells of dank
And endless clammy depths below,

Where slimy monsters watch and gleam
With phosphorescent eyes that make
The night they glare through yet more dark
So they are all that can be seen;

A ship that's ice-bound at the Pole,
As if a crystal trap had shut
Upon it as it vainly sought
The strait that led into this jail.

– Clear emblems of a fate that is
Determined, irremediable,
From which we gather that the Devil
Does well whatever he does.

II

Tête-à-tête sombre et limpide
Qu'un cœur devenu son miroir !
Puits de Vérité, clair et noir,
Où tremble une étoile livide,

Un phare ironique, infernal,
Flambeau des grâces sataniques,
Soulagement et gloire uniques,
— La conscience dans le Mal !

85

L'Horloge

Horloge ! dieu sinistre, effrayant, impassible,
Dont le doigt nous menace et nous dit : « *Souviens-toi !*
Les vibrantes Douleurs dans ton cœur plein d'effroi
Se planteront bientôt comme dans une cible ;

Le Plaisir vaporeux fuira vers l'horizon
Ainsi qu'une sylphide au fond de la coulisse ;
Chaque instant te dévore un morceau du délice
À chaque homme accordé pour toute sa saison.

Trois mille six cents fois par heure, la Seconde
Chuchote : *Souviens-toi !* — Rapide, avec sa voix
D'insecte, Maintenant dit : Je suis Autrefois,
Et j'ai pompé ta vie avec ma trompe immonde !

Remember ! Souviens-toi ! prodigue ! Esto memor !
(Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues.)
Les minutes, mortel folâtre, sont des gangues
Qu'il ne faut pas lâcher sans en extraire l'or !

II

O that exchange, obscure and clear,
Where the heart mirrors the heart,
The Well of Truth, lucid and dark
Where trembles one livid star,

Ironic beacon sent from Hell
To see satanic graces by,
The sole relief, the only glory,
– Evil that knows itself.

85

The Clock

The clock! An ominous impassive god,
Whose finger threatens us and says: “*Remember!*”
Soon Suffering will choose your heart for target
And plant his quivering arrows there for good;

Vaporous Pleasure flits to the horizon,
A gauzy dancing sylph who glides offstage;
Each moment eats a piece of that delight
To each man granted for his earthly season.

Three thousand and six hundred times an hour
The Second sighs *Remember!* Quick as thought,
The insect voice of Now says: I am Past
And sucked your lifeblood with my loathsome power.

Remember! Souviens-toi! Esto memor!
(My metal throat says it in every tongue)
The minutes, mortal fool, are seams of gold;
Strive to extract each ounce of precious ore.

Souviens-toi que le Temps est un joueur avide
Qui gagne sans tricher, à tout coup ! c'est la loi.
Le jour décroît ; la nuit augmente ; *souviens-toi !*
Le gouffre a toujours soif ; la clepsydre se vide.

Tantôt sonnera l'heure où le divin Hasard
Où l'auguste Vertu, ton épouse encor vierge,
Où le Repentir même (oh ! la dernière auberge!),
Où tout te dira : Meurs, vieux lâche ! il est trop tard ! »

Time is a greedy gambler, but no cheat;
He wins with every wager, that's the law.
The day declines; night gains on us; *Remember!*
The abyss gapes thirstily; the sands run out.

Soon the predestined hour will sound your fate,
When Chance, when Virtue (your still-virgin bride),
When even Repentance (yes, your last resort!),
When all say: Die, old coward! it's too late."

TABLEAUX PARISIENS

86

Paysage

Je veux, pour composer chastement mes églogues,
Coucher auprès du ciel, comme les astrologues,
Et, voisin des clochers, écouter en rêvant
Leurs hymnes solennels emportés par le vent.
Les deux mains au menton, du haut de ma mansarde,
Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde ;
Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,
Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité.

Il est doux, à travers les brumes, de voir naître
L'étoile dans l'azur, la lampe à la fenêtre,
Les fleuves de charbon monter au firmament
Et la lune verser son pâle enchantement.
Je verrai les printemps, les étés, les automnes ;
Et quand viendra l'hiver aux neiges monotones,
Je fermerai partout portières et volets
Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais.
Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,
Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
Des baisers, des oiseaux chantant soir et matin,
Et tout ce que l'Idylle a de plus enfantin.
L'Émeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre ;

PARISIAN SCENES

86

Landscape

To write pure eclogues I would love to lie
In bed like an astrologer, near the sky,
Amid the belfries, dreaming at the sound
Of solemn anthems carried on the wind.
There, from my attic, chin in hand, I'd look
Out at some workshop loud with song and talk,
At mast-like chimneys in the steeped city,
And skies that feed dreams of eternity.

How sweet to see, piercing the misty air,
The lamplit window or the evening star,
Great streams of sooty smoke that rise and swell
To where the moon pours down its pallid spell.
I'll see the punctual seasons come and go,
Spring, summer, autumn, until winter's snow,
And then I'll close each door and shutter tight
To build my faerie mansions in the night.
I'll dream of blue horizons and of gardens,
And marble basins filled by weeping fountains,
Kisses, and birds that sing at dawn and dusk,
And all that childish fantasy could ask.
Riot may rattle at my window pane,
And I'll not raise my head, but shall remain

Car je serai plongé dans cette volupté
D'évoquer le Printemps avec ma volonté,
De tirer un soleil de mon cœur, et de faire
De mes pensers brûlants une tiède atmosphère.

87

Le Soleil

Le long du vieux faubourg, où pendent aux mesures
Les persiennes, abri des secrètes luxures,
Quand le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés
Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés,
Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés.

Ce père nourricier, ennemi des chloroses,
Éveille dans les champs les vers comme les roses ;
Il fait s'évaporer les soucis vers le ciel,
Et remplit les cerveaux et les ruches de miel.
C'est lui qui rajeunit les porteurs de béquilles
Et les rend gais et doux comme des jeunes filles,
Et commande aux moissons de croître et de mûrir
Dans le cœur immortel qui toujours veut fleurir !

Quand, ainsi qu'un poète, il descend dans les villes,
Il ennoblit le sort des choses les plus viles,
Et s'introduit en roi, sans bruit et sans valets,
Dans tous les hôpitaux et dans tous les palais.

Lost at my desk in this voluptuous skill
Through which I conjure up the spring at will,
Drawing another sun from my own heart,
Warming the mild air with my burning thought.

87

The Sun

Past run-down houses where the shutters hide
Furtive suburban lecheries inside,
When, with redoubled strength, the sun beats down
On cornfields and on roofs, country and town,
I train my verbal fencing skills alone
And stumble over words like paving stones,
Sniff lucky rhymes round corners, stub my toe
On verses that I dreamed up long ago.

This fostering sun, anaemia's bane, who knows
How best to fat the worm and feed the rose,
Dissolves our cares to vapour and sustains
The honey in our hives and in our brains;
He makes old codgers gentle, young and gay,
And crutchless cripples dance like girls at play;
Crops grow and ripen only through his power
In the immortal heart that longs to flower.

When, like a poet, he inspects the city,
He grants the meanest things new dignity;
A silent unescorted king, he passes
Through all the hospitals and palaces.

88

À une mendiante rousse

Blanche fille aux cheveux roux,
Dont la robe par ses trous
Laisse voir la pauvreté
Et la beauté,

Pour moi, poète chétif,
Ton jeune corps maladif,
Plein de taches de rousseur,
A sa douceur.

Tu portes plus galamment
Qu'une reine de roman
Ses cothurnes de velours
Tes sabots lourds.

Au lieu d'un haillon trop court,
Qu'un superbe habit de cour
Traîne à plis bruyants et longs
Sur tes talons ;

En place de bas troués,
Que pour les yeux des roués
Sur ta jambe un poignard d'or
Reluise encor ;

Que des nœuds mal attachés
Dévoilent pour nos péchés
Tes deux beaux seins, radieux
Comme des yeux ;

88

To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl

A white-skinned girl with flame-red hair,
Holes in the tattered dress you wear
Bear witness to your poverty
And beauty.

For me, poor poet as I am,
Your sickly body has its charm,
And those brown freckles everywhere
Make you more fair.

You wear your heavy clogs with grace
Denied to fabled queens who paced
With velvet buskins on the stages
Of bygone ages.

Instead of this torn skimpy skirt,
A gown expressly made at court
Should swing its silky rustling pleats
Down to your feet;

Instead of stockings full of holes
A dagger with a hilt of gold
Should dazzle, hanging on your thigh,
The ogler's eye;

Let clasps and ribbons loosely tied,
To make us sin, show what divides
Two shining breasts whose radiance
Is like your glance;

Que pour te déshabiller
Tes bras se fassent prier
Et chassent à coups mutins
Les doigts lutins,

Perles de la plus belle eau,
Sonnets de maître Belleau
Par tes galants mis aux fers
Sans cesse offerts,

Valetaille de rimeurs
Te dédiant leurs primeurs
Et contemplant ton soulier
Sous l'escalier,

Maint page épris du hasard,
Maint seigneur et maint Ronsard
Épieraient pour le déduit
Ton frais réduit !

Tu compterais dans tes lits
Plus de baisers que de lis
Et rangerais sous tes lois
Plus d'un Valois !

— Cependant tu vas gueusant
Quelque vieux débris gisant
Au seuil de quelque Véfour
De carrefour ;

Tu vas lorgnant en dessous
Des bijoux de vingt-neuf sous
Dont je ne puis, oh ! pardon !
Te faire don.

As for undressing, let your arms
Be ready to defend your charms
From fingers that would be so rude
As to intrude.

You must resist a constant flow
Of sonnets copied from Belleau,
Fine pearls from lovers you enchain
Who plead in vain;

While rhymesters dedicate to you
Their first lame verses when they view
Your cast-off slipper lying there
Under the stair.

Pages who trust their lucky star,
Bold lords and budding young Ronsards
Would stoop to spying for one look
At your fresh nook.

Some royal lilies for your bed?
You'd count love's kisses there instead,
Although a Valois prince or two
Could fall for you.

– Meanwhile you beg from street to street,
Hoping to cadge a bite to eat,
Leftovers at some café door –
Not quite Véfour.

You gaze with longing in a shop
Where some cheap trinket made you stop;
Alas, I don't have twenty sous
To spend for you.

Va donc, sans autre ornement,
Parfum, perles, diamant,
Que ta maigre nudité,
Ô ma beauté!

89

Le Cygne

À Victor Hugo

I

Andromaque, je pense à vous ! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,
Ce Simois menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fécondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.
Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas ! que le cœur d'un mortel) ;

Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,
Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts,
Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des flaques,
Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.

Là s'étalait jadis une ménagerie ;
Là je vis, un matin, à l'heure où sous les cieux
Froids et clairs le Travail s'éveille, où la voirie
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l'air silencieux,

Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage,
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec

Go, then, upon your way, dear girl,
And wear no diamond or pearl,
No ornament but your gaunt nakedness
For loveliness.

89

The Swan

For Victor Hugo

I

Andromache, I think of you! That rivulet,
A poor sad mirror where in bygone years
Shone the vast majesty of your widowed grief,
That fake Simoeis swollen by your tears

Quickened my fertile memory as I walked
Through the new Place du Carrousel. I thought:
Old Paris is no more (a city's form, alas,
Changes more swiftly than a mortal heart);

Only my mind's eye sees a camp of shacks,
Heaps of rough columns, capitals, stone blocks
Stained green by puddles, straggling tufts of grass;
And shopfronts glittering with bric-a-brac.

There a menagerie once sprawled, and there
One morning early when, beneath the clear
Cold heavens, Labour wakes and sweepers raise
Dark whirlwinds in the silent air, I saw

A swan that had escaped its cage and now
Dragged his white feathers on the dirty road,
Scuffing his webbed feet on the paving stones.
Near a dry ditch, opening his beak, the bird

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,
Et disait, le cœur plein de son beau lac natal :
« Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu ? quand tonneras-tu, foudre ? »
Je vois ce malheureux, mythe étrange et fatal,

Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide,
Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu,
Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide,
Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu !

II

Paris change ! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
N'a bougé ! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m'opprime :
Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous,
Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime,
Et rongé d'un désir sans trêve ! et puis à vous,

Andromaque, des bras d'un grand époux tombée,
Vil bétail, sous la main du superbe Pyrrhus,
Après d'un tombeau vide en extase courbée ;
Veuve d'Hector, hélas ! et femme d'Hélénus !

Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phtisique,
Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l'œil hagard,
Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique
Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard ;

À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve
Jamais, jamais ! à ceux qui s'abreuvent de pleurs
Et têtent la Douleur comme une bonne louve !
Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs !

Flapped frantic wings in the dust; and in his heart,
Still yearning for his native lake, exclaimed:
“Water, when will you rain? Thunder, when roar?”
This hapless creature, mythical and doomed,

I see him sometimes like the man in Ovid,
Stretching his writhing neck and hungry head
Towards the cruel sky’s ironic blue,
As if he sent his protest up to God!

II

Paris is changing! But in my dark mood
Nothing has changed. New houses, scaffolding, stone blocks,
Old suburbs, all turn allegorical:
And my memories are heavier than rocks.

So, at the Louvre, an image burdens me:
I think of my great flapping swan and how
All exiles are ridiculous and sublime,
Gnawed by incessant longing. Then I think of you,

Andromache, from your great husband’s arms
Fallen, a chattel, into the hands of Pyrrhus,
Bending in ecstasy over an empty tomb,
Widow, alas, of Hector, wife of Helenus!

I think of the Negress, thin and consumptive,
Trudging through mud, with haggard eyes that beg
For palm trees left in splendid Africa,
Hidden behind a massive wall of fog;

Of those who lose what can’t be found again,
Never, O never! Those who drink salt tears,
Whom Sorrow suckles like a good she-wolf;
Of half-starved orphans withering like flowers.

Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile
Un vieux Souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor !
Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île,
Aux captifs, aux vaincus !... à bien d'autres encor !

90

Les Sept Vieillards

À Victor Hugo

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant !
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.

Un matin, cependant que dans la triste rue
Les maisons, dont la brume allongeait la hauteur,
Simulaient les deux quais d'une rivière accrue,
Et que, décor semblable à l'âme de l'acteur,

Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace,
Je suivais, roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros
Et discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse,
Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombereaux.

Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,
Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,
Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,

M'apparut. On eût dit sa prune trempée
Dans le fiel ; son regard aiguisait les frimas,
Et sa barbe à longs poils, roide comme une épée,
Se projetait, pareille à celle de Judas.

Thus in the forest where my mind seeks exile
A distant memory winds its full-breathed horn;
I think of castaway sailors on an island,
Of captives, the defeated... and of many, many more.

90

The Seven Old Men

For Victor Hugo

The teeming city, city that swarms with dreams,
Where daylight ghosts accost the passer-by!
Deep in the narrow veins of this colossus,
Throughout there flows the sap of mystery.

One morning when the mist made houses rise
Above the dreary street and seem as tall
As the embankments of a swollen stream,
And when (a stage set like the actor's soul)

The air was dense with dirty yellow fog,
Steeling my nerves to play a hero's part
And urging my already weary soul,
I crossed the suburb shaken by rumbling carts.

All of a sudden an old man whose yellow
Rags had the colour of the rainy sky,
And who would have received a shower of alms
But for the evil glitter in his eye,

Appeared to me. You would have said his eyes
Were steeped in gall: the chill in his regard
Sharpened the frost, and his long Judas beard
Came jutting stiffly out, straight as a sword.

Il n'était pas voûté, mais cassé, son échine
Faisant avec sa jambe un parfait angle droit,
Si bien que son bâton, parachevant sa mine,
Lui donnait la tournure et le pas maladroit

D'un quadrupède infirme ou d'un juif à trois pattes.
Dans la neige et la boue il allait s'empêtrant,
Comme s'il écrasait des morts sous ses savates,
Hostile à l'univers plutôt qu'indifférent.

Son pareil le suivait : barbe, œil, dos, bâton, loques,
Nul trait ne distinguait, du même enfer venu,
Ce jumeau centenaire, et ces spectres baroques
Marchaient du même pas vers un but inconnu.

À quel complot infâme étais-je donc en butte,
Ou quel méchant hasard ainsi m'humiliait ?
Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute,
Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait !

Que celui-là qui rit de mon inquiétude,
Et qui n'est pas saisi d'un frisson fraternel,
Songe bien que malgré tant de décrépitude
Ces sept monstres hideux avaient l'air éternel !

Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième,
Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal,
Dégoutant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même ?
— Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal.

Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
Je rentrai, je fermai ma porte, épouvanté,
Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité !

He was not bent, but broken, for his leg
Formed an exact right angle with his spine,
So that his stick, to finish off the picture,
Gave him the ugly shape and awkward mien

Of a sick quadruped or three-legged Jew.
He trudged through snow and mud as if he meant
To trample on the dead with his old boots,
Hating the world, not just indifferent.

His double followed: beard, back, eye, stick, rags,
An ancient twin who came from the same hell;
This ghostly pair, monstrous, baroque, went on
Plodding in step towards an unknown goal.

What evil plot made me its victim thus,
Or what ill fortune humbled all my pride?
For by the minute seven times I counted
This sinister old man, self-multiplied.

Let those who feel no sharp fraternal shudder
And laugh at my unease reflect that there,
For all their rotting age, the hideous seven
Had nonetheless an everlasting air!

Could I have lived if I had seen the eighth,
Foul Phoenix, son and father of himself,
Ruthless, ironic, deadly twin? – But I
Had turned my back on that cortege from Hell.

Stalled like a drunkard seeing double, I came
Back home aghast and shut the door behind me,
Baffled and sick, with feverish troubled mind,
Plagued by this puzzle, this absurdity!

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre ;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords !

91

Les Petites Vieilles

À Victor Hugo

I

Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales,
Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,
Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,
Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants.

Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes,
Éponine ou Laïs ! Monstres brisés, bossus
Ou tordus, aimons-les ! ce sont encor des âmes.
Sous des jupons troués et sous de froids tissus

Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques,
Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus,
Et serrant sur leur flanc, ainsi que des reliques,
Un petit sac brodé de fleurs ou de rébus ;

Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes ;
Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés,
Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnettes
Où se pend un Démon sans pitié ! Tout cassés

Qu'ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille,
Luisants comme ces trous où l'eau dort dans la nuit ;
Ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille
Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit.

Vainly my reason sought to grasp the helm,
Its efforts mocked and routed by the storm,
And my soul danced and danced, a mastless hulk
Upon a monstrous sea without a shore!

91

The Little Old Women

For Victor Hugo

I

In sinuous folds of the old capitals,
Where even horror steals a magic gleam,
Slave to dark moods, I spy upon these strange
Creatures who blend decrepitude and charm.

These dislocated wrecks were women once,
Laïs or Éponine! Monsters twisted down,
Hunchbacked and bent, let's love them! they have souls.
Under their tattered skirts and chilly gowns,

Scourged by malignant winds, they creep along,
As every clattering omnibus makes them cower,
Clutching, like holy relics, little handbags,
Embroidered with a rebus or a flower;

They jog, for all the world like marionettes,
Or drag themselves, like animals in pain;
Dance with no wish to dance, poor little bells
Rung by some cruel demon! Broken down

The way they are, their eyes still pierce like drills,
Shining like puddle water in the night;
They have the heavenly eyes of little girls
Who laugh in wonder at whatever's bright.

— Avez-vous observé que maints cercueils de vieilles
Sont presque aussi petits que celui d'un enfant ?
La Mort savante met dans ces bières pareilles
Un symbole d'un goût bizarre et captivant,

Et lorsque j'entrevois un fantôme débile
Traversant de Paris le fourmillant tableau,
Il me semble toujours que cet être fragile
S'en va tout doucement vers un nouveau berceau ;

À moins que, méditant sur la géométrie,
Je ne cherche, à l'aspect de ces membres discords,
Combien de fois il faut que l'ouvrier varie
La forme de la boîte où l'on met tous ces corps.

— Ces yeux sont des puits faits d'un million de larmes,
Des creusets qu'un métal refroidi pailleta...
Ces yeux mystérieux ont d'invincibles charmes
Pour celui que l'austère Infortune allaita !

II

De Frascati défunt Vestale enamourée ;
Prêtresse de Thalie, hélas ! dont le souffleur
Enterré sait le nom ; célèbre évaporée
Que Tivoli jadis ombragea dans sa fleur,

Toutes m'enivrent ! mais parmi ces êtres frêles
Il en est qui, faisant de la douleur un miel,
Ont dit au Dévouement qui leur prêtait ses ailes :
Hippogriffe puissant, mène-moi jusqu'au ciel !

L'une, par sa patrie au malheur exercée,
L'autre, que son époux surchargea de douleurs,
L'autre, par son enfant Madone transpercée,
Toutes auraient pu faire un fleuve avec leurs pleurs !

– Have you observed that coffins of old women
Are often small, as if they held a child?
Ingenious Death has placed in this a symbol
That marks a weird and captivating style,

And when, amid the swarming scene of Paris,
I glimpse some passing phantom, old and feeble,
It always strikes me that this fragile soul
Is going gently to another cradle;

Unless, on seeing these distorted limbs,
My mind turns geometrical; then I think
How often workmen need to change the shape
Of boxes that they put those bodies in.

– Those eyes are wells of tears, or crucibles
Bright-spangled when the cooling ore was cast...
Mysterious eyes that have compelling charms
For one who suckled stern Misfortune's breast!

II

Vestal of love who used to haunt Frascati's;
Priestess of Thalia, alas, whose name
Some buried prompter knows; a faded glory
Whom Tivoli once sheltered in her prime,

They all entrance me! Yet among these frail creatures
Are some who, making honey out of grief,
Have told Self-Sacrifice who lent them wings:
Take me to heaven, mighty Hippogriff!

One schooled to misery by her fatherland,
And one whose husband proved too much to bear,
One a Madonna pierced by her own child,
Each could have made a river with her tears.

III

Ah ! que j'en ai suivi de ces petites vieilles !
Une, entre autres, à l'heure où le soleil tombant
Ensanglante le ciel de blessures vermeilles,
Pensive, s'asseyait à l'écart sur un banc,

Pour entendre un de ces concerts, riches de cuivre,
Dont les soldats parfois inondent nos jardins,
Et qui, dans ces soirs d'or où l'on se sent revivre,
Versent quelque héroïsme au cœur des citadins.

Celle-là, droite encor, fière et sentant la règle,
Humait avidement ce chant vif et guerrier ;
Son œil parfois s'ouvrait comme l'œil d'un vieil aigle ;
Son front de marbre avait l'air fait pour le laurier !

IV

Telles vous cheminez, stoïques et sans plaintes,
À travers le chaos des vivantes cités,
Mères au cœur saignant, courtisanes ou saintes,
Dont autrefois les noms par tous étaient cités.

Vous qui fûtes la grâce ou qui fûtes la gloire,
Nul ne vous reconnaît ! un ivrogne incivil
Vous insulte en passant d'un amour dérisoire ;
Sur vos talons gambade un enfant lâche et vil.

Honteuses d'exister, ombres ratatinées,
Peureuses, le dos bas, vous côtoyez les murs ;
Et nul ne vous salue, étranges destinées !
Débris d'humanité pour l'éternité mûrs !

III

How many of those women have I stalked!
One, among others, when the setting sun
Incarnadines the sky with scarlet wounds,
Pensive, would settle on a bench alone

To listen to a military band
Some golden evening when sound floods the park,
When souls revive and the rich brass awakes
Heroic stirrings in civilian hearts.

Then she, still upright, prompt and proud to serve,
Inhaled that song, its brisk and warlike tone;
An aged eagle's glance gleamed in her eye;
Her marble brow deserved the laurel crown!

IV

So, through the chaos of our living cities,
Stoic and uncomplaining, you pass on,
Mothers with bleeding hearts, harlots or saints,
Whose names were once the talk of everyone.

You who were grace itself, you who were glory,
Nobody knows you now. Some drunkard's mock
Advances turn the words of love to insult;
A sniggering child gambols behind your back.

Ashamed to be alive, bent tattered shades,
Hugging the wall in fear as you go by,
Nobody greets you, strange ill-fated souls,
Human debris, ripe for eternity.

Mais moi, moi qui de loin tendrement vous surveille,
L'œil inquiet, fixé sur vos pas incertains,
Tout comme si j'étais votre père, ô merveille !
Je goûte à votre insu des plaisirs clandestins :

Je vois s'épanouir vos passions novices ;
Sombres ou lumineux, je vis vos jours perdus ;
Mon cœur multiplié jouit de tous vos vices !
Mon âme resplendit de toutes vos vertus !

Ruines ! ma famille ! ô cerveaux congénères !
Je vous fais chaque soir un solennel adieu !
Où serez-vous demain, Èves octogénaires,
Sur qui pèse la griffe effroyable de Dieu ?

92

Les Aveugles

Contemple-les, mon âme ; ils sont vraiment affreux !
Pareils aux mannequins ; vaguement ridicules ;
Terribles, singuliers comme les somnambules ;
Dardant on ne sait où leurs globes ténébreux.

Leurs yeux, d'où la divine étincelle est partie,
Comme s'ils regardaient au loin, restent levés
Au ciel ; on ne les voit jamais vers les pavés
Pencher rêveusement leur tête appesantie.

Ils traversent ainsi le noir illimité,
Ce frère du silence éternel. Ô cité !
Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris et beugles,

Éprise du plaisir jusqu'à l'atrocité,
Vois ! je me traîne aussi ! mais, plus qu'eux hébété,
Je dis : Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles ?

But I, who watch you tenderly from afar,
Marking your stumbling steps with anxious eyes,
As if I were your father (marvellous thought!),
Unknown to you, I taste clandestine joys:

I see your novice passions blossoming,
Your dark or bright lost days I live again;
My plural heart enjoys all of your vices,
And in my soul all of your virtues shine.

Ruins, my family, kindred minds, receive
My grave farewell each night. Tomorrow, where
Shall you be found, octogenarian Eves,
On whom there weighs God's clutch and terrible claw?

92

The Blind

Consider them, my soul, that ghastly air,
Like tailor's dummies, half-ridiculous,
Sleepwalkers, alien and ominous,
Darting their sightless orbs around; but where?

Their eyes, in which the spark divine is dead,
Are raised towards the sky as if they scanned
Something far-off; one never sees them bend
Towards the ground a heavy dreaming head.

So they traverse the never-ending dark,
Brother of infinite silence. O great city,
Singing and laughing, baying as you seek

Pleasures that verge on the atrocious, look!
I sleepwalk too and ask, more dazed than they:
What do these blind men look for in the sky?

93

À une passante

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet ;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son œil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit! — Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! *jamais* peut-être !
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais !

94

Le Squelette laboureur

I

Dans les planches d'anatomie
Qui traînent sur ces quais poudreux
Où maint livre cadavéreux
Dort comme une antique momie,

Dessins auxquels la gravité
Et le savoir d'un vieil artiste,
Bien que le sujet en soit triste,
Ont communiqué la Beauté,

93

To a Woman Passing By

Around me roared the bustling deafening street.
I saw a tall and slender woman pass,
In mourning, yet majestic in distress,
Lifting and swaying the hem of her skirt;

A supple stately motion that revealed
A sculpted leg. I drank, like one insane,
From that pale eye that nursed a hurricane,
The sweetness that enchants, the joy that kills.

A flash... and then the night! – Transient beauty
Whose glance renews me, must we then be severed
Until I see you in eternity?

Elsewhere, far-off, too late or maybe never!
Your path as dark to me as mine to you
– You whom I might have loved, as you well knew!

94

Digging Skeletons

I

Sleeping like mummies in the crates
Of dusty volumes by the Seine,
Among the many corpselike books
Are sets of anatomical plates,

Fine drawings where the gravity
And skill that those old artists had,
Although the subject may be sad,
Communicate a certain beauty;

On voit, ce qui rend plus complètes
Ces mystérieuses horreurs,
Bêchant comme des laboureurs,
Des Écorchés et des Squelettes.

II

De ce terrain que vous fouillez,
Manants résignés et funèbres,
De tout l'effort de vos vertèbres,
Ou de vos muscles dépouillés,

Dites, quelle moisson étrange,
Forçats arrachés au charnier,
Tirez-vous, et de quel fermier
Avez-vous à remplir la grange ?

Voulez-vous (d'un destin trop dur
Épouvantable et clair emblème !)
Montrer que dans la fosse même
Le sommeil promis n'est pas sûr ;

Qu'envers nous le Néant est traître ;
Que tout, même la Mort, nous ment,
Et que sempiternellement,
Hélas ! il nous faudra peut-être

Dans quelque pays inconnu
Écorcher la terre revêche
Et pousser une lourde bêche
Sous notre pied sanglant et nu ?

One sees the strange design that yields
Its full of mystery and fear:
Flayed frame and skeleton appear
As farmhands digging in a field.

II

Dull landless labourers, who thus
Toil without pausing to complain,
Your unfleshed muscles under strain,
Your backbone aching with the stress,

Say what strange harvest will be born
From your hard labour in this earth;
What graveyard gave you up from death
To fill what ghostly farmer's barn?

Or do you want to make it clear,
As frightful emblems of our fate,
That even though the grave awaits,
The promised sleep is less than sure;

That even Nothingness betrays us,
That Death itself will prove a liar,
And that forever and forever
In lands unknown, perhaps, we must

Revive to flay the earth and split
The stubborn soil with trenchant blade,
Pushing a heavy iron spade
Under our bleeding, naked foot?

95

Le Crépuscule du soir

Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel ;
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup ; le ciel
Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve,
Et l'homme impatient se change en bête fauve.

Ô soir, aimable soir, désiré par celui
Dont les bras, sans mentir, peuvent dire : Aujourd'hui
Nous avons travaillé ! — C'est le soir qui soulage
Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage,
Le savant obstiné dont le front s'alourdit,
Et l'ouvrier courbé qui regagne son lit.
Cependant des démons malsains dans l'atmosphère
S'éveillent lourdement, comme des gens d'affaire,
Et cognent en volant les volets et l'auvent.
À travers les lueurs que tourmente le vent
La Prostitution s'allume dans les rues ;
Comme une fourmilière elle ouvre ses issues ;
Partout elle se fraye un occulte chemin,
Ainsi que l'ennemi qui tente un coup de main ;
Elle remue au sein de la cité de fange
Comme un ver qui dérobe à l'Homme ce qu'il mange.
On entend çà et là les cuisines siffler,
Les théâtres glapir, les orchestres ronfler ;
Les tables d'hôte, dont le jeu fait les délices,
S'emplissent de catins et d'escrocs, leurs complices,
Et les voleurs, qui n'ont ni trêve ni merci,
Vont bientôt commencer leur travail, eux aussi,
Et forcer doucement les portes et les caisses
Pour vivre quelques jours et vêtir leurs maîtresses.

Recueille-toi, mon âme, en ce grave moment,
Et ferme ton oreille à ce rugissement.

95

Dusk

Evening, the pleasant hour that criminals love,
Steals in with wolfish steps; the sky above,
Like a vast alcove, closes up the day,
And man becomes a ravening beast of prey.

Evening, sweet evening, longed for by the man
Whose arms can truly say: Today we've done
Our work! This evening surely brings relief
To minds devoured by a savage grief,
The stubborn scholar with his nodding head,
The back-bent workman plodding home to bed.
Meanwhile foul demons wake and throng the air,
Heavy, as if they had some business there,
Bump into shutters, flutter against blinds.
Under the gas lamps flickering in the wind
Dame Prostitution flares and opens wide
All issues from the ant heap where she hides,
For everywhere she treads a secret track,
As if she planned some underground attack;
She burrows through the city's slime and mud,
A worm who steals the poor man's daily bread.
Kitchens assault the ear with hissing steam,
Bands blare and tawdry theatres screech and scream;
In dives and dens the gaming tables wait
To fill with sluts and swindlers and their mates,
While burglars who are rarely known to shirk
Get ready to pursue their heartless work
Of cracking safes and picking padlocked doors
To pay a good weekend and dress their whores.

At this grave time, my soul, retire within
And shut your ears against the infernal din.

C'est l'heure où les douleurs des malades s'aigrissent !
La sombre Nuit les prend à la gorge ; ils finissent
Leur destinée et vont vers le gouffre commun ;
L'hôpital se remplit de leurs soupirs. — Plus d'un
Ne viendra plus chercher la soupe parfumée,
Au coin du feu, le soir, auprès d'une âme aimée.

Encore la plupart n'ont-ils jamais connu
La douceur du foyer et n'ont jamais vécu !

96

Le Jeu

Dans des fauteuils fanés des courtisanes vieilles,
Pâles, le sourcil peint, l'œil câlin et fatal,
Minaudant, et faisant de leurs maigres oreilles
Tomber un cliquetis de pierre et de métal ;

Autour des verts tapis des visages sans lèvre,
Des lèvres sans couleur, des mâchoires sans dent,
Et des doigts convulsés d'une infernale fièvre,
Fouillant la poche vide ou le sein palpitant ;

Sous de sales plafonds un rang de pâles lustres
Et d'énormes quinquets projetant leurs lueurs
Sur des fronts ténébreux de poètes illustres
Qui viennent gaspiller leurs sanglantes sueurs ;

Voilà le noir tableau qu'en un rêve nocturne
Je vis se dérouler sous mon œil clairvoyant.
Moi-même, dans un coin de l'antre taciturne,
Je me vis accoudé, froid, muet, enviant,

This is the hour when sick men's pains grow worse,
Night takes them by the throat; they've run their course
And take their way towards the common pit,
Gasping in hospitals. Many will not sit
Ever again beside the fire and spend
The time with fragrant soup and one loved friend.

But most of them have never known the love
A hearth can offer, and have never lived.

96

Gambling

In shabby armchairs pale old courtesans,
With painted eyes, a dead enticing look,
Make stone or metal earrings clink and jingle
With each coquettish nod or simpering shake;

Around the green cloth faces without lips,
Lips without any colour, toothless jaws,
And feverish fingers searching empty pockets
Or panting breasts to fund one wager more;

Under the dirty ceiling chandeliers
And oil lamps cast a fitful lurid light
Upon the furrowed brows of famous poets
Who gather here to waste their bloody sweat.

In my prophetic dream, this was the scene,
The gloomy tableau that I saw unroll:
I saw myself, mute, in that silent den,
Cold, huddled up and envying them all,

Enviant de ces gens la passion tenace,
De ces vieilles putains la funèbre gaieté,
Et tous gaillardement trafiquant à ma face,
L'un de son vieil honneur, l'autre de sa beauté!

Et mon cœur s'effraya d'envier maint pauvre homme
Courant avec ferveur à l'abîme béant,
Et qui, soûl de son sang, préférerait en somme
La douleur à la mort et l'enfer au néant!

97

Danse macabre

À Ernest Christophe

Fière, autant qu'un vivant, de sa noble stature,
Avec son gros bouquet, son mouchoir et ses gants,
Elle a la nonchalance et la désinvolture
D'une coquette maigre aux airs extravagants.

Vit-on jamais au bal une taille plus mince ?
Sa robe exagérée, en sa royale ampleur,
S'écroule abondamment sur un pied sec que pince
Un soulier pomponné, joli comme une fleur.

La ruche qui se joue au bord des clavicules,
Comme un ruisseau lascif qui se frotte au rocher,
Défend pudiquement des lazzi ridicules
Les funèbres appas qu'elle tient à cacher.

Ses yeux profonds sont faits de vide et de ténèbres,
Et son crâne, de fleurs artistement coiffé,
Oscille mollement sur ses frêles vertèbres,
Ô charme d'un néant follement attifé!

Yes, envying those men's tenacious passion,
The dreadful gaiety of those old whores,
All bravely bartering before my face
Honour forsworn or beauty's long-lost cause!

Fear seized my heart that I should envy thus
Such wretched folk who rush to the abyss,
Who, drunk with their own blood, prefer, all told,
Suffering to death, and Hell to nothingness.

97

The Dance of Death

For Ernest Christophe

Proud of her height as if she were alive,
With handkerchief and gloves and huge bouquet,
She puts on nonchalant and easy airs,
Excessive in a gaunt coquettish way.

What ball has ever seen so slim a waist?
Her sumptuous gown in regal fulness flows
Down to a small dry foot, pinched in a shoe
Sporting a pompon, pretty as a rose.

The lace that plays around her collarbone,
Like a lascivious stream that rubs a rock,
Defends the charms that modesty would hide
Against the gibes of those who come to mock.

Her deepset eyes are sockets, void and dark,
Her skull, adorned with flowers, sways slack and loose,
Barely supported by weak vertebrae.
O charm of gay and gaudy nothingness!

Aucuns t'appelleront une caricature,
Qui ne comprennent pas, amants ivres de chair,
L'élégance sans nom de l'humaine armature.
Tu réponds, grand squelette, à mon goût le plus cher !

Viens-tu troubler, avec ta puissante grimace,
La fête de la Vie ? ou quelque vieux désir,
Éperonnant encor ta vivante carcasse,
Te pousse-t-il, crédule, au sabbat du Plaisir ?

Au chant des violons, aux flammes des bougies,
Espères-tu chasser ton cauchemar moqueur,
Et viens-tu demander au torrent des orgies
De rafraîchir l'enfer allumé dans ton cœur ?

Inépuisable puits de sottise et de fautes !
De l'antique douleur éternel alambic !
À travers le treillis recourbé de tes côtes
Je vois, errant encor, l'insatiable aspic.

Pour dire vrai, je crains que ta coquetterie
Ne trouve pas un prix digne de ses efforts ;
Qui, de ces cœurs mortels, entend la raillerie ?
Les charmes de l'horreur n'enivrent que les forts !

Le gouffre de tes yeux, plein d'horribles pensées,
Exhale le vertige, et les danseurs prudents
Ne contempleront pas sans d'amères nausées
Le sourire éternel de tes trente-deux dents.

Pourtant, qui n'a serré dans ses bras un squelette,
Et qui ne s'est nourri des choses du tombeau ?
Qu'importe le parfum, l'habit ou la toilette ?
Qui fait le dégoûté montre qu'il se croit beau.

Some men will call you a caricature;
They fail to grasp, since flesh excites their lust,
The human framework's unsung elegance.
Great skeleton, you suit my special taste.

With your fierce grimace, do you come to trouble
The Feast of Life, or does some old desire
Still spur your carcass to a Sabbath dance,
As if it could rekindle ancient fire?

You hope that violins and flaming torches
Will force the mocking nightmare to depart?
And do you ask an orgiastic flood
To cool the hell that's burning in your heart?

Unplumbed unfailing well of faults and folly,
Alembic of our old undying ills,
Around the trellis of your ribs I see
The all-consuming viper winding still.

Truly, I fear your coquetry will not
Receive the prize it struggled for so long;
Few human hearts appreciate the joke:
The charms of horror only charm the strong.

Your eyes' dark gulf, swarming with horrid thoughts,
Has dizzying depths; and prudent dancers shun
Your smile, a bitter stomach-churning sight,
Thirty-two teeth fixed in a constant grin.

Yet who has not embraced a skeleton,
Or fed upon the tomb's funereal dust?
Perfume or fancy clothes, who cares? It is
The self-admiring fop who feigns disgust.

Bayadère sans nez, irrésistible gouge,
Dis donc à ces danseurs qui font les offusqués :
« Fiers mignons, malgré l'art des poudres et du rouge,
Vous sentez tous la mort ! Ô squelettes musqués,

Antinoüs flétris, dandys à face glabre,
Cadavres vernissés, lovelaces chenus,
Le branle universel de la danse macabre
Vous entraîne en des lieux qui ne sont pas connus !

Des quais froids de la Seine aux bords brûlants du Gange,
Le troupeau mortel saute et se pâme, sans voir
Dans un trou du plafond la trompette de l'Ange
Sinistrement béante ainsi qu'un tromblon noir.

En tout climat, sous tout soleil, la Mort t'admire
En tes contorsions, risible Humanité,
Et souvent, comme toi, se parfumant de myrrhe,
Mêle son ironie à ton insanité ! »

98

L'Amour du mensonge

Quand je te vois passer, ô ma chère indolente,
Au chant des instruments qui se brise au plafond
Suspendant ton allure harmonieuse et lente,
Et promenant l'ennui de ton regard profond ;

Quand je contemple, aux feux du gaz qui le colore,
Ton front pâle, embelli par un morbide attrait,
Où les torches du soir allument une aurore,
Et tes yeux attirants comme ceux d'un portrait,

Enchanting hooker, noseless bayadere,
Go tell those dancers who seem so offended:
“Darlings, however much you paint and powder,
You have a stench of death that can’t be mended!

O gilded corpses, scented skeletons,
Antinoüs and Lovelace, skin and bone,
The swirling universal Dance of Death,
Is sweeping you away to lands unknown.

From Seine’s cold quays to Ganges’ burning banks,
The mortal herd goes revelling, and thus
Sees not the Angel’s trumpet pierce the ceiling,
Its black mouth gaping like a blunderbuss.

All the world over Death admires your
Comic contortions, O Humanity,
And perfuming herself, like you, with myrrh,
Blends irony with your insanity.”

98

The Love of Delusion

Sweet indolent one, when broken chords descend
To interrupt the lingering harmony
As you walk slowly past, and when I see
The look that shows the depth of your ennui;

When I see gaslight bring a glow to your
Pale brow, where evening torches light a dawn,
That morbid charm, and your compelling eyes
Like those a mystic artist might have drawn,

Je me dis : Qu'elle est belle ! et bizarrement fraîche !
Le souvenir massif, royale et lourde tour,
La couronne, et son cœur, meurtri comme une pêche,
Est mûr, comme son corps, pour le savant amour.

Es-tu le fruit d'automne aux saveurs souveraines ?
Es-tu vase funèbre attendant quelques pleurs,
Parfum qui fait rêver aux oasis lointaines,
Oreiller caressant, ou corbeille de fleurs ?

Je sais qu'il est des yeux, des plus mélancoliques,
Qui ne recèlent point de secrets précieux ;
Beaux écrins sans bijoux, médaillons sans reliques,
Plus vides, plus profonds que vous-mêmes, ô Cieux !

Mais ne suffit-il pas que tu sois l'apparence,
Pour réjouir un cœur qui fuit la vérité ?
Qu'importe ta bêtise ou ton indifférence ?
Masque ou décor, salut ! J'adore ta beauté.

99

Je n'ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville,
Notre blanche maison, petite mais tranquille ;
Sa Pomone de plâtre et sa vieille Vénus
Dans un bosquet chétif cachant leurs membres nus,
Et le soleil, le soir, ruisselant et superbe,
Qui, derrière la vitre où se brisait sa gerbe,
Semblait, grand œil ouvert dans le ciel curieux,
Contempler nos dîners longs et silencieux,
Répandant largement ses beaux reflets de cierge
Sur la nappe frugale et les rideaux de serge.

I think: How lovely and how strangely fresh!
Massive remembrance, towering and grave,
Has crowned her head; her heart, bruised like a peach,
Is, like her body, ripe for knowing love.

Are you the fruit of autumn's sovereign savours?
Are you an urn awaiting tearful showers?
A perfume that recalls some far oasis,
A sensual pillow or a bed of flowers?

I know that there are eyes, most melancholy,
In which no precious secrets have been hidden,
Shrines without relics, caskets without jewels,
Deeper and emptier than yourself, O Heaven!

But is it not enough that you, mere semblance,
Delight a heart that loves the truth no more?
What matters your indifference or folly?
Hail mask or show! Your beauty I adore.

99

Our old white house, I have not forgotten it,
Not very far from town, and small but quiet;
Its modest grove in which a time-stained Venus
And plaster Pomona hid their nakedness;
The evening sun, superbly streaming down,
Scattering rays behind the window pane,
Seemed to observe, like an attentive eye,
Our lengthy silent suppers from on high,
Dappling like candles the sweet textures of
Serge curtain and the frugal tablecloth.

100

La servante au grand cœur dont vous étiez jalouse,
 Et qui dort son sommeil sous une humble pelouse,
 Nous devrions pourtant lui porter quelques fleurs.
 Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grandes douleurs,
 Et quand Octobre souffle, émondeur des vieux arbres,
 Son vent mélancolique à l'entour de leurs marbres,
 Certes, ils doivent trouver les vivants bien ingrats,
 À dormir, comme ils font, chaudement dans leurs draps,
 Tandis que, dévorés de noires songeries,
 Sans compagnon de lit, sans bonnes causeries,
 Vieux squelettes gelés travaillés par le ver,
 Ils sentent s'égoutter les neiges de l'hiver
 Et le siècle couler, sans qu'amis ni famille
 Remplacent les lambeaux qui pendent à leur grille.

Lorsque la bûche siffle et chante, si le soir,
 Calme, dans le fauteuil je la voyais s'asseoir,
 Si, par une nuit bleue et froide de décembre,
 Je la trouvais tapie en un coin de ma chambre,
 Grave, et venant du fond de son lit éternel
 Couvrir l'enfant grandi de son œil maternel,
 Que pourrais-je répondre à cette âme pieuse,
 Voyant tomber des pleurs de sa paupière creuse ?

101

Brumes et pluies

Ô fins d'automne, hivers, printemps trempés de boue,
 Endormeuses saisons ! je vous aime et vous loue
 D'envelopper ainsi mon cœur et mon cerveau
 D'un linceul vaporeux et d'un vague tombeau.

100

She made you jealous, the great-hearted nurse
 Who sleeps her last sleep here beneath this grass –
 We really ought to bring her a few flowers.
 The dead, yes, the poor dead, have their own sorrows;
 And when October winds bring branches down
 Howling among the tombs that lie around,
 Surely the living, sleeping warm in bed,
 Must seem ungrateful to the shivering dead;
 Consumed by dark imaginings, without
 A soul to share their sheets or have a chat,
 Worm-eaten skeletons, they feel the snow
 Drip down in winter, and the century flow,
 And still no friends or family renew
 The ragged wreaths that hang upon their tombs.

Suppose one evening I should see her there,
 Beside the crackling fire, in her chair,
 Or in the corner of my room at night
 Watching me through December's cold blue light,
 Grave risen spirit, come to brood with mild
 Maternal eye over the grown-up child:
 What could I answer to this pious soul
 Whose tears come falling from two hollow holes?

101

Mist and Rain

Late autumn, winter, and spring's mud-soaked days,
 Somnolent seasons that I love and praise,
 You wrap my heart and brain in a misty shroud
 And bury them in sepulchres of cloud.

Dans cette grande plaine où l'autan froid se joue,
Où par les longues nuits la girouette s'enroue,
Mon âme mieux qu'au temps du tiède renouveau
Ouvrira largement ses ailes de corbeau.

Rien n'est plus doux au cœur plein de choses funèbres,
Et sur qui dès longtemps descendent les frimas,
Ô blafardes saisons, reines de nos climats,

Que l'aspect permanent de vos pâles ténèbres,
— Si ce n'est, par un soir sans lune, deux à deux,
D'endormir la douleur sur un lit hasardeux.

102

Rêve parisien

À Constantin Guys

I

De ce terrible paysage,
Tel que jamais mortel n'en vit,
Ce matin encore l'image,
Vague et lointaine, me ravit.

Le sommeil est plein de miracles !
Par un caprice singulier,
J'avais banni de ces spectacles
Le végétal irrégulier,

Et, peintre fier de mon génie,
Je savourais dans mon tableau
L'enivrante monotonie
Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau.

On this great plain where winds blow keen and cold
And the hoarse weathercock grates all night, my soul
Rejects the warm renewal summer brings
And spreads more potently its raven wings.

Nothing is sweeter to the gloomy heart
So long enured to frost and chilling showers
Than your pale shadows, the unchanging sight

Of weather blankly and supremely ours
– Except some moonless night when we are led
To rest two griefs upon one random bed.

102

Parisian Dream

For Constantin Guys

I

The image of a landscape that
No mortal eye has ever seen,
Distant and vague and terrible,
Charmed me this morning yet again.

Sleep brings its store of miracles:
Upon a strange and sudden whim
I had banished from such scenes all trace
Of formless green and growing things;

Proud of my skill in painting, I
Savoured the way my work displayed
The ravishing monotony
That metal, stone and water made.

Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades,
C'était un palais infini,
Plein de bassins et de cascades
Tombant dans l'or mat ou bruni ;

Et des cataractes pesantes,
Comme des rideaux de cristal,
Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
À des murailles de métal.

Non d'arbres, mais de colonnades
Les étangs dormants s'entouraient,
Où de gigantesques naïades,
Comme des femmes, se miraient.

Des nappes d'eau s'épanchaient, bleues,
Entre des quais roses et verts,
Pendant des millions de lieues,
Vers les confins de l'univers ;

C'étaient des pierres inouïes
Et des flots magiques ; c'étaient
D'immenses glaces éblouies
Par tout ce qu'elles reflétaient !

Insouciantes et taciturnes,
Des Ganges, dans le firmament,
Versaient le trésor de leurs urnes
Dans des gouffres de diamant.

Architecte de mes féeries,
Je faisais, à ma volonté,
Sous un tunnel de pierreries
Passer un océan dompté ;

A maze of stairways and arcades,
A palace whose vast walls enfold
Numberless pools and clear cascades
Falling on rough or burnished gold;

The mightiest cataracts of all
Seemed hung upon the ramparts there
Like crystal screens on metal walls,
Shining, suspended in the air.

Not trees, but stately colonnades
Encircled every sleeping pool,
Where monumental nymphs surveyed
Their mirrored charms, as women do.

Between the green and rosy quays
Sheets of blue water took their course,
League upon league, as if towards
The limits of the universe;

And there were gems that lay beneath
The magic surface unsuspected,
That liquid mirror clearly dazzled
By everything that it reflected!

Like Ganges, cool and taciturn,
Great rivers in the heavens above
Poured down the treasure of their urns
Into the depths of diamond caves.

As architect of my fairyland,
Slave of no will except my own,
I tamed the sea and forced it through
A tunnel made of precious stones;

Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
Dans le rayon cristallisé.

Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
De soleil, même au bas du ciel,
Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel !

Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
Planait (terrible nouveauté !
Tout pour l'œil, rien pour les oreilles !)
Un silence d'éternité.

II

En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis,
Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme,
La pointe des soucis maudits ;

La pendule aux accents funèbres
Sonnait brutalement midi,
Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
Sur le triste monde engourdi.

And everything, even black itself,
Seemed polished, pure and shining bright;
The liquid had its glow enshrined
In a crystallized ray of light.

Indeed, there was no star, no glimmer
Or beam from a late low sun
To illuminate such great wonders
Whose fire was all their own.

Naught for the ear, all for the eye,
This was a terror new to me;
Over these moving marvels hovered
A silence of eternity.

II

I opened my ardent eyes and saw
How I lived in a wretched hole,
And felt the needle points of care
Re-entering my soul;

And the brutal chime of the clock
Struck sullen noon as it called
Upon the sky to pour its dark
On the sad and sluggish world.

103

Le Crépuscule du matin

La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes,
Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes.

C'était l'heure où l'essaim des rêves malfaisants
Tord sur leurs oreillers les bruns adolescents ;
Où, comme un œil sanglant qui palpite et qui bouge,
La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge ;
Où l'âme, sous le poids du corps revêche et lourd,
Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour.
Comme un visage en pleurs que les brises essuient,
L'air est plein du frisson des choses qui s'enfuient,
Et l'homme est las d'écrire et la femme d'aimer.

Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.
Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,
Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide ;
Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,
Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur leurs doigts.
C'était l'heure où parmi le froid et la lésine
S'aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine ;
Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux ;
Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,
Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices
Poussaient leur dernier râle en hoquets inégaux.
Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux,
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.

103

Dawn

The barrack square woke to the bugle's sound
And streetlamps flickered in the morning wind.

It was the hour when sick dreaming sets
Brown adolescents writhing in their beds;
When, like a nervous throbbing bloodshot eye,
The lamp inflicts a red stain on the day;
When soul and sullen body imitate
The war between the lamp and morning light;
When, like a tearful face dried by the wind,
The air is trembling with fleeting things,
And men are tired of writing, women of love.

From chimneys here and there smoke curls above.
Streetwalkers lie and slumber, stupefied,
With garish painted eyes, mouths open wide;
Old crones with wrinkled breasts blow on their fingers
And blow again to wake the cooling cinders.
It is the hour when cold and want constrain
Poor working women to give birth in pain;
Like blood-choked sobs in some consumptive breast
A cock crow lacerates the early mist;
Houses stay muffled in a sea of fog;
On narrow poorhouse beds the dying cough
Their lives away, their ragged breathing fails.
Now debauchees come home, exhausted by their toils.

Dawn, shivering in her dress of rose and green,
Makes her way slowly up the empty Seine,
While glum old Paris rubs his eyes and wakes,
Picks up his tools and trudges off to work.

LE VIN

104

L'Âme du vin

Un soir, l'âme du vin chantait dans les bouteilles :
« Homme, vers toi je pousse, ô cher déshérité,
Sous ma prison de verre et mes cires vermeilles,
Un chant plein de lumière et de fraternité !

Je sais combien il faut, sur la colline en flamme,
De peine, de sueur et de soleil cuisant
Pour engendrer ma vie et pour me donner l'âme ;
Mais je ne serai point ingrat ni malfaisant,

Car j'éprouve une joie immense quand je tombe
Dans le gosier d'un homme usé par ses travaux,
Et sa chaude poitrine est une douce tombe
Où je me plais bien mieux que dans mes froids caveaux.

Entends-tu retentir les refrains des dimanches
Et l'espoir qui gazouille en mon sein palpitant ?
Les coudes sur la table et retroussant tes manches,
Tu me glorifieras et tu seras content ;

J'allumerai les yeux de ta femme ravie ;
À ton fils je rendrai sa force et ses couleurs
Et serai pour ce frêle athlète de la vie
L'huile qui raffermir les muscles des lutteurs.

WINE

104

The Soul of Wine

The soul of wine once sang out of the bottle:
“O dispossessed mankind, my gift tonight,
Under imprisoning glass and crimson seal,
Will be a song of brotherhood and light.

I know how much it costs, the toil, the sweat,
On the hot hills, beneath a burning sun,
To give me life, instil my soul; I shall
Not harm you or forget what you have done,

For it's my joy to fill the throat of some
Old work-worn labourer who gulps me down;
His warm breast is a grave that pleases me
Better than chilly cellars underground.

Wait! Do you hear that Sunday song resound
The hope that warbles in my throbbing breast?
When, sleeves rolled up and elbows on the table,
You laud my name and find your happiness.

Your wife's enraptured eyes will share my fire;
And to your son, frail athlete of this life,
I shall give strength and colour, and become
The oil that hardens muscles for the strife.

En toi je tomberai, végétale ambroisie,
Grain précieux jeté par l'éternel Semeur,
Pour que de notre amour naisse la poésie
Qui jaillira vers Dieu comme une rare fleur ! »

105

Le Vin des chiffonniers

Souvent, à la clarté rouge d'un réverbère
Dont le vent bat la flamme et tourmente le verre,
Au cœur d'un vieux faubourg, labyrinthe fangeux
Où l'humanité grouille en ferments orageux,

On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête,
Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète,
Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets,
Épanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets.

Il prête des serments, dicte des lois sublimes,
Terrasse les méchants, relève les victimes,
Et sous le firmament comme un dais suspendu
S'enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu.

Oui, ces gens harcelés de chagrins de ménage,
Moulus par le travail et tourmentés par l'âge,
Éreintés et pliant sous un tas de débris,
Vomissement confus de l'énorme Paris,

Reviennent, parfumés d'une odeur de futailles,
Suivis de compagnons, blanchis dans les batailles,
Dont la moustache pend comme les vieux drapeaux.
Les bannières, les fleurs et les arcs triomphaux

And like ambrosia I shall fall in you,
A precious seed from the eternal Sower,
That poetry may blossom from our love,
And thrust its way to God like a rare flower.”

105

The Ragman's Wine

Often, beneath a streetlamp's reddish gleam,
When the wind shakes the glass and stirs the flame,
In some old suburb where the human flood
Seethes and ferments in labyrinths of mud,

You see a ragman stumbling into view,
Bumping against brick walls as poets do;
And heedless of how many narks attend,
He vaunts the glorious works that he intends.

He swears great oaths, dictates sublime decrees,
Casts down the wicked, grants their victims peace,
And, as if high in heaven upon a throne,
Delights to see such virtues as his own.

Yes, these poor folk, harassed by household cares,
Ground in the mill of toil, worn by the years,
Bent under piles of rubbish, jumbled scrap,
The dregs that monster Paris vomits up,

Return still redolent of keg or barrel,
With hoary veterans of many battles,
Whose whiskers droop like ancient faded banners.
Triumphal arches, flags and flowery honours

Se dressent devant eux, solennelle magie!
Et dans l'étourdissante et lumineuse orgie
Des clairons, du soleil, des cris et du tambour,
Ils apportent la gloire au peuple ivre d'amour!

C'est ainsi qu'à travers l'Humanité frivole
Le vin roule de l'or, éblouissant Pactole;
Par le gosier de l'homme il chante ses exploits
Et règne par ses dons ainsi que les vrais rois.

Pour noyer la rancœur et bercer l'indolence
De tous ces vieux maudits qui meurent en silence,
Dieu, touché de remords, avait fait le sommeil;
L'Homme ajouta le Vin, fils sacré du Soleil!

106

Le Vin de l'assassin

Ma femme est morte, je suis libre!
Je puis donc boire tout mon soûl.
Lorsque je rentrais sans un sou,
Ses cris me déchiraient la fibre.

Autant qu'un roi je suis heureux;
L'air est pur, le ciel admirable...
Nous avons un été semblable
Lorsque j'en devins amoureux!

L'horrible soif qui me déchire
Aurait besoin pour s'assouvir
D'autant de vin qu'en peut tenir
Son tombeau ; — ce n'est pas peu dire :

Arise before them. In that magic dream,
That deafening, dazzling, orgiastic scene,
With bugles, sunshine, shouting, drums, they give
All glory to a people drunk with love!

Thus, rolling on for frivolous Mankind,
The fabulous river flecked with gold is Wine;
Wine boasts its deeds through human throats that sing,
And reigns through bounteous gifts like a true king.

To drown the rancour and to dull the pain
Of old men dying silent and alone,
Remorseful God made sleep, Man added Wine,
Born of the sacred Sun, a child divine.

106

The Murderer's Wine

My wife is dead and I am free,
Free to go boozing when I like;
I used to come home stony-broke;
Her cries frayed every nerve in me.

Now I'm as happy as a king;
The air is pure, the sky is bliss...
We had a summer just like this
When I loved her and we were young.

The raging thirst I have today
Is not an easy one to slake:
How much exactly would it take?
Enough to fill her tomb, I'd say;

Je l'ai jetée au fond d'un puits,
Et j'ai même poussé sur elle
Tous les pavés de la margelle.
— Je l'oublierai si je le puis !

Au nom des serments de tendresse,
Dont rien ne peut nous délier,
Et pour nous réconcilier
Comme au beau temps de notre ivresse,

J'implorai d'elle un rendez-vous,
Le soir, sur une route obscure.
Elle y vint ! — folle créature !
Nous sommes tous plus ou moins fous !

Elle était encore jolie,
Quoique bien fatiguée ! et moi,
Je l'aimais trop ! voilà pourquoi
Je lui dis : Sors de cette vie !

Nul ne peut me comprendre. Un seul
Parmi ces ivrognes stupides
Songea-t-il dans ses nuits morbides
À faire du vin un linceul ?

Cette crapule invulnérable
Comme les machines de fer
Jamais, ni l'été ni l'hiver,
N'a connu l'amour véritable,

Avec ses noirs enchantements,
Son cortège infernal d'alarmes,
Ses fioles de poison, ses larmes,
Ses bruits de chaîne et d'ossements !

And that's a lot, because I put
Her body down a well and dropped
All of the rim's loose stones on top
– Something I'm trying to forget.

Pleading those vows of tenderness
And ties that no man ought to sever,
To reconcile us and recover
Our old enchanting happiness,

I named the place, a quiet lane;
And fixed a meeting late at night.
She came – she wasn't very bright,
But most of us are half insane.

She still looked pretty good, my wife,
Although worn out; and as for me,
I loved her far too much. That's why
I said to her: Now quit this life.

Who understands me? See the crowd
Of sleepy sots who drown in drink;
There isn't one of them who'd think
Of turning wine into a shroud.

Invulnerable clods that move
Through winter and through summer too,
Iron machines that never knew
Anything like the truth of love,

Love with its dark entrancing charms,
Its poisonous flasks, its tears, its moans,
Its clanking chains, its rattling bones,
Its hellish retinue of alarms.

— Me voilà libre et solitaire !
Je serai ce soir ivre mort ;
Alors, sans peur et sans remord,
Je me coucherai sur la terre,

Et je dormirai comme un chien !
Le chariot aux lourdes roues
Chargé de pierres et de boues,
Le wagon enragé peut bien

Écraser ma tête coupable
Ou me couper par le milieu,
Je m'en moque comme de Dieu,
Du Diable ou de la Sainte Table !

107

Le Vin du solitaire

Le regard singulier d'une femme galante
Qui se glisse vers nous comme le rayon blanc
Que la lune onduleuse envoie au lac tremblant,
Quand elle y veut baigner sa beauté nonchalante ;

Le dernier sac d'écus dans les doigts d'un joueur ;
Un baiser libertin de la maigre Adeline ;
Les sons d'une musique énervante et câline,
Semblable au cri lointain de l'humaine douleur,

Tout cela ne vaut pas, ô bouteille profonde,
Les baumes pénétrants que ta panse féconde
Garde au cœur altéré du poète pieux ;

Tu lui verses l'espoir, la jeunesse et la vie,
— Et l'orgueil, ce trésor de toute gueuserie,
Qui nous rend triomphants et semblables aux Dieux !

– Now here I am, alone and free!
Tonight I'll be dead drunk again;
No fears and no regret; and then
The earth will be a bed for me,

Where, like a dog, I'll sleep all night.
And should some waggon rumbling down,
Heavy with loads of mud and stone,
Roll over me, why that's all right:

Come crush my head and, if you're able,
Cut me in half, for all I care;
I couldn't give a damn, I swear,
For God, the Devil, or the Holy Table!

107

The Lonely Man's Wine

The strange cool glance a sensual woman has,
Gliding towards you like the trembling wake
Of the moon's long white beam upon the lake
In which she laves her careless lovely rays;

The last full purse that burns a gambler's fingers,
Or slender Adeline's slow lascivious kiss,
Sweet music's enervating smooth caress
Where some far note of human pain still lingers;

None of all these, deep bottle, brings relief
Like the strong balms your belly holds in store:
All that the pious poet's heart could crave

You pour to serve him, hope and youth and life
– And pride, that treasure of the unruly poor,
In which we triumph like the Gods above.

108

Le Vin des amants

Aujourd'hui l'espace est splendide !
Sans mors, sans éperons, sans bride,
Partons à cheval sur le vin
Pour un ciel féerique et divin !

Comme deux anges que torture
Une implacable calenture,
Dans le bleu cristal du matin
Suivons le mirage lointain !

Mollement balancés sur l'aile
Du tourbillon intelligent,
Dans un délire parallèle,

Ma sœur, côte à côte nageant,
Nous fuirons sans repos ni trêves
Vers le paradis de mes rêves !

108

The Wine of Lovers

Today how splendid is the air!
Come! Without bridle, bit or spur,
We'll mount upon the steed of wine
And ride to magic skies divine.

Like two angels racked for ever
By some hot remorseless fever,
We glimpse, in morning's crystal blue,
The distant image we pursue.

By the whirlwind gently swayed,
The cunning wind that sweeps the sea,
Swimming together side by side,

Dear sister, in shared ecstasy,
We'll fly unresting to those gleams
That light the paradise of my dreams.

FLEURS DU MAL

109

La Destruction

Sans cesse à mes côtés s'agite le Démon ;
Il nage autour de moi comme un air impalpable ;
Je l'avale et le sens qui brûle mon poumon
Et l'emplit d'un désir éternel et coupable.

Parfois il prend, sachant mon grand amour de l'Art,
La forme de la plus séduisante des femmes,
Et, sous de spécieux prétextes de cafard,
Accoutume ma lèvre à des philtres infâmes.

Il me conduit ainsi, loin du regard de Dieu,
Haletant et brisé de fatigue, au milieu
Des plaines de l'Ennui, profondes et désertes,

Et jette dans mes yeux pleins de confusion
Des vêtements souillés, des blessures ouvertes,
Et l'appareil sanglant de la Destruction !

FLOWERS OF EVIL

109

Destruction

The Devil, busy at my side, infects
The air with vague impalpable unrest;
I swallow it and feel it burn my lungs
And swell them with an endless guilty lust.

Knowing my love of Art, he often takes
The most seductive of sweet female forms,
And, with his specious arguments, he trains
My lips to crave vile potions, liquid charms.

He leads me thus, far from the sight of God,
Gasping for breath and weary with the road,
Into wide plains and deserts of Ennui;

And there, before my baffled eyes, he throws
Corpses with gaping wounds and sullied clothes,
And all Destruction's bloody panoply.

110

Une martyre

Dessin d'un maître inconnu

Au milieu des flacons, des étoffes lamées
Et des meubles voluptueux,
Des marbres, des tableaux, des robes parfumées
Qui traînent à plis somptueux,

Dans une chambre tiède où, comme en une serre,
L'air est dangereux et fatal,
Où des bouquets mourants dans leurs cercueils de verre
Exhalent leur soupir final,

Un cadavre sans tête épanche, comme un fleuve,
Sur l'oreiller désaltéré
Un sang rouge et vivant, dont la toile s'abreuve
Avec l'avidité d'un pré.

Semblable aux visions pâles qu'enfante l'ombre
Et qui nous enchaînent les yeux,
La tête, avec l'amas de sa crinière sombre
Et de ses bijoux précieux,

Sur la table de nuit, comme une renoncule,
Repose ; et, vide de pensers,
Un regard vague et blanc comme le crépuscule
S'échappe des yeux révoltés.

Sur le lit, le tronc nu sans scrupules étale
Dans le plus complet abandon
La secrète splendeur et la beauté fatale
Dont la nature lui fit don ;

110

A Martyr

Drawing by an Unknown Master

Amid the flasks of scent and sequined fabrics,
Rich furnishing of a space that holds
Statues and paintings and long perfumed robes
Trailing in sumptuous folds,

In a warm chamber where the hothouse air
Hangs heavy with mortality,
And, coffined under glass, limp flowers exhale
Their last expiring sigh,

A headless corpse spills out a stream of blood,
To make a red expanding stain
On the white pillowcase that soaks it up
As a thirsty field drinks rain.

Like pale hallucinations in the night
That hold our fearful eyes in thrall,
The head itself – the high-piled raven mane,
Entwined with precious pearls –

Rests like a white ranunculus upon
A table by the bed; a gaze
Empty of thought, unfixed and blank as twilight,
Escapes its upturned eyes.

Splayed on the bed, the naked trunk reveals,
In the most sheer abandonment,
The secret splendour and the fatal beauty
That nature chose to grant;

Un bas rosâtre, orné de coins d'or, à la jambe,
Comme un souvenir est resté ;
La jarretière, ainsi qu'un œil secret qui flambe,
Darde un regard diamanté.

Le singulier aspect de cette solitude
Et d'un grand portrait langoureux,
Aux yeux provocateurs comme son attitude,
Révèle un amour ténébreux,

Une coupable joie et des fêtes étranges
Pleines de baisers infernaux,
Dont se réjouissait l'essaim des mauvais anges
Nageant dans les plis des rideaux ;

Et cependant, à voir la maigreur élégante
De l'épaule au contour heurté,
La hanche un peu pointue et la taille fringante
Ainsi qu'un reptile irrité,

Elle est bien jeune encor ! — Son âme exaspérée
Et ses sens par l'ennui mordus
S'étaient-ils entr'ouverts à la meute altérée
Des désirs errants et perdus ?

L'homme vindicatif que tu n'as pu, vivante,
Malgré tant d'amour, assouvir,
Combla-t-il sur ta chair inerte et complaisante
L'immensité de son désir ?

Réponds, cadavre impur ! et par tes tresses roides
Te soulevant d'un bras fiévreux,
Dis-moi, tête effrayante, a-t-il sur tes dents froides
Collé les suprêmes adieux ?

She still wears one pink stocking, edged with gold,
As if it were a souvenir;
The garter's gleam is like a secret eye,
A diamond, hard and clear.

The languorous pose and the provoking eyes
Of a portrait hanging above
Combine with this singular solitude
To suggest an unspeakable love,

Outlandish entertainments, guilty pleasures,
Perverse embraces learned in Hell,
To tempt voyeurs, lurking behind the curtains
Where swarms of evil angels dwell;

Yet pause to look at the fine shoulder's contour,
That slender elegant line,
The narrow angular hips, or the waist
With its lithe reptilian turn,

She is still so young! – Did her frustrated soul
And her senses consumed by ennui
Give way to a pack of depraved desires
And set those hellhounds free?

Alive, for all your love, you could not sate
Your lover; did his vengeful lust
Find consummation in the passive flesh
Of your receptive corpse at last?

Tell me, foul corpse, and tell me, terrible head
That I lift by its stiffening hair,
Did he seek those death-cold lips and seal
His farewell kisses there?

— Loin du monde railleur, loin de la foule impure,
Loin des magistrats curieux,
Dors en paix, dors en paix, étrange creature,
Dans ton tombeau mystérieux ;

Ton époux court le monde, et ta forme immortelle
Veille près de lui quand il dort ;
Autant que toi sans doute il te sera fidèle,
Et constant jusques à la mort.

111

Femmes damnées

Comme un bétail pensif sur le sable couchées,
Elles tournent leurs yeux vers l'horizon des mers,
Et leurs pieds se cherchant et leurs mains rapprochées
Ont de douces langueurs et des frissons amers.

Les unes, cœurs épris des longues confidences,
Dans le fond des bosquets où jacent les ruisseaux,
Vont épelant l'amour des craintives enfances
Et creusent le bois vert des jeunes arbrisseaux ;

D'autres, comme des sœurs, marchent lentes et graves
À travers les rochers pleins d'apparitions,
Où Saint Antoine a vu surgir comme des laves
Les seins nus et pourprés de ses tentations ;

Il en est, aux lueurs des résines croulantes,
Qui dans le creux muet des vieux antres païens
T'appellent au secours de leurs fièvres hurlantes,
Ô Bacchus, endormeur des remords anciens !

– Far from censorious eyes and mocking tongues,
Your troubled spirit finds release;
Far from the world, in your mysterious tomb
Sleep on, sleep on in peace.

Your bridegroom wanders; your immortal form
Will follow him and guard his rest;
No less than yours, his love is strong and firm
And faithful unto death.

111

Doomed Women

Like pensive cattle lying on the sand,
They scan the far horizon of the sea;
Hand reaches out for hand and feet entwine
In thrills of pain and languorous ecstasy.

Some, with hearts longing to confide, withdraw
Deep in secluded groves by gossiping streams,
And there spell out their timid childhood loves
And carve the bark of saplings with green names;

Others, like nuns, with solemn steps traverse
A land where visions teem, a rocky waste,
Where once Saint Antony was tempted by
Purple eruptions of great naked breasts;

And some, lit by the glow of melting resin,
In caverns haunted by old pagan rites,
Call upon Bacchus in their moaning fevers
To calm and lull to sleep their long regrets.

Et d'autres, dont la gorge aime les scapulaires,
Qui, recélant un fouet sous leurs longs vêtements,
Mêlent, dans le bois sombre et les nuits solitaires,
L'écume du plaisir aux larmes des tourments.

Ô vierges, ô démons, ô monstres, ô martyres,
De la réalité grands esprits contempteurs,
Chercheuses d'infini, dévotes et satyres,
Tantôt pleines de cris, tantôt pleines de pleurs,

Vous que dans votre enfer mon âme a poursuivies,
Pauvres sœurs, je vous aime autant que je vous plains,
Pour vos mornes douleurs, vos soifs inassouvies,
Et les urnes d'amour dont vos grands cœurs sont pleins !

112

Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs

La Débauche et la Mort sont deux aimables filles,
Prodigues de baisers et riches de santé,
Dont le flanc toujours vierge et drapé de guenilles
Sous l'éternel labeur n'a jamais enfanté.

Au poète sinistre, ennemi des familles,
Favori de l'enfer, courtisan mal renté,
Tombeaux et lupanars montrent sous leurs charmilles
Un lit que le remords n'a jamais fréquenté.

Et la bière et l'alcôve en blasphèmes fécondes
Nous offrent tour à tour, comme deux bonnes sœurs,
De terribles plaisirs et d'affreuses douceurs.

Quand veux-tu m'enterrer, Débauche aux bras immondes ?
Ô Mort, quand viendras-tu, sa rivale en attraits,
Sur ses myrtes infects enter tes noirs cyprès ?

Some breasts will crave the scapular and hide
A lash beneath the garment's flowing train,
And in dark woods and solitary nights
Mingle moist passion with their tears of pain.

O holy virgins, demons, monsters, martyrs,
Whose noble minds despise reality,
Seeking the infinite in pious lust,
Now with salt tears, now with an anguished cry,

Poor sisters, I have tracked you to your hell
With pity and a passionate soul that burns
For your bleak sufferings and unslaked thirst,
And, in your hearts, love's overflowing urns.

112

The Two Good Sisters

Debauchery and Death are two sweet girls,
Generous with kisses, a good healthy pair,
Whose virgin loins, though often ploughed, have never
Borne fruit beneath the rags they wear.

To the ill-omened poet, family-hater,
Half-paid retainer in the infernal courts,
The shady groves of brothels and of tombs
Offer a bed unhaunted by remorse.

Coffin and bedroom, rich in blasphemy,
Like two good sisters, offer equal measure
Of ghastly sweetness and atrocious pleasure.

Filthy Debauch, when will you bury me?
And when will you, Death, her seductive rival,
Graft your dark cypress on her fetid myrtle?

113

La Fontaine de sang

Il me semble parfois que mon sang coule à flots,
Ainsi qu'une fontaine aux rythmiques sanglots.
Je l'entends bien qui coule avec un long murmure,
Mais je me tâte en vain pour trouver la blessure.

À travers la cité, comme dans un champ clos,
Il s'en va, transformant les pavés en îlots,
Désaltérant la soif de chaque creature,
Et partout colorant en rouge la nature.

J'ai demandé souvent à des vins capiteux
D'endormir pour un jour la terreur qui me mine ;
Le vin rend l'œil plus clair et l'oreille plus fine !

J'ai cherché dans l'amour un sommeil oublieux ;
Mais l'amour n'est pour moi qu'un matelas d'aiguilles
Fait pour donner à boire à ces cruelles filles !

114

Allégorie

C'est une femme belle et de riche encolure,
Qui laisse dans son vin traîner sa chevelure.
Les griffes de l'amour, les poisons du tripot,
Tout glisse et tout s'émousse au granit de sa peau.
Elle rit à la Mort et nargue la Débauche,
Ces monstres dont la main, qui toujours gratte et fauche,
Dans ses jeux destructeurs a pourtant respecté
De ce corps ferme et droit la rude majesté.
Elle marche en déesse et repose en sultane ;
Elle a dans le plaisir la foi mahométane,
Et dans ses bras ouverts, que remplissent ses seins,

113

The Fountain of Blood

Sometimes I feel there is a turbulent flood,
A rhythmic fountain, sobbing out my blood;
I hear distinctly its long murmuring sound;
But seek in vain to touch and feel the wound.

As if in some arena, it flows down
The city streets, transforming paving stones
To islets, slaking every thirst, and spreads
Until it stains nature's green world with red.

Often from captious wine I've asked a deep
Draught that would dull my terror for a day;
Wine that gives keener sense to eyes and ears!

And I have sought in love oblivious sleep;
But love's a bed of needles where I pay
A round of drinks for both these cruel girls.

114

Allegory

How beautiful! her long hair trailing down
Over the opulent neck into the wine;
Love's claws, the poisons of the gambling den,
Leave not a trace upon her granite skin.
She laughs at Death and mocks Debauchery,
Monsters whose hands, though made to scratch and flay
In their destructive sport, yet still respect
This body's majesty that stands erect.
Resting or roused, she follows pleasure's lead
As faithful as a Moslem to his creed;
Her outspread arms expose her willing breasts

Elle appelle des yeux la race des humains.
 Elle croit, elle sait, cette vierge inféconde
 Et pourtant nécessaire à la marche du monde,
 Que la beauté du corps est un sublime don
 Qui de toute infamie arrache le pardon.
 Elle ignore l'Enfer comme le Purgatoire,
 Et quand l'heure viendra d'entrer dans la Nuit noire,
 Elle regardera la face de la Mort,
 Ainsi qu'un nouveau-né, — sans haine et sans remord.

115

La Béatrice

Dans des terrains cendreaux, calcinés, sans verdure,
 Comme je me plaignais un jour à la nature,
 Et que de ma pensée, en vaguant au hasard,
 J'aiguais lentement sur mon cœur le poignard,
 Je vis en plein midi descendre sur ma tête
 Un nuage funèbre et gros d'une tempête,
 Qui portait un troupeau de démons vicieux,
 Semblables à des nains cruels et curieux.
 À me considérer froidement ils se mirent,
 Et, comme des passants sur un fou qu'ils admirent,
 Je les entendis rire et chuchoter entre eux,
 En échangeant maint signe et maint clignement d'yeux :

— « Contemplons à loisir cette caricature
 Et cette ombre d'Hamlet imitant sa posture,
 Le regard indécis et les cheveux au vent.
 N'est-ce pas grand-pitié de voir ce bon vivant,
 Ce gueux, cet histrion en vacances, ce drôle,
 Parce qu'il sait jouer artistement son rôle,
 Vouloir intéresser au chant de ses douleurs

Where she invites mankind to come and rest.
A barren virgin, yet the world that goes
Upon its way needs her; she feels, she knows
How bodily beauty is a gift sublime
That finds a way to pardon every crime.
She knows no Hell or fear of purging fire,
And when at last the black Night stands before her,
Like one newborn she'll look Death in the face
And enter without hatred or remorse.

115

My Beatrice

I wandered through a wasteland, grey and burned,
Ashen and leafless, and as I complained
To nature, with the dagger of my thought
Honed slowly on the whetstone of my heart,
I saw, in clearest noon, above my head,
Great with the coming storm, a deadly cloud
That bore a demon throng, a vicious host
Of curious and cruel dwarfs who cast
On me the cold observant look that I
Have often noticed when some passers-by
Stare at a madman in the street and trade
Nudges and winks, sniggers and whispered words:

– “Now take your time to watch this parody:
He copies Hamlet's pose from tragedy,
The indecisive look, the wind-blown hair –
But isn't it a shame to see him there?
Because he brings some talent to his role,
This playboy, beggar, jobless actor, fool,
Thinks that his tuneful sorrows will enchant

Les aigles, les grillons, les ruisseaux et les fleurs,
Et même à nous, auteurs de ces vieilles rubriques,
Réciter en hurlant ses tirades publiques ? »

J'aurais pu (mon orgueil aussi haut que les monts
Domine la nuée et le cri des démons)
Détourner simplement ma tête souveraine,
Si je n'eusse pas vu parmi leur troupe obscène,
Crime qui n'a pas fait chanceler le soleil !
La reine de mon cœur au regard nonpareil,
Qui riait avec eux de ma sombre détresse
Et leur versait parfois quelque sale caresse.

116

Un voyage à Cythère

Mon cœur, comme un oiseau, voltigeait tout joyeux
Et planait librement à l'entour des cordages ;
Le navire roulait sous un ciel sans nuages,
Comme un ange enivré d'un soleil radieux.

Quelle est cette île triste et noire ? — C'est Cythère,
Nous dit-on, un pays fameux dans les chansons,
Eldorado banal de tous les vieux garçons.
Regardez, après tout, c'est une pauvre terre.

— Île des doux secrets et des fêtes du cœur !
De l'antique Vénus le superbe fantôme
Au-dessus de tes mers plane comme un arôme,
Et charge les esprits d'amour et de langueur.

Belle île aux myrtes verts, pleine de fleurs écloses,
Vénérée à jamais par toute nation,
Où les soupirs des cœurs en adoration
Roulent comme l'encens sur un jardin de roses

The flowers and brooks, the eagle and the ant,
While we ourselves are publicly berated
With those old rubrics that we first created.”

Given my lofty pride that can control
A crowd of demons as they swarm and howl,
I could have simply turned my regal head,
Had I not seen among that obscene horde
(How could it not have dimmed the noonday sun!)
That lady of the peerless glance, my queen,
Who laughed along with them at my distress
And shared from time to time some lewd caress.

116

A Voyage to Cythera

My happy heart played like a bird in the air,
Gliding around the rigging, soaring free;
The ship sailed on beneath a cloudless sky,
A sun-drunk angel, dazzled by the glare.

What is this sad dark isle? – That is Cythera,
They told us, and poets have sung its fame,
Banal Eldorado, every old bachelor’s dream:
A poor sort of place, not much to look at there.

– Isle of sweet secrets where the heart rejoices,
The spectre of proud Venus from old days
Still hovers over you and scents your seas,
And fills men’s minds with languor and with love.

Isle of green myrtle and full blooming flowers,
Revered in every age by every nation,
Where the long sighs of hearts in adoration
Exhale like incense in a bed of roses

Ou le roucoulement éternel d'un ramier !
— Cythère n'était plus qu'un terrain des plus maigres,
Un désert rocailleux troublé par des cris aigres.
J'entrevois pourtant un objet singulier !

Ce n'était pas un temple aux ombres bocagères,
Où la jeune prêtresse, amoureuse des fleurs,
Allait, le corps brûlé de secrètes chaleurs,
Entre-bâillant sa robe aux brises passagères ;

Mais voilà qu'en rasant la côte d'assez près
Pour troubler les oiseaux avec nos voiles blanches,
Nous vîmes que c'était un gibet à trois branches,
Du ciel se détachant en noir, comme un cyprès.

De féroces oiseaux perchés sur leur pâture
Détruisaient avec rage un pendu déjà mûr,
Chacun plantant, comme un outil, son bec impur
Dans tous les coins saignants de cette pourriture ;

Les yeux étaient deux trous, et du ventre effondré
Les intestins pesants lui coulaient sur les cuisses,
Et ses bourreaux, gorgés de hideuses délices,
L'avaient à coups de bec absolument châtré.

Sous les pieds, un troupeau de jaloux quadrupèdes,
Le museau relevé, tournoyait et rôdait ;
Une plus grande bête au milieu s'agitait
Comme un exécuteur entouré de ses aides.

Habitant de Cythère, enfant d'un ciel si beau,
Silencieusement tu souffrais ces insultes
En expiation de tes infâmes cultes
Et des péchés qui t'ont interdit le tombeau.

Or like the ringdove's soft incessant calling!
– But now how harsh and bare Cythera lies,
A stony desert troubled by bitter cries.
My glance, however, fell on a singular object.

No, not a rustic temple where great trees
Might shade the young priestess in love with flowers,
Walking to cool her body's hidden fires,
Half-opening her robe to the passing breeze;

Instead, as we skirted the coast so closely
That our flapping sails made the birds take fright,
We saw a three-branched gibbet there, upright,
Black like a cypress, stark against the sky.

Fierce birds, perched on their prey, were tearing up
The corpse, already ripe, of a hanged man,
With filthy beaks like instruments to scan
Each bleeding recess of that rotting heap;

The eyes were two dark holes, the belly gaped
And spilled the heavy guts along his thighs;
His torturers, hideous connoisseurs, had prised
The morsel of his manhood quite away.

A pack of jealous animals at his feet
Circled and prowled, lifting their eager snouts;
One, bigger than the rest, bustled about
Like a chief executioner with his mates.

Child of Cythera and a sky so fair,
It was in silence you endured these insults,
To expiate the sins and infamous cults
That have denied you a sepulchre there.

Ridicule pendu, tes douleurs sont les miennes !
Je sentis, à l'aspect de tes membres flottants,
Comme un vomissement, remonter vers mes dents
Le long fleuve de fiel des douleurs anciennes ;

Devant toi, pauvre diable au souvenir si cher,
J'ai senti tous les becs et toutes les mâchoires
Des corbeaux lancinants et des panthères noires
Qui jadis aimaient tant à triturer ma chair.

— Le ciel était charmant, la mer était unie ;
Pour moi tout était noir et sanglant désormais,
Hélas ! et j'avais, comme en un suaire épais,
Le cœur enseveli dans cette allégorie.

Dans ton île, ô Vénus ! je n'ai trouvé debout
Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image...
— Ah ! Seigneur ! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégoût !

117

L'Amour et le crâne

Vieux cul-de-lampe

L'Amour est assis sur le crâne
De l'Humanité,
Et sur ce trône le profane,
Au rire effronté,

Souffle gaiement des bulles rondes
Qui montent dans l'air,
Comme pour rejoindre les mondes
Au fond de l'éther.

Grotesque old gallows bird, your pains are mine!
As your stretched limbs dangled before my eyes,
A tide of gall like vomit seemed to rise,
The long and sour flood of my past pains.

Poor devil, dear to me, I felt afresh
The lacerating beaks and grinding jaws
Of ravens and black panthers who were once
So keen to mince and masticate my flesh.

– The sky was pure enchantment, calm the sea –
For me, alas, now dark and stained with blood;
And there, as if enveloped in its shroud,
Deep in that allegory lay my heart.

In your isle, O Venus, I found nothing standing
But a gibbet bearing my symbolic weight...
Lord, give me courage and strength to contemplate
My body and my heart without disgust!

117

Love and the Skull

An Old Colophon

Here is Love seated happily,
Squatting on Mankind's skull:
And laughing boldly from that throne,
The shameless infidel

Gaily blows bubbles that ascend
Into the ambient air,
As if they meant to reach new worlds
In some ethereal sphere.

Le globe lumineux et frêle
Prend un grand essor,
Crève et crache son âme grêle
Comme un songe d'or.

J'entends le crâne à chaque bulle
Prier et gémir :
— « Ce jeu féroce et ridicule,
Quand doit-il finir ?

Car ce que ta bouche cruelle
Éparpille en l'air,
Monstre assassin, c'est ma cervelle,
Mon sang et ma chair ! »

THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

Each luminous frail globe soars up,
Rapid and round and whole,
Then shatters like a golden dream
And spits out its thin soul.

With every bubble I can hear
The skull still beg and groan:
“This savage and derisive game,
Ah, when will it be done?

For what your cruel mouth disperses,
The vapour that you shed
Into the air, you murderer, is
My brain, my flesh and blood!”

RÉVOLTE

118

Le Reniement de Saint Pierre

Qu'est-ce que Dieu fait donc de ce flot d'anathèmes
Qui monte tous les jours vers ses chers Séraphins ?
Comme un tyran gorgé de viande et de vins,
Il s'endort au doux bruit de nos affreux blasphèmes.

Les sanglots des martyrs et des suppliciés
Sont une symphonie enivrante sans doute,
Puisque, malgré le sang que leur volupté coûte,
Les cieus ne s'en sont point encore rassasiés !

— Ah ! Jésus, souviens-toi du Jardin des Olives !
Dans ta simplicité tu priaï à genoux
Celui qui dans son ciel riait au bruit des clous
Que d'ignobles bourreaux plantaient dans tes chairs vives,

Lorsque tu vis cracher sur ta divinité
La crapule du corps de garde et des cuisines,
Et lorsque tu sentis s'enfoncer les épines
Dans ton crâne où vivait l'immense Humanité ;

Quand de ton corps brisé la pesanteur horrible
Allongeait tes deux bras distendus, que ton sang
Et ta sueur coulaient de ton front pâissant,
Quand tu fus devant tous posé comme une cible,

REVOLT

118

Saint Peter's Denial

Anathemas that ascend to Paradise,
A daily flood – what does God make of it?
Like some fat tyrant, stuffed with wine and meat,
He falls asleep, lulled by our blasphemies.

The sobs of tortured martyrs are the stuff
Of music that enchants celestial taste,
Since, despite all the blood such pleasures cost,
The heavens have still by no means had enough.

– Jesus, recall the Agony in the Garden!
In your simplicity you prayed to him
Who heard the torturers' nails get hammered in
Your living flesh, and laughed at it from Heaven.

And when they spat on your divinity,
Those greasy scullions and scum of the guard;
And when you felt the thorns piercing your head
That held the life of vast Humanity;

And when your broken body was straining down,
Wrenching your outstretched arms with its dead weight,
When your pale face was drenched with blood and sweat,
When you were lifted up for public scorn,

Rêvais-tu de ces jours si brillants et si beaux
Où tu vins pour remplir l'éternelle promesse,
Où tu foulais, monté sur une douce ânesse,
Des chemins tout jonchés de fleurs et de rameaux,

Où, le cœur tout gonflé d'espoir et de vaillance,
Tu fouettais tous ces vils marchands à tour de bras,
Où tu fus maître enfin ? Le remords n'a-t-il pas
Pénétré dans ton flanc plus avant que la lance ?

— Certes, je sortirai, quant à moi, satisfait
D'un monde où l'action n'est pas la sœur du rêve ;
Puisse-je user du glaive et périr par le glaive !
Saint Pierre a renié Jésus... il a bien fait !

119

Abel et Caïn

I

Race d'Abel, dors, bois et mange ;
Dieu te sourit complaisamment.

Race de Caïn, dans la fange
Rampe et meurs misérablement.

Race d'Abel, ton sacrifice
Flatte le nez du Séraphin !

Race de Caïn, ton supplice
Aura-t-il jamais une fin ?

Race d'Abel, vois tes semailles
Et ton bétail venir à bien ;

Did you then dream of your first radiant days,
With the eternal promise to fulfil,
When, mounted on a gentle ass, triumphal,
You trod on flowers and palms that strewed the way;

When with a hopeful heart that knew no fear
You scourged the merchants with unbridled force,
When you at last were lord? Did not remorse
Pierce through your side more deeply than the spear?

– For me, this world is one I'll gladly quit,
Where dreaming is no sister to the deed:
May I both live and perish by the sword!
St Peter denied Jesus... he was right!

119

Abel and Cain

I

Race of Abel, sleep, eat, drink,
Enjoy the indulgent smile of God,

Race of Cain, lie down and die
Where you stay crawling in the mud.

Race of Abel, for a sniff
Of your burnt offerings angels bend.

Race of Cain, this life of torture,
Will it ever have an end?

Race of Abel, see your cattle
Multiply and crops abound;

Race de Caïn, tes entrailles
Hurlent la faim comme un vieux chien.

Race d'Abel, chauffe ton ventre
À ton foyer patriarcal ;

Race de Caïn, dans ton antre
Tremble de froid, pauvre chacal !

Race d'Abel, aime et pullule !
Ton or fait aussi des petits.

Race de Caïn, cœur qui brûle,
Prends garde à ces grands appétits.

Race d'Abel, tu croîs et broutes
Comme les punaises des bois !

Race de Caïn, sur les routes
Traîne ta famille aux abois.

II

Ah ! race d'Abel, ta charogne
Engraissera le sol fumant !

Race de Caïn, ta besogne
N'est pas faite suffisamment ;

Race d'Abel, voici ta honte :
Le fer est vaincu par l'épieu !

Race de Caïn, au ciel monte,
Et sur la terre jette Dieu !

THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

Race of Cain, your guts howl out
With hunger pangs like some old hound.

Race of Abel, warm your belly
At the patriarchal hearth;

Race of Cain, poor jackal, shiver
In the den that gave you birth.

Race of Abel, love and breed!
And watch the breeding of your gold;

Race of Cain, with burning heart,
Let not such appetites take hold.

Race of Abel, how you grow
And munch like lice in rotten wood!

Race of Cain, trudge with your folk
Forlorn along the open road.

II

Race of Abel, your foul carcass
Will manure the steaming soil;

Race of Cain, the task before you
Is one demanding still more toil;

Race of Abel, shame! Your plough's
Sharp blade is conquered by the spear.

Race of Cain, storm Heaven and throw
God to the earth down here!

120

Les Litanies de Satan

Ô toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges,
Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Ô Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort,
Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui sais tout, grand roi des choses souterraines,
Guérisseur familier des angoisses humaines,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui, même aux lépreux, aux parias maudits,
Enseignes par l'amour le goût du Paradis,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Ô toi qui de la Mort, ta vieille et forte amante,
Engendras l'Espérance, — une folle charmante !

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui fais au proscrit ce regard calme et haut
Qui damne tout un peuple autour d'un échafaud,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui sais en quels coins des terres envieuses
Le Dieu jaloux cacha les pierres précieuses,

120

The Litanies of Satan

O loveliest of the Angels and most wise,
A God betrayed by fate and lost to praise,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

O Prince of exile, victim of such wrong,
Who, when defeated, rises up more strong,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

All-knowing one, great sovereign who reigns
Under the earth and heals our human pains,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who even to the leprous and despised
Teaches through love the taste of Paradise,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who upon Death, your old and sturdy lover,
Begot the madcap Hope, that sweet deceiver,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who makes the prisoner's glance unmoved and proud
As from the scaffold he condemns the crowd,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who knows the secret corners of the land
Where gems were hidden by God's jealous hand,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi dont l'œil clair connaît les profonds arsenaux
Où dort enseveli le peuple des métaux,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi dont la large main cache les précipices
Au somnambule errant au bord des édifices,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui, magiquement, assouplis les vieux os
De l'ivrogne attardé foulé par les chevaux,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui, pour consoler l'homme frêle qui souffre,
Nous appris à mêler le salpêtre et le soufre,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui poses ta marque, ô complice subtil,
Sur le front du Crésus impitoyable et vil,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui mets dans les yeux et dans le cœur des filles
Le culte de la plaie et l'amour des guenilles,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Bâton des exilés, lampe des inventeurs,
Confesseur des pendus et des conspirateurs,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Whose clear eye knows the deeply buried store
Of metals sleeping in their veins of ore,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Whose broad hand hides the fall below the ledge
From sleepwalkers who stray towards the edge,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who makes the drunkard's bones supple and sound
When passing horses knock him to the ground,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who, to console all feeble, suffering men
Taught us the power of powder in a gun,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Whose mark is fixed, O subtle smooth accomplice,
Upon the vile unpitying brow of Croesus,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Who offers girls the rags their eyes adore
And teaches hearts to love the cult of sores,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

The inventor's lamp, the exile's staff and stay,
Confessor of the rebel hanged on high,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Père adoptif de ceux qu'en sa noire colère
Du paradis terrestre a chassés Dieu le Père,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Prière

Gloire et louange à toi, Satan, dans les hauteurs
Du Ciel, où tu régnas, et dans les profondeurs
De l'Enfer, où, vaincu, tu rêves en silence !
Fais que mon âme un jour, sous l'Arbre de Science,
Près de toi se repose, à l'heure où sur ton front
Comme un Temple nouveau ses rameaux s'épanchront !

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Father to men since God the Father's wrath
Expelled mankind from paradise on earth,

Satan, have pity on my long distress!

Prayer

Glory to you, O Satan, in the heights
Of heaven where you once reigned, and down below
In Hell where you lie dreaming in defeat!
Beneath the Tree of Knowledge, let my soul
Rest near you when its branches once more grow
Like a new Temple, arched above your brow.

LA MORT

121

La Mort des amants

Nous aurons des lits pleins d'odeurs légères,
Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux,
Et d'étranges fleurs sur des étagères,
Éclores pour nous sous des cieux plus beaux.

Usant à l'envi leurs chaleurs dernières,
Nos deux cœurs seront deux vastes flambeaux,
Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières
Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux.

Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique,
Nous échangerons un éclair unique,
Comme un long sanglot, tout chargé d'adieux ;

Et plus tard un Ange, entr'ouvrant les portes,
Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux,
Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.

122

La Mort des pauvres

C'est la Mort qui console, hélas ! et qui fait vivre ;
C'est le but de la vie, et c'est le seul espoir
Qui, comme un élixir, nous monte et nous enivre,
Et nous donne le cœur de marcher jusqu'au soir ;

DEATH

121

The Death of Lovers

We shall have beds where subtle fragrance hovers,
And couches deep as tombs where we shall lie,
And on our shelves we shall set out strange flowers
That bloomed for us beneath a lovelier sky.

Competing to consume their dying heat,
Like two vast torches, shall our hearts take fire,
And see reflections of their double light
In our two souls, twin mirrors of desire.

One evening tinted rose and mystic blue,
We shall exchange a single lightning flash,
Like one long sob, dense with a last adieu.

Later an Angel, slipping through the door,
Will come with joy to clean the tarnished glass
And reignite the fires that burn no more.

122

The Death of the Poor

Death is what comforts us and makes us live,
It is the only hope, life's end and aim,
Which like some tonic strong elixir gives
Us heart to march along till evening comes;

À travers la tempête, et la neige, et le givre,
C'est la clarté vibrante à notre horizon noir ;
C'est l'auberge fameuse inscrite sur le livre,
Où l'on pourra manger, et dormir, et s'asseoir ;

C'est un Ange qui tient dans ses doigts magnétiques
Le sommeil et le don des rêves extatiques,
Et qui refait le lit des gens pauvres et nus ;

C'est la gloire des Dieux, c'est le grenier mystique,
C'est la bourse du pauvre et sa patrie antique,
C'est le portique ouvert sur les Cieux inconnus !

123

La Mort des artistes

Combien faut-il de fois secouer mes grelots
Et baiser ton front bas, morne caricature ?
Pour piquer dans le but, de mystique nature,
Combien, ô mon carquois, perdre de javelots ?

Nous userons notre âme en de subtils complots,
Et nous démolirons mainte lourde armature,
Avant de contempler la grande Créature
Dont l'inferral désir nous remplit de sanglots !

Il en est qui jamais n'ont connu leur Idole,
Et ces sculpteurs damnés et marqués d'un affront,
Qui vont se martelant la poitrine et le front,

N'ont qu'un espoir, étrange et sombre Capitole !
C'est que la Mort, planant comme un soleil nouveau,
Fera s'épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau !

Light on the dark horizon that we seek,
It glitters clear through tempest, snow and frost;
It is the inn that's promised in the book,
Where we shall eat, sit down and sleep at last;

It is the Angel whose magnetic hands
Hold slumber and ecstatic dreams in beds
Made fresh to bring the poor and naked home;

It is the poor man's purse, his fatherland,
The mystic grange, the glory of the gods,
The portico that leads to Heavens unknown.

123

The Death of Artists

How often must I shake my bells and kiss
Your louring brow, gloomy caricature?
To hit some target of a mystic nature
How many spears, O quiver, must I waste?

Wasted by soul-destroying schemes, we shall
Smash many armatures before we gaze
On the one Creature who consumes our days
With sobbing passion and desires from Hell.

But there are those who never knew their Idol:
These sculptors, damned and branded, put to shame,
Who go about, beating their breast and brow,

Have but one hope (a strange dark Capitol!):
That Death, a hovering new sun, will warm
The flowers of their brains and make them grow.

124

La Fin de la journée

Sous une lumière blafarde
Court, danse et se tord sans raison
La Vie, impudente et criearde.
Aussi, sitôt qu'à l'horizon

La nuit voluptueuse monte,
Apaisant tout, même la faim,
Effaçant tout, même la honte,
Le Poète se dit : « Enfin !

Mon esprit, comme mes vertèbres,
Invoque ardemment le repos ;
Le cœur plein de songes funèbres,

Je vais me coucher sur le dos
Et me rouler dans vos rideaux,
Ô rafraîchissantes ténèbres ! »

125

Le Rêve d'un curieux

À EN.

Connais-tu, comme moi, la douleur savoureuse,
Et de toi fais-tu dire : « Oh ! l'homme singulier ! »
— J'allais mourir. C'était dans mon âme amoureuse,
Désir mêlé d'horreur, un mal particulier ;

Angoisse et vif espoir, sans humeur factieuse.
Plus allait se vidant le fatal sablier,
Plus ma torture était âpre et délicieuse ;
Tout mon cœur s'arrachait au monde familial.

124

The End of the Day

She dances madly here and there
In the pallid evening light,
Life bold and shrill, without a care:
But when voluptuous night

Mounts up from the horizon's rim,
Soothing all passions, bringing rest
Even to hunger, even shame,
The Poet tells himself: "At last!

My spirit, like my backbone, hurts,
It craves and calls for some respite;
While gloomy dreams oppress my heart,

I shall stretch out upon the bed,
And roll in your refreshing shades,
O curtains of the night!"

125

The Dream of a Curious Man

To F.N.

Do you share my delicious pain, and shall
Men say of you: "What a strange type he is!"
— I was about to die. In my loving soul
Were desire and horror, a peculiar sickness;

Anguish and hope: I took it in good part.
The more the fatal hourglass sank, the more
My torture brought pleasure and pain; my heart
Wrenched itself free of the familiar world.

J'étais comme l'enfant avide du spectacle,
Haïssant le rideau comme on hait un obstacle...
Enfin la vérité froide se révéla :

J'étais mort sans surprise, et la terrible aurore
M'enveloppait. — Eh quoi ! n'est-ce donc que cela ?
La toile était levée et j'attendais encore.

126

Le Voyage

À Maxime Du Camp

I

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah ! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes !
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit !

Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers,
Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,
Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers :

Les uns, joyeux de fuir une patrie infâme ;
D'autres, l'horreur de leurs berceaux, et quelques-uns,
Astrologues noyés dans les yeux d'une femme,
La Circé tyrannique aux dangereux parfums.

Pour n'être pas changés en bêtes, ils s'enivrent
D'espace et de lumière et de cieux embrasés ;
La glace qui les mord, les soleils qui les cuivrent,
Effacent lentement la marque des baisers.

I was like a child, keen for the show to start,
Hating the curtain that was in the way..
And then at last the bare cold truth came out:

I had died without surprise, the ghastly grey
Of dawn enveloped me. – What! Is that all?
The curtain was raised and I was waiting still.

126

The Voyage

For Maxime Du Camp

I

For the child, in love with maps and coloured prints,
The universe matches his vast appetite.
How great the world is in the lamplight's glow!
And how the world is small in memory's sight!

One morning we set out, our brains on fire;
With rancorous hearts and bitter longings we
Follow the rhythm of the waves, and lull
Our own infinity on the finite sea:

Some of us glad to quit a shameless homeland,
And some a ruined childhood; then there are
Astrologers that flee the scent of danger
Left by some tyrant Circe in the air.

Lest they be changed to beasts, they drug themselves
With space and light and with the blazing skies;
The biting ice, the sun that burns their skin
Efface the signs that kisses left as scars.

Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent
Pour partir ; cœurs légers, semblables aux ballons,
De leur fatalité jamais ils ne s'écartent,
Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours : Allons !

Ceux-là dont les désirs ont la forme des nues,
Et qui rêvent, ainsi qu'un conscrit le canon,
De vastes voluptés, changeantes, inconnues,
Et dont l'esprit humain n'a jamais su le nom !

II

Nous imitons, horreur ! la toupie et la boule
Dans leur valse et leurs bonds ; même dans nos sommeils
La Curiosité nous tourmente et nous roule,
Comme un Ange cruel qui fouette des soleils.

Singulière fortune où le but se déplace,
Et, n'étant nulle part, peut être n'importe où !
Où l'Homme, dont jamais l'espérance n'est lasse,
Pour trouver le repos court toujours comme un fou !

Notre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie ;
Une voix retentit sur le pont : « Ouvre l'œil ! »
Une voix de la hune, ardente et folle, crie :
« Amour... gloire... bonheur ! » Enfer ! c'est un écueil !

Chaque îlot signalé par l'homme de vigie
Est un Eldorado promis par le Destin ;
L'Imagination qui dresse son orgie
Ne trouve qu'un récif aux clartés du matin.

Ô le pauvre amoureux des pays chimériques !
Faut-il le mettre aux fers, le jeter à la mer,
Ce matelot ivrogne, inventeur d'Amériques
Dont le mirage rend le gouffre plus amer ?

But the true travellers are those who leave
For leaving's sake; their hearts light as balloons,
Still faithful to their fate, not knowing why,
They always rise and say: Let us be gone!

The longings of such men are formed like clouds;
As conscripts dream of cannons, so they dream
Of vast voluptuous joys, changing, unknown,
For which the human mind has found no name!

II

We copy (awful thought!) the ball and top
In how we bounce and waltz; even in our sleep
Tormenting Curiosity spins us round
Like suns beneath a cruel Angel's whip.

Strange destiny, where the goal is ever moving
And, being nowhere, can be anywhere;
Where Man who never loses hope keeps running
Madly to find a rest that's never there.

Our soul is a three-master seeking out
The Happy Isle; a voice resounds on deck:
"Look there!" down from the crow's nest, brave and bold:
"Love... glory... happiness!" Hell! It's a rock!

Every new island is an Eldorado
Promised by Destiny to our belief;
Our lookout Fantasy dreams up an orgy
And in the light of morning finds a reef.

Poor drunken sailor, pander to our dreams,
Inventor of Americas, must we
Clap you in irons, throw you overboard,
Since your mirage embitters our salt sea?

Tel le vieux vagabond, piétinant dans la boue,
Rêve, le nez en l'air, de brillants paradis ;
Son œil ensorcelé découvre une Capoue
Partout où la chandelle illumine un taudis.

III

Étonnants voyageurs ! quelles nobles histoires
Nous lisons dans vos yeux profonds comme les mers !
Montrez-nous les écrins de vos riches memoires,
Ces bijoux merveilleux, faits d'astres et d'éthers.

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile !
Faites, pour égayer l'ennui de nos prisons,
Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile,
Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d'horizons.

Dites, qu'avez-vous vu ?

IV

« Nous avons vu des astres
Et des flots ; nous avons vu des sables aussi ;
Et, malgré bien des chocs et d'imprévus désastres,
Nous nous sommes souvent ennuyés, comme ici.

La gloire du soleil sur la mer violette,
La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant,
Allumaient dans nos cœurs une ardeur inquiète
De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant.

Les plus riches cités, les plus grands paysages,
Jamais ne contenaient l'attrait mystérieux
De ceux que le hasard fait avec les nuages.
Et toujours le désir nous rendait soucieux !

Like some old tramp who dreams bright paradise,
Nose in the air and feet that trudge in mud,
With eyes enchanted, he finds Capua
In every candle lighting up a shed.

III

Amazing travellers! what noble stories
We find by reading in your sea-deep eyes!
Show us your coffers, rich with memories,
Those jewels made of ether and of stars.

We long to travel without steam or sail:
Come, cheer us in the tedium of our prison,
Project on the taut canvas of our souls
Your memories framed by some remote horizon.

Tell us, what have you seen?

IV

“We have seen stars
And waves, of course, and sandy deserts too;
And yet, for all the shocks and unforeseen
Disasters, we were often bored like you.

The glorious sunshine on the violet sea,
The glorious cities in the setting sun,
Kindled a restless yearning in our hearts
To soar into those skies that urged us on.

The richest cities and the broadest landscapes
Never possessed the elusive strange allure
That chance confers upon the passing clouds.
Desire would always make us more unsure.

— La jouissance ajoute au désir de la force.
Désir, vieil arbre à qui le plaisir sert d'engrais,
Cependant que grossit et durcit ton écorce,
Tes branches veulent voir le soleil de plus près !

Grandiras-tu toujours, grand arbre plus vivace
Que le cyprès ? — Pourtant nous avons, avec soin,
Cueilli quelques croquis pour votre album vorace,
Frères qui trouvez beau tout ce qui vient de loin !

Nous avons salué des idoles à trompe ;
Des trônes constellés de bijoux lumineux ;
Des palais ouvragés dont la féerique pompe
Serait pour vos banquiers un rêve ruineux ;

Des costumes qui sont pour les yeux une ivresse ;
Des femmes dont les dents et les ongles sont teints,
Et des jongleurs savants que le serpent caresse. »

V

Et puis, et puis encore ?

VI

« Ô cerveaux enfantins !

Pour ne pas oublier la chose capitale,
Nous avons vu partout, et sans l'avoir cherché,
Du haut jusques en bas de l'échelle fatale,
Le spectacle ennuyeux de l'immortel péché :

La femme, esclave vile, orgueilleuse et stupide,
Sans rire s'adorant et s'aimant sans dégoût ;
L'homme, tyran goulé, paillard, dur et cupide,
Esclave de l'esclave et ruisseau dans l'égout ;

– Enjoyment gives desire new sap, and pleasure
Is the manure that feeds desire's old tree;
For while the bark grows thick and hard, the branches
Reach up to see the sunshine and the sky.

Great tree, more hardy than the cypress, will
You keep on growing? – Well, we took great care
To make some sketches for our brothers who
Think that all beauty must come from afar.

We have bowed down to elephantine idols;
Seen thrones where studded jewels flash and gleam,
Vast palaces whose faerie pomp would be
Your banker's version of a ruinous dream;

Costumes that are a rapture for the eyes,
Wise fakirs charming snakes who work and wind,
Women who paint their fingernails and teeth.”

V

And then, and then what else?

VI

“O childish minds!

Let's not forget the essential: what we found
Was not what we were seeking, but one thing:
From top to bottom of the fatal scale
The tedious spectacle of immortal sin:

Woman, a wretched slave, stupid and proud,
Mirthless self-worshipper and coarse self-lover;
Man, a crude tyrant, lecher, miser, glutton,
Slave to a slave, a rivulet in a sewer;

Le bourreau qui jouit, le martyr qui sanglote ;
La fête qu'assaisonne et parfume le sang ;
Le poison du pouvoir énervant le despote,
Et le peuple amoureux du fouet abrutissant ;

Plusieurs religions semblables à la nôtre,
Toutes escaladant le ciel ; la Sainteté,
Comme en un lit de plume un délicat se vautre,
Dans les clous et le crin cherchant la volupté ;

L'Humanité bavarde, ivre de son génie,
Et, folle maintenant comme elle était jadis,
Criant à Dieu, dans sa furibonde agonie :
« Ô mon semblable, ô mon maître, je te maudis ! »

Et les moins sots, hardis amants de la Démence,
Fuyant le grand troupeau parqué par le Destin,
Et se réfugiant dans l'opium immense !
— Tel est du globe entier l'éternel bulletin. »

VII

Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage !
Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd'hui,
Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image :
Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui !

Faut-il partir ? rester ? Si tu peux rester, reste ;
Pars, s'il le faut. L'un court, et l'autre se tapit
Pour tromper l'ennemi vigilant et funeste,
Le Temps ! Il est, hélas ! des coureurs sans répit,

Comme le Juif errant et comme les apôtres,
À qui rien ne suffit, ni wagon ni vaisseau,
Pour fuir ce rétiaire infâme ; il en est d'autres
Qui savent le tuer sans quitter leur berceau.

The hangman having fun, the martyr sobbing,
A feast with blood to scent and spice it up;
The despot weakened by his poisonous power,
Subjects who love the stultifying whip;

Many religions very like our own,
All storming heaven; Holiness each night
Swooning with pleasure on a couch of nails,
Like any feather-bedded sybarite;

Mankind, drunk with its genius, and mad
Now as it always has been in its course,
Cries out to God in raging agony:
'My image, O my master, take my curse!'

And some bold lovers of Insanity,
Less stupid than the sheep in Destiny's fold,
Take refuge in vast opium's embrace
– And that's your news-sheet from the whole wide world."

VII

What bitter knowledge travel brings! Dull world,
Where our own face is all we have to see,
Today, tomorrow, always – an oasis
Of horror in a desert of ennui.

Should we then leave? Or stay? Stay if you can;
Leave if you must. One runs, and one, more cunning,
Stays to cheat Time, his deadly watchful foe;
But some, alas, find no respite from running,

Like the apostles or the Wandering Jew,
Who ride or sail away, but are not able
To flee Time's odious net: and there are others
Who kill him though they never leave the cradle.

Lorsque enfin il mettra le pied sur notre échine,
Nous pourrons espérer et crier : En avant !
De même qu'autrefois nous partions pour la Chine,
Les yeux fixés au large et les cheveux au vent,

Nous nous embarquerons sur la mer des Ténèbres
Avec le cœur joyeux d'un jeune passager.
Entendez-vous ces voix, charmantes et funèbres,
Qui chantent : « Par ici ! vous qui voulez manger

Le Lotus parfumé ! c'est ici qu'on vendange
Les fruits miraculeux dont votre cœur a faim ;
Venez vous enivrer de la douceur étrange
De cette après-midi qui n'a jamais de fin » ?

À l'accent familier nous devinons le spectre ;
Nos Pylades là-bas tendent leurs bras vers nous.
« Pour rafraîchir ton cœur nage vers ton Électre ! »
Dit celle dont jadis nous baisions les genoux.

VIII

Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps ! levons l'ancre !
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort ! Appareillons !
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons !

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte !
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* !

But even when his foot is on our spine
We still can hope and cry: We're outward bound!
Just as we did when we embarked for China,
With seaward gaze and hair loose to the wind,

We shall set sail upon the Sea of Darkness
With a young passenger's untamed joyful heart.
Say, can you hear those deadly siren voices
That sing: "Come here, all you who wish to eat

The fragrant Lotus; this is where we cull
The magic fruit that sates your hungry mind:
Steep yourselves in its flavour, strange and sweet,
On this still afternoon that has no end"?

We know each ghost by the familiar accent,
Our Pylades stretching his arms towards us.
"To cool your heart, swim out to your Electra!" –
That voice of one whose knees we used to kiss!

VIII

O Death, old captain, time to raise the anchor!
This country wearies us, O Death! Set sail!
Even though sky and sea are black as ink,
The hearts you know are bright and will prevail.

Pour us your poison to restore our strength;
A fire burns our brains with longing to
Plunge in the deep, in Heaven or Hell, who cares!
The depths of the Unknown, to find the *new*!

Wreckage

(Les Épaves, 1866)

1

Le Coucher du soleil romantique

Que le Soleil est beau quand tout frais il se lève,
Comme une explosion nous lançant son bonjour !
— Bienheureux celui-là qui peut avec amour
Saluer son coucher plus glorieux qu'un rêve !

Je me souviens !... J'ai vu tout, fleur, source, sillon,
Se pâmer sous son œil comme un cœur qui palpite...
— Courons vers l'horizon, il est tard, courons vite,
Pour attraper au moins un oblique rayon !

Mais je poursuis en vain le Dieu qui se retire ;
L'irrésistible Nuit établit son empire,
Noire, humide, funeste et pleine de frissons ;

Une odeur de tombeau dans les ténèbres nage,
Et mon pied peureux froisse, au bord du marécage,
Des crapauds imprévus et de froids limaçons.

1
The Setting of the
Romantic Sun

How splendid is the sun when its fresh gleam
Explodes upon us, bidding us good day!
– Happy are those who with such love can greet
The sun that sets, more glorious than a dream.

Spring, flower, furrow – I have seen them all,
Swooning beneath his eye like a beating heart...
– To the horizon, quick, let's not be late,
To catch one ray in its last slanting fall.

In vain I follow the retreating God,
Inexorable Night restores its sway,
Black, damp and dreary, shuddering with dread;

Some odour of the grave floats in the shade,
And, edging past the swamp, my footsteps brush
Cold slugs and unexpected toads.

PIÈCES CONDAMNÉES

2

Lesbos

Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques,
Lesbos, où les baisers, languissants ou joyeux,
Chauds comme les soleils, frais comme les pastèques,
Font l'ornement des nuits et des jours glorieux ;
Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques,

Lesbos, où les baisers sont comme les cascades
Qui se jettent sans peur dans les gouffres sans fonds,
Et courent, sanglotant et gloussant par saccades,
Orageux et secrets, fourmillants et profonds ;
Lesbos, où les baisers sont comme les cascades !

Lesbos, où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,
Où jamais un soupir ne resta sans écho,
À l'égal de Paphos les étoiles t'admirent,
Et Vénus à bon droit peut jalouser Sapho !
Lesbos, où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,

Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses,
Qui font qu'à leurs miroirs, stérile volupté !
Les filles aux yeux creux, de leurs corps amoureuses,
Caressent les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité ;
Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses,

CONDEMNED POEMS

2

Lesbos

Mother of Latin games and Grecian pleasures,
Where kisses, source of languor or delight,
Warmer than suns and cool as watermelons,
Enhance the glories of the day and night,
Mother of Latin games and Grecian pleasures,

Lesbos, where kisses are like fearless falls
That leap into unfathomed caves with sounds
That ripple, sob and laugh in sudden bursts,
Stormy and secret, swarming underground,
Lesbos, where kisses are like fearless falls!

Lesbos, where two sweet Phrynes clasp each other,
Where no one sighs without some echoing sigh,
The stars admire you no less than Paphos,
And Venus envies Sappho, and knows why.
Lesbos, where two sweet Phrynes clasp each other,

Lesbos, where in the sultry languorous night
Hollow-eyed girls before the looking glass
Make love to their own bodies – sterile pleasure
In nubile fruits now ripe for that caress;
Lesbos, a land of sultry languorous nights,

Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'œil austère ;
 Tu tires ton pardon de l'excès des baisers,
 Reine du doux empire, aimable et noble terre,
 Et des raffinements toujours inépuisés.
 Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'œil austère.

Tu tires ton pardon de l'éternel martyr,
 Infligé sans relâche aux cœurs ambitieux,
 Qu'attire loin de nous le radieux sourire
 Entrevu vaguement au bord des autres cieux !
 Tu tires ton pardon de l'éternel martyr !

Qui des Dieux osera, Lesbos, être ton juge
 Et condamner ton front pâli dans les travaux,
 Si ses balances d'or n'ont pesé le déluge
 De larmes qu'à la mer ont versé tes ruisseaux ?
 Qui des Dieux osera, Lesbos, être ton juge ?

Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste ?
 Vierges au cœur sublime, honneur de l'archipel,
 Votre religion comme une autre est auguste,
 Et l'amour se rira de l'Enfer et du Ciel !
 Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste ?

Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre
 Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs,
 Et je fus dès l'enfance admis au noir mystère
 Des rires effrénés mêlés aux sombres pleurs ;
 Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre.

Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,
 Comme une sentinelle à l'œil perçant et sûr,
 Qui guette nuit et jour brick, tartane ou frégate,
 Dont les formes au loin frissonnent dans l'azur ;
 Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate

Forget old Plato's strict censorious frown,
 Your pardon's sealed by one excessive kiss,
 Queen of this empire, sweet and noble land,
 And by unending subtleties of bliss.
 Forget old Plato's strict censorious frown.

Your pardon's sealed by the long martyrdom
 Inflicted on aspiring souls who sigh
 After the radiant smile that lures them on,
 Glimpsed at the margin of some alien sky.
 Your pardon's sealed by the long martyrdom.

What God will dare, Lesbos, to be your judge
 And sentence your pale brow to infamy
 Unless his golden scales have weighed the flood
 Of tears your streams have swept into the sea?
 What God will dare, Lesbos, to be your judge?

What are the laws of right and wrong to us?
 High-hearted virgins, glory of this isle,
 Your creed is no less august than another,
 And Hell and Heaven make true lovers smile.
 What are the laws of right and wrong to us?

Lesbos has chosen me alone on earth
 To sing these flowering virgins' secret love,
 And as a child I knew the mystery
 Of how slow tears blend with a frantic laugh;
 Lesbos has chosen me alone on earth.

Since then I watch on the Leucadian peak
 Like some sharp sentinel with piercing eye
 Who sees the shapes of frigate, galley, skiff,
 Hang trembling in the blue as they sail by;
 Since then I watch on the Leucadian peak,

Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne,
 Et parmi les sanglots dont le roc retentit
 Un soir ramènera vers Lesbos, qui pardonne,
 Le cadavre adoré de Sapho, qui partit
 Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne !

De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète.
 Plus belle que Vénus par ses mornes pâleurs !
 — L'œil d'azur est vaincu par l'œil noir que tachète
 Le cercle ténébreux tracé par les douleurs
 De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète !

— Plus belle que Vénus se dressant sur le monde
 Et versant les trésors de sa sérénité
 Et le rayonnement de sa jeunesse blonde
 Sur le vieil Océan de sa fille enchanté ;
 Plus belle que Vénus se dressant sur le monde !

— De Sapho qui mourut le jour de son blasphème,
 Quand, insultant le rite et le culte inventé,
 Elle fit son beau corps la pâture suprême
 D'un brutal dont l'orgueil punit l'impiété
 De celle qui mourut le jour de son blasphème.

Et c'est depuis ce temps que Lesbos se lamente,
 Et, malgré les honneurs que lui rend l'univers,
 S'enivre chaque nuit du cri de la tourmente
 Que poussent vers les cieux ses rivages déserts !
 Et c'est depuis ce temps que Lesbos se lamente !

Hoping to find some mercy in the waves
 That, amid rocks re-echoing the sound
 Of sobs, may bring her body home to Lesbos –
 Sappho, forgiven and adored, who drowned,
 Hoping to find some mercy in the waves.

Sappho, male force in poetry and love,
 Fairer than blue-eyed Venus in the glade
 Whose azure glance yields to that pallid face
 And eyes that pain has circled with a shade;
 Sappho, male force in poetry and love.

– Fairer than Venus rising on the world
 And raining down her gifts serene and mild
 And all the radiance of her golden youth
 On father Ocean, spellbound by his child;
 Fairer than Venus rising on the world.

– Sappho who died the day that she blasphemed
 And, scorning her own rites and mystery,
 Gave up her lovely body to a brute
 Whose pride then punished the impiety
 Of one who died the day that she blasphemed.

And since that day Lesbos laments and mourns,
 Despite such honours as the world affords,
 And every night thrills to the cry of storms
 Urged skyward from the island's barren shores!
 And since that day Lesbos laments and mourns.

3

Femmes damnées

Delphine et Hippolyte

À la pâle clarté des lampes languissantes,
Sur de profonds coussins tout imprégnés d'odeur,
Hippolyte rêvait aux caresses puissantes
Qui levaient le rideau de sa jeune candeur.

Elle cherchait, d'un œil troublé par la tempête,
De sa naïveté le ciel déjà lointain,
Ainsi qu'un voyageur qui retourne la tête
Vers les horizons bleus dépassés le matin.

De ses yeux amortis les paresseuses larmes,
L'air brisé, la stupeur, la morne volupté,
Ses bras vaincus, jetés comme de vaines armes,
Tout servait, tout paraît sa fragile beauté.

Étendue à ses pieds, calme et pleine de joie,
Delphine la couvait avec des yeux ardents,
Comme un animal fort qui surveille une proie,
Après l'avoir d'abord marquée avec les dents.

Beauté forte à genoux devant la beauté frêle,
Superbe, elle humait voluptueusement
Le vin de son triomphe, et s'allongeait vers elle,
Comme pour recueillir un doux remerciement.

Elle cherchait dans l'œil de sa pâle victime
Le cantique muet que chante le plaisir,
Et cette gratitude infinie et sublime
Qui sort de la paupière ainsi qu'un long soupir.

3

Doomed Women

Delphine and Hippolyta

In the pale glow of soft expiring lamps,
Hippolyta, on cushions steeped in scent,
Lay dreaming of the potent first caress
That stripped the veil from her young innocence;

And with a clouded look she sought the clear
Lost heaven of her old simplicity,
Like some late traveller glancing back towards
The blue horizons of a morning sky.

Her idle tears falling from weary eyes,
Dazed broken air and sensual distress,
Limp arms – abandoned arms indeed – all this
Served and enhanced her fragile loveliness.

Stretched at her feet, joyful and calm at last,
Delphine, with burning eyes, absorbed the sight,
Like a strong animal brooding on the prey
That it has marked and mastered with a bite.

Before frail beauty this strong beauty kneeling
Breathed in her triumph like a wine whose scent
Imbued her still; she leaned towards her lover
As if to gather some sweet recompense.

In her pale victim's look she sought a hymn
In silent praise of pleasure and of joy,
And gratitude, sublime and infinite,
That slips from heavy eyelids like a sigh.

— « Hippolyte, cher cœur, que dis-tu de ces choses ?
Comprends-tu maintenant qu'il ne faut pas offrir
L'holocauste sacré de tes premières roses
Aux souffles violents qui pourraient les flétrir ?

Mes baisers sont légers comme ces éphémères
Qui caressent le soir les grands lacs transparents,
Et ceux de ton amant creuseront leurs ornières
Comme des chariots ou des socs déchirants ;

Ils passeront sur toi comme un lourd attelage
De chevaux et de bœufs aux sabots sans pitié...
Hippolyte, ô ma sœur ! tourne donc ton visage,
Toi, mon âme et mon cœur, mon tout et ma moitié,

Tourne vers moi tes yeux pleins d'azur et d'étoiles !
Pour un de ces regards charmants, baume divin,
Des plaisirs plus obscurs je lèverai les voiles
Et je t'endormirai dans un rêve sans fin ! »

Mais Hippolyte alors, levant sa jeune tête :
— « Je ne suis point ingrate et ne me repens pas,
Ma Delphine, je souffre et je suis inquiète,
Comme après un nocturne et terrible repas.

Je sens fondre sur moi de lourdes épouvantes
Et de noirs bataillons de fantômes épars,
Qui veulent me conduire en des routes mouvantes
Qu'un horizon sanglant ferme de toutes parts.

Avons-nous donc commis une action étrange ?
Explique, si tu peux, mon trouble et mon effroi :
Je frissonne de peur quand tu me dis : "Mon ange !"
Et cependant je sens ma bouche aller vers toi.

– “Hippolyta, what can you say to this?
 You must not offer – understand me now –
 The sacred sacrifice of your first roses
 To those rough winds that waste them on the bough.

My kisses are as light as mayflies when
 They skim at evening over limpid lakes;
 Those of a man would trench your beauty’s field
 Like the deep furrows that a ploughshare makes;

Or like a team of horses or of oxen
 Whose pitiless hooves would crush you if you fall...
 Hippolyta, my sister, look at me,
 My heart and soul, my other self, my all,

Give me that look, rich with the sky and stars!
 For one such look, for that celestial balm,
 I would unveil the most mysterious pleasures
 And lull you to a deep and endless dream.”

But then Hippolyta, raising her young head:
 “I am not thankless, I have no regrets;
 Yet there is pain, as if some dreadful feast
 The night before had left me without rest.

I feel a host of fears come swooping down
 With legions of black ghosts who hope to lead
 My steps on ever-shifting paths, closed off
 By low horizons under skies that bleed.

Have we committed such a monstrous act?
 Can you explain my trouble and my fears?
 I shudder when you say to me: ‘My angel’;
 And yet I know my mouth still longs for yours.

Ne me regarde pas ainsi, toi, ma pensée!
 Toi que j'aime à jamais, ma sœur d'élection,
 Quand même tu serais une embûche dressée
 Et le commencement de ma perdition! »

Delphine secouant sa crinière tragique,
 Et comme trépignant sur le trépied de fer,
 L'œil fatal, répondit d'une voix despotique :
 — « Qui donc devant l'amour ose parler d'enfer ?

Maudit soit à jamais le rêveur inutile
 Qui voulut le premier, dans sa stupidité,
 S'éprenant d'un problème insoluble et stérile,
 Aux choses de l'amour mêler l'honnêteté!

Celui qui veut unir dans un accord mystique
 L'ombre avec la chaleur, la nuit avec le jour,
 Ne chauffera jamais son corps paralytique
 À ce rouge soleil que l'on nomme l'amour !

Va, si tu veux, chercher un fiancé stupide ;
 Cours offrir un cœur vierge à ses cruels baisers ;
 Et, pleine de remords et d'horreur, et livide,
 Tu me rapporteras tes seins stigmatisés...

On ne peut ici-bas contenter qu'un seul maître ! »
 Mais l'enfant, épanchant une immense douleur,
 Cria soudain : « — Je sens s'élargir dans mon être
 Un abîme béant ; cet abîme est mon cœur !

Brûlant comme un volcan, profond comme le vide !
 Rien ne rassasiera ce monstre gémissant
 Et ne rafraîchira la soif de l'Euménide
 Qui, la torche à la main, le brûle jusqu'au sang.

I cannot bear that look from you, my sister,
My chosen sister, ever in my heart,
Even if you should prove an ambush for me
And where my journey to perdition starts.”

Shaking her tragic mane, stamping her foot,
As if inspired by Apollo’s spell,
Delphine replied with an oracular voice:
“When Love stands waiting, who dares speak of Hell?

Cursed be for ever the first futile dreamer
Who in his folly brought about this long
And sterile strife by hoping to combine
Matters of love with thoughts of right and wrong!

No one who seeks a mystic harmony
Between cold darkness and the heat of day
Will ever warm his paralytic body
At love’s red sun or feel its ardent ray.

Go find some brutish lover, offer him
Your virgin heart, if you should think it best;
Then, horrified by his harsh grasp, come back
And let me see the bruises on your breasts...

In this world you can only serve one master.”
But, in her anguish, with a sudden start,
The child cried out: “I feel a deep abyss
Gaping within; is that abyss my heart?

Nothing can ever sate this groaning monster,
Boiling like a volcano, deep and void;
Nothing can quench the thirst that like a Fury,
With torch in hand, will burn my very blood.

Que nos rideaux fermés nous séparent du monde,
 Et que la lassitude amène le repos !
 Je veux m'anéantir dans ta gorge profonde
 Et trouver sur ton sein la fraîcheur des tombeaux ! »

— Descendez, descendez, lamentables victimes,
 Descendez le chemin de l'enfer éternel !
 Plongez au plus profond du gouffre, où tous les crimes,
 Flagellés par un vent qui ne vient pas du ciel,

Bouillonnent pêle-mêle avec un bruit d'orage.
 Ombres folles, courez au but de vos désirs ;
 Jamais vous ne pourrez assouvir votre rage,
 Et votre châtiment naîtra de vos plaisirs.

Jamais un rayon frais n'éclaira vos cavernes ;
 Par les fentes des murs des miasmes fiévreux
 Filtrent en s'enflammant ainsi que des lanternes
 Et pènètrent vos corps de leurs parfums affreux.

L'âpre stérilité de votre jouissance
 Altère votre soif et roidit votre peau,
 Et le vent furibond de la concupiscence
 Fait claquer votre chair ainsi qu'un vieux drapeau.

Loin des peuples vivants, errantes, condamnées,
 À travers les déserts courez comme les loups ;
 Faites votre destin, âmes désordonnées,
 Et fuyez l'infini que vous portez en vous !

Let our drawn curtains close us from the world
 And lassitude become our way to rest;
 I long to lose myself in you and find
 The coolness of the tomb upon your breast.”

– Go down, go down, you pitiable victims,
 Along the path where the damned souls are driven;
 Plunge to the bottom of the pit where crimes
 Are scourged by winds that do not come from heaven,

Swarming pell-mell, vain shades, as thunder rumbles.
 Rush to the destined goal of your desires;
 There never shall your fury be assuaged
 As all your pleasures stoke the penal fires.

No freshening ray will ever light your caves:
 Through fissures in your prison walls a faint
 Miasmic glow will filter and imbue
 Your bodies with a ghastly feverish scent.

The sterile act that crowns your bitter passion
 Will plague you with new thirst and dry your skin,
 And sudden storms of lust will make your flesh
 Clack like a tattered banner in the wind.

Far from the living, wandering and condemned,
 Run through the barren desert waste like wolves;
 Fulfil your fate, disordered souls, and flee
 The infinite you carry in yourselves!

4

Le Léthé

Viens sur mon cœur, âme cruelle et sourde,
Tigre adoré, monstre aux airs indolents ;
Je veux longtemps plonger mes doigts tremblants
Dans l'épaisseur de ta crinière lourde ;

Dans tes jupons remplis de ton parfum
Ensevelir ma tête endolorie,
Et respirer, comme une fleur flétrie,
Le doux relent de mon amour défunt.

Je veux dormir ! dormir plutôt que vivre !
Dans un sommeil aussi doux que la mort,
J'étalerai mes baisers sans remords
Sur ton beau corps poli comme le cuivre.

Pour engloutir mes sanglots apaisés
Rien ne me vaut l'abîme de ta couche ;
L'oubli puissant habite sur ta bouche,
Et le Léthé coule dans tes baisers.

À mon destin, désormais mon délice,
J'obéirai comme un prédestiné ;
Martyr docile, innocent condamné,
Dont la ferveur attise le supplice,

Je sucerais, pour noyer ma rancœur,
Le népenthès et la bonne ciguë
Aux bouts charmants de cette gorge aiguë,
Qui n'a jamais emprisonné de cœur.

4

Lethe

Come to my heart, unfeeling cruel soul,
Tigress adored, you great lethargic beast;
My fingers, thrusting into your rich mane,
Will stay there trembling for a long, long while.

I long to bury my poor aching head
In your wide underskirts, steeped in your scent,
And breathe, as if I held a withered flower,
The fading fragrance of a love that's dead.

I long to sleep, not live – to slumber in
An insubstantial dream as sweet as death,
Where I shall spread remorseless kisses on
The beauty of your polished copper skin.

There's nothing that compares with the abyss
Of your soft bed to drown and mute my pain;
Potent oblivion dwells upon your lips,
And Lethe's healing flow is in your kiss.

My destiny is now my one desire,
My fate my choice, like a predestined soul,
A docile martyr, guiltless and condemned,
Whose fervour kindles the tormenting fire;

To drown my rancour I shall put the root
Of hemlock and nepenthe to the test,
Sipped from the lovely tips of your sharp breasts
That never served as prison for a heart.

5

À celle qui est trop gaie

Ta tête, ton geste, ton air
Sont beaux comme un beau paysage ;
Le rire joue en ton visage
Comme un vent frais dans un ciel clair.

Le passant chagrin que tu frôles
Est ébloui par la santé
Qui jaillit comme une clarté
De tes bras et de tes épaules.

Les retentissantes couleurs
Dont tu parsèmes tes toilettes
Jettent dans l'esprit des poètes
L'image d'un ballet de fleurs.

Ces robes folles sont l'emblème
De ton esprit bariolé ;
Folle dont je suis affolé,
Je te hais autant que je t'aime !

Quelquefois dans un beau jardin
Où je traînais mon atonie,
J'ai senti, comme une ironie,
Le soleil déchirer mon sein ;

Et le printemps et la verdure
Ont tant humilié mon cœur,
Que j'ai puni sur une fleur
L'insolence de la Nature.

5

Too Cheerful

Your head, your gestures, and your air
Are like a lovely countryside;
Your face a sky without a cloud
When playful smiles have swept it clear.

A downcast soul would feel the charm
Of health if you should merely brush
Against him in the street – that fresh
Glow in your shoulders and your arms.

The vivid colours that enhance
Your many costumes seem designed
To fill besotted poets' minds
With visions of a flower dance.

These gaudy gowns are emblems of
Your infinite variety,
Madwoman, who has maddened me
And whom I hate no less than love.

In pleasant gardens where, oppressed,
I sometimes drag my lethargy,
I've felt, like some sharp irony,
A shaft of sunlight pierce my breast;

Humiliated by the power
Of Nature's green and growing things,
I cursed the insolence of spring
And took revenge upon a flower.

Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et, vertigineuse douceur !
À travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T'infuser mon venin, ma sœur !

6

Les Bijoux

La très chère était nue, et, connaissant mon cœur,
Elle n'avait gardé que ses bijoux sonores,
Dont le riche attirail lui donnait l'air vainqueur
Qu'ont dans leurs jours heureux les esclaves des Mores.

Quand il jette en dansant son bruit vif et moqueur,
Ce monde rayonnant de métal et de pierre
Me ravit en extase, et j'aime à la fureur
Les choses où le son se mêle à la lumière.

Elle était donc couchée et se laissait aimer,
Et du haut du divan elle souriait d'aise
À mon amour profond et doux comme la mer,
Qui vers elle montait comme vers sa falaise.

And so, when darkness favours pleasures,
Like a base coward, I would creep
With silent steps to where you sleep,
And view your body's secret treasures;

And there fulfil my hidden wish
To bruise your breast and pierce your side
With a deep wound, gaping and wide,
To punish your too happy flesh,

And then, O dizzying sweetness! through
Those new red lips with their fresh lustre,
Infuse into your veins, dear sister,
The poison I reserve for you.

6

The Jewels

My beloved was naked and, knowing my heart,
Wore nothing but her jewels, whose display,
Sounding and rich, gave her the conquering look
Of Moorish odalisques on lucky days.

The lively mocking dancing noise it makes,
That world of stone and metal, hard and bright,
Thrills me to ecstasy; I burn with passion
For everything where sound combines with light.

So she lay there and let herself be loved,
And, from her couch, smiled down on me, as if
My deep and tender love were a great tide
Rising towards her, mounting to a cliff.

Les yeux fixés sur moi, comme un tigre dompté,
 D'un air vague et rêveur elle essayait des poses,
 Et la candeur unie à la lubricité
 Donnait un charme neuf à ses métamorphoses ;

Et son bras et sa jambe, et sa cuisse et ses reins,
 Polis comme de l'huile, onduleux comme un cygne,
 Passaient devant mes yeux clairvoyants et sereins ;
 Et son ventre et ses seins, ces grappes de ma vigne,

S'avançaient, plus câlins que les Anges du mal,
 Pour troubler le repos où mon âme était mise,
 Et pour la déranger du rocher de cristal
 Où, calme et solitaire, elle s'était assise.

Je croyais voir unis par un nouveau dessin
 Les hanches de l'Antiope au buste d'un imberbe,
 Tant sa taille faisait ressortir son bassin.
 Sur ce teint fauve et brun le fard était superbe !

— Et la lampe s'étant résignée à mourir,
 Comme le foyer seul illuminait la chambre,
 Chaque fois qu'il poussait un flamboyant soupir,
 Il inondait de sang cette peau couleur d'ambre !

7

Les Métamorphoses du vampire

La femme cependant, de sa bouche de fraise,
 En se tordant ainsi qu'un serpent sur la braise,
 Et pétrissant ses seins sur le fer de son busc,
 Laissait couler ces mots tout imprégnés de musc :
 — « Moi, j'ai la lèvre humide, et je sais la science
 De perdre au fond d'un lit l'antique conscience.

Eyes fixed on me, like those of a tamed tiger,
 Dreaming, she tried one or another pose;
 And candour linked with the lascivious
 Gave a new charm to every shape she chose;

And her arms and her legs, her thighs, her loins,
 Oiled smooth and undulating like a swan,
 Passed on before my clear prophetic eyes;
 And belly and breasts, the clusters of my vine,

More tempting than the Evil Angels, thrust
 Forward to break the rest my soul had found
 And shift it from the quiet crystal rock
 Where, distant and aloof, it sat enthroned.

It was as if some strange design had joined
 Antiope's hips to the bust of a boy,
 So proudly did her waist project her loins.
 On that dark skin her painting was a joy!

– And now the ailing lamp was left to die,
 So that the room was lit by the fire alone,
 And every time it heaved a flaming sigh,
 A wash of blood suffused her amber skin.

7

Metamorphoses of the Vampire

The woman, meanwhile, stretches and uncoils,
 Twists like a snake who writhes on burning coals,
 Kneading her breast against her rigid stays,
 As with her scented strawberry mouth she says:
 “My lips are moist; my skills have often led
 Old Conscience to be smothered in my bed;

Je sèche tous les pleurs sur mes seins triomphants,
 Et fais rire les vieux du rire des enfants.
 Je remplace, pour qui me voit nue et sans voiles,
 La lune, le soleil, le ciel et les étoiles !
 Je suis, mon cher savant, si docte aux voluptés,
 Lorsque j'étouffe un homme en mes bras redoutés,
 Ou lorsque j'abandonne aux morsures mon buste,
 Timide et libertine, et fragile et robuste,
 Que sur ces matelas qui se pâment d'émoi,
 Les anges impuissants se damneraient pour moi ! »

Quand elle eut de mes os sucé toute la moelle,
 Et que languissamment je me tournai vers elle
 Pour lui rendre un baiser d'amour, je ne vis plus
 Qu'une outre aux flancs gluants, toute pleine de pus !
 Je fermai les deux yeux, dans ma froide épouvante,
 Et quand je les rouvris à la clarté vivante,
 À mes côtés, au lieu du mannequin puissant
 Qui semblait avoir fait provision de sang,
 Tremblaient confusément des débris de squelette,
 Qui d'eux-mêmes rendaient le cri d'une girouette
 Ou d'une enseigne, au bout d'une tringle de fer,
 Que balance le vent pendant les nuits d'hiver.

On my triumphant breast tears turn to joys
 And old men sport and laugh like little boys.
 For those who see me naked, I replace
 The sun, the moon, and the vast starry space.
 I am, dear sage, so studied in my charms
 That when I smother men in my dread arms
 Or sacrifice my breast to their keen bite
 With timid joy or lecherous delight,
 On mattresses soaked through with ecstasy,
 Angels would fall and damn themselves for me!”

When she had sucked the marrow from my bones
 And, to repay her kisses with my own,
 I idly turned, what greeted me was this:
 A greasy leather flask, dripping with pus!
 I closed my eyes in shuddering cold fright;
 Yet when again they opened to the light,
 I found no potent dummy in my bed,
 Sated with blood, but lying there instead
 Scraps of a skeleton, jumbled scant remains,
 That creaked their protest like a weathervane,
 Or like a shop sign's rusty iron song,
 Swung out by winds in winter all night long.

GALANTERIES

8

Le Jet d'eau

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante !
Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,
Dans cette pose nonchalante
Où t'a surprise le plaisir.
Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,
Entretient doucement l'extase
Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.

La gerbe épanouie
En mille fleurs,
Où Phœbé réjouie
Met ses couleurs,
Tombe comme une pluie
De larges pleurs.

Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie
L'éclair brûlant des voluptés
S'élance, rapide et hardie,
Vers les vastes cieux enchantés.
Puis, elle s'épanche, mourante,
En un flot de triste langueur,
Qui par une invisible pente
Descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.

GALLANTRIES

8

The Fountain

Close your tired eyes, poor lover,
Let time pass, but keep them closed,
As they were when sudden pleasure
Caught you in that casual pose.
In the courtyard day and night
The fountain plays incessantly,
Prolonging what this evening brought
Of love and liquid ecstasy.

The spray widens out
In a thousand flowers,
Where Phoebe delights
To lavish her colours;
Then falls with the weight
Of tearful showers.

And even so your fiery soul,
Burned by its ardent raptures, flies
Hurtling heavenward, swift and bold,
Up to the vast enchanted skies.
Then, in the air diffused, it fails,
Descending from its watery height,
As, with a languid dying fall,
It drenches down into my heart.

La gerbe épanouie
En mille fleurs,
Où Phœbé réjouie
Met ses couleurs,
Tombe comme une pluie
De larges pleurs.

Ô toi, que la nuit rend si belle,
Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers tes seins,
D'écouter la plainte éternelle
Qui sanglote dans les bassins !
Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,
Arbres qui frissonnez autour,
Votre pure mélancolie
Est le miroir de mon amour.

La gerbe épanouie
En mille fleurs,
Où Phœbé réjouie
Met ses couleurs,
Tombe comme une pluie
De larges pleurs.

9

Les Yeux de Berthe

Vous pouvez mépriser les yeux les plus célèbres,
Beaux yeux de mon enfant, par où filtre et s'enfuit
Je ne sais quoi de bon, de doux comme la Nuit !
Beaux yeux, versez sur moi vos charmantes ténèbres !

Grands yeux de mon enfant, arcanes adorés,
Vous ressemblez beaucoup à ces grottes magiques
Où, derrière l'amas des ombres léthargiques,
Scintillent vaguement des trésors ignorés !

The spray widens out
In a thousand flowers,
Where Phoebe delights
To lavish her colours;
Then falls with the weight
Of tearful showers.

Queen of the night, I love to lean
Sweetly towards your breasts and hear
The fountain sobbing on the stone
And weeping its eternal tears.
Blessed night! The moon looks coldly down,
Trees shiver, sounding waters move;
This perfect melancholy scene
Is the pure mirror of my love.

The spray widens out
In a thousand flowers,
Where Phoebe delights
To lavish her colours;
Then falls with the weight
Of tearful showers.

9

The Eyes of Berthe

No lovely eyes can rival yours, my child,
There's something that escapes from them, then fades,
Something that's like the Night, gentle and mild:
Drown me, dark eyes, in your enticing shades.

My child's wide eyes, great mysteries adored,
How you resemble those enchanted caves
Where dense lethargic shadows fail to hide
The magic glitter of a treasure trove!

Mon enfant a des yeux obscurs, profonds et vastes,
Comme toi, Nuit immense, éclairés comme toi !
Leurs feux sont ces pensers d'Amour, mêlés de Foi,
Qui pétillent au fond, voluptueux ou chastes.

10

Hymne

À la très chère, à la très belle
Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en l'immortalité !

Elle se répand dans ma vie
Comme un air imprégné de sel,
Et dans mon âme inassouvie
Verse le goût de l'éternel.

Sachet toujours frais qui parfume
L'atmosphère d'un cher réduit,
Encensoir oublié qui fume
En secret à travers la nuit,

Comment, amour incorruptible,
T'exprimer avec vérité ?
Grain de musc qui gis, invisible,
Au fond de mon éternité !

À la très bonne, à la très belle,
Qui fait ma joie et ma santé,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en l'immortalité !

My child has eyes whose light is wide and grave
Like that of starry nights, boundless and vast;
Nourished by Faith, their fires are thoughts of Love
That sparkle deeply, sensual or chaste.

10

Hymn

To the most beautiful, most dear,
The immortal idol I adore,
Who fills my heart with radiance,
Be praises now and evermore.

Her presence permeates my life
Like salty breezes from the sea,
And in my hungry soul distils
A savour of eternity.

Fresh perfume in the air of some
Secluded and much loved retreat,
A secret censer, smoking on
Forgotten through the hours of night,

Love uncorrupted, how shall I
Express you truly? May you be
That grain of musk, invisible,
Enclosed by my eternity.

To the most lovely and most kind,
The immortal angel I adore,
Who brings me joy and heals my mind,
Be praises now and evermore.

11

Les Promesses d'un visage

J'aime, ô pâle beauté, tes sourcils surbaissés,
D'où semblent couler des ténèbres ;
Tes yeux, quoique très noirs, m'inspirent des pensées
Qui ne sont pas du tout funèbres.

Tes yeux, qui sont d'accord avec tes noirs cheveux,
Avec ta crinière élastique,
Tes yeux, languissamment, me disent : « Si tu veux,
Amant de la muse plastique,

Suivre l'espoir qu'en toi nous avons excité,
Et tous les goûts que tu professes,
Tu pourras constater notre véracité,
Depuis le nombril jusqu'aux fesses ;

Tu trouveras au bout de deux beaux seins bien lourds,
Deux larges médailles de bronze,
Et sous un ventre uni, doux comme du velours,
Bistré comme la peau d'un bonze,

Une riche toison qui, vraiment, est la sœur
De cette énorme chevelure,
Souple et frisée, et qui t'égale en épaisseur,
Nuit sans étoiles. Nuit obscure ! »

11

The Promises of a Face

I love your heavy eyebrows, O pale beauty,
 Whence flowing shadows seem to fall;
Your eyes, though very black, inspire thoughts
 That aren't funereal at all.

Your eyes, a perfect match for your black mane,
 In languid tones say: "If you choose
To follow up the hopes that we excite,
 You lover of the plastic muse,

And if you wish to satisfy at last
 The special tastes that you pursue,
You'll find that we've been truthful when you reach
 The navel and the buttocks too.

You'll find a pair of luscious heavy breasts
 With large medallions of bronze,
And, under the smooth belly, velvet-soft,
 As tawny as a Buddhist bonze,

A sister to that massive mane above,
 A supple fleece of curly hair,
Tresses as dense and black as Night itself,
 Mysterious Night without a star."

12

Le Monstre

Ou le paranymphe d'une nymphe macabre

I

Tu n'es certes pas, ma très chère,
Ce que Veillot nomme un tendron.
Le jeu, l'amour, la bonne chère,
Bouillonnent en toi, vieux chaudron!
Tu n'es plus fraîche, ma très chère,

Ma vieille infante ! Et cependant
Tes caravanes insensées
T'ont donné ce lustre abondant
Des choses qui sont très usées,
Mais qui séduisent cependant.

Je ne trouve pas monotone
La verdure de tes quarante ans ;
Je préfère tes fruits, Automne,
Aux fleurs banales du Printemps !
Non ! tu n'es jamais monotone !

Ta carcasse a des agréments
Et des grâces particulières ;
Je trouve d'étranges piments
Dans le creux de tes deux salières ;
Ta carcasse a des agréments !

Nargue des amants ridicules
Du melon et du giraumont !
Je préfère tes clavicules
À celles du roi Salomon,
Et je plains ces gens ridicules !

12

The Monster

Or in Praise of a Macabre Nymph

I

You're absolutely not, my dear,
What Veuillot calls a tender shoot;
Love, gambling, plenty of good cheer,
Have boiled too long in your old pot!
You're not exactly fresh, my dear,

My old princess! Yet all the same,
With crazy days and wilder nights,
You've got some lustre from the game;
It's use that makes old objects bright
And stay seductive all the same.

I'm never bored by what you bring,
The special tang that says you're forty;
They're so banal, those flowers of spring;
I much prefer the fruits of autumn.
No, I'm not bored by what you bring.

Strange how your carcass still entices
With charms I find in you alone;
I think some rare exotic spices
Lie hidden in your collarbones;
Strange how your carcass still entices.

The devil take that foolish lover
Who plumps for pumpkin or for melon;
The clavicles my hands discover
Are something that I'd rather dwell on;
I pity such a foolish lover.

Tes cheveux, comme un casque bleu,
Ombragent ton front de guerrière,
Qui ne pense et rougit que peu,
Et puis se sauvent par derrière,
Comme les crins d'un casque bleu.

Tes yeux qui semblent de la boue,
Où scintille quelque fanal,
Ravivés au fard de ta joue,
Lancent un éclair infernal !
Tes yeux sont noirs comme la boue !

Par sa luxure et son dédain
Ta lèvre amère nous provoque ;
Cette lèvre, c'est un Eden
Qui nous attire et qui nous choque.
Quelle luxure ! et quel dédain !

Ta jambe musculeuse et sèche
Sait gravir au haut des volcans,
Et malgré la neige et la dèche
Danser les plus fougueux cancons.
Ta jambe est musculeuse et sèche ;

Ta peau brûlante et sans douceur,
Comme celle des vieux gendarmes,
Ne connaît pas plus la sueur
Que ton œil ne connaît les larmes.
(Et pourtant elle a sa douceur !)

II

Sotte, tu t'en vas droit au Diable !
Volontiers j'irais avec toi,
Si cette vitesse effroyable

WRECKAGE

With that blue helmet of your hair
You seem like some wild Amazon,
Whose thoughts are fierce and blushes rare;
And on your neck some wisps hang down
From that blue helmet of your hair.

Your eyes are dull and dark as mud
In lamplit streets on dreary nights,
Yet when your cheek is powdered red
They flash with an infernal light,
Your eyes as dull and black as mud.

With its lascivious lift and scorn,
Your bitter lip provokes our lust;
That lip is Eden now reborn
To wake both passion and disgust.
What sensual passion! And what scorn!

Your legs are muscular and dry,
Ready to climb volcanic peaks
And dance a cancan up on high;
Though cold and starved, they're far from weak,
Those muscular legs so tough and dry.

Your skin has nothing soft or sweet;
Burned rough like that of grenadiers,
It knows as little about sweat
As your eyes know of shedding tears
(And yet it does have something sweet!)

II

You fool, you're going straight to Hell!
I'd gladly join you. If I wait,
It's that your speed's enough to quell

Ne me causait pas quelque émoi.
Va-t'en donc, toute seule, au Diable!

Mon rein, mon poumon, mon jarret
Ne me laissent plus rendre hommage
À ce Seigneur, comme il faudrait.
« Hélas! c'est vraiment bien dommage! »
Disent mon rein et mon jarret.

Oh! très sincèrement je souffre
De ne pas aller aux sabbats,
Pour voir, quand il pète du soufre,
Comment tu lui baises son cas!
Oh! très sincèrement je souffre!

Je suis diablement affligé
De ne pas être ta torchère,
Et de te demander congé,
Flambeau d'enfer! Juge, ma chère,
Combien je dois être affligé,

Puisque depuis longtemps je t'aime,
Étant très logique! En effet,
Voulant du Mal chercher la crème
Et n'aimer qu'un monstre parfait,
Vraiment oui! vieux monstre, je t'aime!

13

Franciscæ meæ laudes

*Vers composés pour une modiste érudite et dévote
(Voir ci-dessus, Les Fleurs du Mal, 60.)*

My ardour, and I hesitate.
So go to Hell all by yourself.

My kidneys, lungs and my shrunk shanks
Prevent me giving, as I should,
The Lord of Hell due praise and thanks.
“It’s such a shame, we wish we could,”
So say my kidneys and shrunk shanks.

The Witches’ Sabbath! How I suffer
Because I can’t be there to pick
A place where Satan farts his sulphur
And see you bend to kiss his prick!
Believe me when I say I suffer.

It does afflict me hellishly
That I’m not fit enough to bear
Your torch and that I take, you see,
My leave from your infernal flare.
Judge how afflicted I must be,

For if I’ve loved so long, it’s true
To say that’s logical and your due;
The cream of Evil I pursue
Demands a perfect monster – You!
Yes, you old monster, I love you.

13

Franciscae meæ laudes

*Lines composed for a learned and devout dressmaker
(See Les Fleurs du Mal, 60)*

ÉPIGRAPHES

14

Vers pour le portrait de
M. Honoré Daumier

Celui dont nous t'offrons l'image,
Et dont l'art, subtil entre tous,
Nous enseigne à rire de nous,
Celui-là, lecteur, est un sage.

C'est un satirique, un moqueur ;
Mais l'énergie avec laquelle
Il peint le Mal et sa séquelle,
Prouve la beauté de son cœur.

Son rire n'est pas la grimace
De Melmoth ou de Méphisto
Sous la torche de l'Alecto
Qui les brûle, mais qui nous glace.

Leur rire, hélas ! de la gaîté
N'est que la douloureuse charge ;
Le sien rayonne, franc et large,
Comme un signe de sa bonté !

EPIGRAPHS

14

On the Portrait of Honoré Daumier

The man portrayed upon this page
Has subtle skills that teach us how
To laugh at our own faults; so now,
Reader, consider him a sage.

Mockery, satire, that's his art,
And yet the vigour he has brought
To painting Evil and its fruit
Confirms the beauty of his heart.

His smile is not what we were told
Of Melmoth's or Mephisto's grin,
Burned by the Furies for their sin;
Those flaming torches leave us cold.

Their smile can have no comic sense
Except as painful parody,
While his shines bravely, broad and free,
A sign of his benevolence.

15

Lola de Valence

Entre tant de beautés que partout on peut voir,
Je comprends bien, amis, que le désir balance ;
Mais on voit scintiller en Lola de Valence
Le charme inattendu d'un bijou rose et noir.

16

Sur *Le Tasse en prison*
d'Eugène Delacroix

Le poète au cachot, débraillé, maladif,
Roulant un manuscrit sous son pied convulsif,
Mesure d'un regard que la terreur enflamme
L'escalier de vertige où s'abîme son âme.

Les rires enivrants dont s'emplit la prison
Vers l'étrange et l'absurde invitent sa raison ;
Le Doute l'environne, et la Peur ridicule,
Hideuse et multiforme, autour de lui circule.

Ce génie enfermé dans un taudis malsain,
Ces grimaces, ces cris, ces spectres dont l'essaim
Tourbillonne, ameuté derrière son oreille,

Ce rêveur que l'horreur de son logis réveille,
Voilà bien ton emblème, Âme aux songes obscurs,
Que le Réel étouffe entre ses quatre murs !

15

Lola de Valence

It's hard to say which way the heart inclines;
Beauties abound, but only Lola shows
Beauty's surprising jewel which combines
Bright blackness with the colours of the rose.

16

On Tasso in Prison
by Eugène Delacroix

Unkempt and sick, the poet in his cell,
Rolling a manuscript beneath his heel,
Looks down at the abyss with fearful stare
And counts the giddy steps that lead him there.

Wild bursts of laughter echoing through his jail
Tempt him to the absurd as reason fails,
While Doubt surrounds him and ridiculous Fear,
Ugly and multiform, pervades the air.

This genius, pent up in a filthy place,
These grimaces and howls, this crowded space,
Where, at his ear, loud spectres swarm and swirl;

This dreamer, waking to his dreadful world –
Here is your emblem, dimly dreaming Soul,
Stifled by harsh Reality's four walls.

PIÈCES DIVERSES

17

La Voix

Mon berceau s'adossait à la bibliothèque,
Babel sombre, où roman, science, fabliau,
Tout, la cendre latine et la poussière grecque,
Se mêlaient. J'étais haut comme un in-folio.
Deux voix me parlaient. L'une, insidieuse et ferme,
Disait : « La Terre est un gâteau plein de douceur ;
Je puis (et ton plaisir serait alors sans terme !)
Te faire un appétit d'une égale grosseur. »
Et l'autre : « Viens ! oh ! viens voyager dans les rêves,
Au-delà du possible, au-delà du connu ! »
Et celle-là chantait comme le vent des grèves,
Fantôme vagissant, on ne sait d'où venu,
Qui caresse l'oreille et cependant l'effraie.
Je te répondis : « Oui ! douce voix ! » C'est d'alors
Que date ce qu'on peut, hélas ! nommer ma plaie
Et ma fatalité. Derrière les décors
De l'existence immense, au plus noir de l'abîme,
Je vois distinctement des mondes singuliers,
Et, de ma clairvoyance extatique victime,
Je traîne des serpents qui mordent mes souliers.
Et c'est depuis ce temps que, pareil aux prophètes,
J'aime si tendrement le désert et la mer ;
Que je ris dans les deuils et pleure dans les fêtes,
Et trouve un goût suave au vin le plus amer ;

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

17

The Voice

They leaned my cradle up against the bookcase,
Where fables, fact and fiction shared a row,
Mingled with Grecian dust and Latin ashes.
I was no taller than a folio.
Two voices spoke to me: one, clear and tempting,
Said: "Look, the Earth's a sweet enormous cake;
If pleasures without limit suit your taste,
I offer you an appetite just as great."
The other: "Come, come travel in your dreams,
Beyond the possible, beyond the known!"
It was a phantom with a voice that seemed
To come from barren strands where winds make moan,
Caressing and yet frightening the ear.
I answered: "Yes, sweet voice" – that was when first
I felt, alas, the wound that has become
My fatal destiny. Behind the vast
Decor of our existence, in the dark
Abyss, I clearly see outlandish worlds,
And, as a victim of my own rapt vision,
I walk with serpents biting at my heels.
And it is since that time that like the prophets
I have such love for seas and desert wastes,
And weep at feasts and laugh at funerals,
And find in bitter wine the sweetest taste;

Que je prends très souvent les faits pour des mensonges,
Et que, les yeux au ciel, je tombe dans des trous.
Mais la Voix me console et dit : « Garde tes songes ;
Les sages n'en ont pas d'aussi beaux que les fous ! »

18

L'Imprévu

Harpagon, qui veillait son père agonisant,
Se dit, rêveur, devant ces lèvres déjà blanches :
« Nous avons au grenier un nombre suffisant,
Ce me semble, de vieilles planches ? »

Célimène roucoule et dit : « Mon cœur est bon,
Et naturellement, Dieu m'a faite très belle. »
— Son cœur ! cœur racorni, fumé comme un jambon,
Recuit à la flamme éternelle !

Un gazetier fumeux, qui se croit un flambeau,
Dit au pauvre, qu'il a noyé dans les ténèbres :
« Où donc l'aperçois-tu, ce créateur du Beau,
Ce Redresseur que tu célèbres ? »

Mieux que tous, je connais certain voluptueux
Qui bâille nuit et jour, et se lamente et pleure,
Répétant, l'impuissant et le fat : « Oui, je veux
Être vertueux, dans une heure ! »

L'horloge, à son tour, dit à voix basse : « Il est mûr,
Le damné ! J'avertis en vain la chair infecte.
L'homme est aveugle, sourd, fragile, comme un mur
Qu'habite et que ronge un insecte ! »

And often facts appear to me as lies;
 I fall in ditches as I scan the skies.
 But then the Voice consoles me: "Keep your dreams;
 The mad dream far more sweetly than the wise."

18

The Unforeseen

Harpagon watches at his father's deathbed
 And muses as he sees those lips turn white:
 "Up in the attic there are some old planks;
 I've counted them; they'll do all right."

Célimène coos: "My heart is kind, and God,
 Of course, has made me beautiful as well."
 Her tender heart! Dried up, smoked like a ham,
 Reheated in the fires of Hell!

A foggy hack thinks he's a shining light
 And asks the poet he has smeared with mud:
 "Where do you see this Saviour you adore,
 Source of the Beautiful and Good?"

And all too well I know an impotent fop,
 A lecher yawning night and day, who vows
 With snivelling sighs: "Yes, I'll be virtuous;
 I mean to start an hour from now."

The deep-voiced clock in turn says: "He is ripe
 And damned; I warned his fetid flesh in vain.
 Man is unstable, blind and deaf, a wall
 That insects gnaw and undermine."

Et puis, Quelqu'un paraît, que tous avaient nié,
Et qui leur dit, railleur et fier : « Dans mon ciboire,
Vous avez, que je crois, assez communiqué,
À la joyeuse Messe noire ?

Chacun de vous m'a fait un temple dans son cœur ;
Vous avez, en secret, baisé ma fesse immonde !
Reconnaissez Satan à son rire vainqueur,
Énorme et laid comme le monde !

Avez-vous donc pu croire, hypocrites surpris,
Qu'on se moque du maître, et qu'avec lui l'on triche,
Et qu'il soit naturel de recevoir deux prix,
D'aller au Ciel et d'être riche ?

Il faut que le gibier paye le vieux chasseur
Qui se morfond longtemps à l'affût de la proie.
Je vais vous emporter à travers l'épaisseur,
Compagnons de ma triste joie,

À travers l'épaisseur de la terre et du roc,
À travers les amas confus de votre cendre,
Dans un palais aussi grand que moi, d'un seul bloc,
Et qui n'est pas de pierre tendre :

Car il est fait avec l'universel Pêché,
Et contient mon orgueil, ma douleur et ma gloire ! »
— Cependant, tout en haut de l'univers juché,
Un Ange sonne la victoire

De ceux dont le cœur dit : « Que béni soit ton fouet,
Seigneur ! que la douleur, ô Père, soit bénie !
Mon âme dans tes mains n'est pas un vain jouet,
Et ta prudence est infinie. »

WRECKAGE

Then Someone whom they all denied appears
And proudly mocks them: "How you all turned up
To have a jolly time at my Black Mass
And take communion from my cup!

Each of you built my temple in his heart
And kissed my arse in secret. Now behold!
Recognize Satan by his conquering laugh,
As huge and ugly as the world.

Caught in the act, you hypocrites, how could
You think to cheat the Devil of his due,
Or that it's normal to receive two prizes,
Riches galore and Heaven too?

The game must be enough to pay the hunter,
Weary with patient stalking of the prey.
I mean to sweep you off through thickest matter,
Companions of my gloomy joy,

Through thickness of the earth, thickness of rock,
Through the heaped ashes of your flesh and bone,
To where a palace stands, immense like me,
One block, not made of tender stone;

For it is built with universal Sin,
And holds my pride, my suffering, my glory!"
– And yet, perched high upon the universe
An Angel sounds the victory

Of those whose hearts declare: "Blessed be your scourge,
O Lord! O Father, may the pain be blessed!
My soul is not a plaything in your hands;
Your watchful wisdom knows no rest."

Le son de la trompette est si délicieux,
 Dans ces soirs solennels de célestes vendanges,
 Qu'il s'infiltré comme une extase dans tous ceux
 Dont elle chante les louanges.

19

La Rançon

L'homme a, pour payer sa rançon,
 Deux champs au tuf profond et riche,
 Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche
 Avec le fer de la raison ;

Pour obtenir la moindre rose,
 Pour extorquer quelques épis,
 Des pleurs salés de son front gris
 Sans cesse il faut qu'il les arrose.

L'un est l'Art, et l'autre l'Amour.
 — Pour rendre le juge propice,
 Lorsque de la stricte justice
 Paraîtra le terrible jour,

Il faudra lui montrer des granges
 Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
 Dont les formes et les couleurs
 Gagnent le suffrage des Anges.

And so delightful is the trumpet's sound
When evening comes on heaven's harvest days
That it imbues with ecstasy all those
Who hear it sing their praise.

19

The Ransom

Man tills, to pay his ancient ransom,
Two fields of deep and fertile soil;
He digs and clears them with his toil
And with the ploughshare of his reason;

The fruit of his long struggle shows
In some reluctant ears of corn;
The sweat of his grey brow alone
Waters a timid little rose.

One field is Art, the other Love.
– When comes that last tremendous day,
The only chance we have to sway
The strict impartial judge above

Will be to show him generous
Barns full of crops, abundant flowers,
Whose forms and colours have the power
To make the Angels vote for us.

20

À une Malabaraise

Tes pieds sont aussi fins que tes mains, et ta hanche
Est large à faire envie à la plus belle blanche ;
À l'artiste pensif ton corps est doux et cher ;
Tes grands yeux de velours sont plus noirs que ta chair.
Aux pays chauds et bleus où ton Dieu t'a fait naître,
Ta tâche est d'allumer la pipe de ton maître,
De pourvoir les flacons d'eaux fraîches et d'odeurs,
De chasser loin du lit les moustiques rôdeurs,
Et, dès que le matin fait chanter les platanes,
D'acheter au bazar ananas et bananes.
Tout le jour, où tu veux, tu mènes tes pieds nus,
Et fredonnes tout bas de vieux airs inconnus ;
Et quand descend le soir au manteau d'écarlate,
Tu poses doucement ton corps sur une natte,
Où tes rêves flottants sont pleins de colibris,
Et toujours, comme toi, gracieux et fleuris.
Pourquoi, l'heureuse enfant, veux-tu voir notre France,
Ce pays trop peuplé que fauche la souffrance,
Et, confiant ta vie aux bras forts des marins,
Faire de grands adieux à tes chers tamarins ?
Toi, vêtue à moitié de mousselines frêles,
Frissonnante là-bas sous la neige et les grêles,
Comme tu pleurerai tes loisirs doux et francs,
Si, le corset brutal emprisonnant tes flancs,
Il te fallait glaner ton souper dans nos fanges
Et vendre le parfum de tes charmes étranges,
L'œil pensif, et suivant, dans nos sales brouillards,
Des cocotiers absents les fantômes épars !

20

To a Malabar Girl

Your hands and feet are slim, your hips are wide
And promise more than any stiff white bride,
With that sweet body artists revel in,
And velvet eyes much blacker than your skin.
A sultry homeland gives you many tasks:
To light your master's pipe and fill the flasks
With cool fresh scented water; or to spread
Nets that will keep mosquitoes from the bed;
Each morning when the plane trees sing you are
The first to buy sweet fruits at the bazaar.
You wander freely, barefoot, all day long
Humming some half-remembered ancient song;
And when the russet-mantled sun has set,
You lay your body gently on a mat
Where flowers and humming birds go haunting through
The floating dreams with easy grace, like you.
Why is it, happy child, you seek a chance
To see our wretched overcrowded France,
Looking for safety to a strong-armed crew
And bidding your dear tamarinds adieu?
How you would shiver under snow and hail,
Half-dressed in flimsy muslin, young and frail,
And mourn the loss of simple joyful days;
Imprisoned by a corset's harsh embrace,
Obliged to sell your charms to earn your bread,
Trading exotic pleasures in the mud,
Eyes peering through our grimy fog to seize
Some glimpse of coconuts on absent trees!

BOUFFONNERIES

21

Sur les débuts d'Amina Boschetti

Au théâtre de la Monnaie, à Bruxelles

Amina bondit, — fuit, — puis voltige et sourit ;
Le Welche dit : « Tout ça, pour moi, c'est du prâcrit ;
Je ne connais, en fait de nymphes bocagères,
Que celles de *Montagne-aux-Herbes-Potagères*. »

Du bout de son pied fin et de son œil qui rit,
Amina verse à flots le délire et l'esprit ;
Le Welche dit : « Fuyez, délices mensongères !
Mon épouse n'a pas ces allures légères. »

Vous ignorez, sylphide au jarret triomphant,
Qui voulez enseigner la valse à l'éléphant,
Au hibou la gaîté, le rire à la cigogne,

Que sur la grâce en feu le Welche dit : « Haro ! »
Et que le doux Bacchus lui versant du bourgogne,
Le monstre répondrait : « J'aime mieux le faro ! »

BUFFONERIES

21

On the Debut of Amina Boschetti

At the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels

Amina leaps, turns, smiles, pretends to flee;
The Belgian says: "All this is Greek to me;
The only woodland nymphs I ever meet
Are those who hang around in Market Street."

From smiling eye down to her dainty foot,
Amina glows with ecstasy and wit;
The Belgian says: "You false delights, away!
My wife would never think of such display."

O strong-legged sylph with your triumphant glance,
You cannot teach an elephant to dance,
An owl to revel or a stork to laugh;

The Belgian sees your grace and says. "Be off!"
If Bacchus came with vintage wine, I fear,
The boor would say: "I'd rather have a beer."

22

À M. Eugène Fromentin

À propos d'un importun qui se disait son ami

Il me dit qu'il était très riche,
 Mais qu'il craignait le choléra :
 — Que de son or il était chiche,
 Mais qu'il goûtait fort l'Opéra ;

— Qu'il raffolait de la nature,
 Ayant connu monsieur Corot ;
 — Qu'il n'avait pas encor voiture,
 Mais que cela viendrait bientôt ;

— Qu'il aimait le marbre et la brique,
 Les bois noirs et les bois dorés ;
 — Qu'il possédait dans sa fabrique
 Trois contremaîtres décorés ;

— Qu'il avait, sans compter le reste,
 Vingt mille actions sur le *Nord* ;
 — Qu'il avait trouvé, pour un zeste,
 Des encadrements d'Oppenord ;

— Qu'il donnerait (fût-ce à Luzarches !)
 Dans le bric-à-brac jusqu'au cou,
 Et qu'au Marché des Patriarches
 Il avait fait plus d'un bon coup ;

— Qu'il n'aimait pas beaucoup sa femme.
 Ni sa mère ; — mais qu'il croyait
 À l'immortalité de l'âme,
 Et qu'il avait lu Niboyet !

22

To M. Eugène Fromentin

On a Bore Who Claimed to Be His Friend

He told me he was very rich,
But scared of catching cholera;
– That he was careful with his cash,
But dearly loved the Opera;

– That Nature was his driving passion
And that he knew Monsieur Corot;
– He hadn't bought a carriage yet,
But some day really would do so;

– That he loved marble, bricks as well,
Gilt wood and polished ebony;
– And that three medals had been won
By foremen in his factory.

– That he was strong in railway shares,
Worth twenty thousand in the *Nord*;
– And that he'd picked up for a song
Some nice old frames by Oppenordt;

– That he splashed out on bric-a-brac,
And found stuff even at Luzarches;
That more than once he'd got a bargain
At the Marché des Patriarches;

– That no, he didn't love his wife,
Or mother either – but he'd say
That he believed the soul immortal
And read the works of Niboyet;

— Qu'il penchait pour l'amour physique,
 Et qu'à Rome, séjour d'ennui,
 Une femme, d'ailleurs phtisique,
 Était morte d'amour pour lui.

Pendant trois heures et demie,
 Ce bavard, venu de Tournai,
 M'a dégoisé toute sa vie;
 J'en ai le cerveau consterné.

S'il fallait décrire ma peine,
 Ce serait à n'en plus finir;
 Je me disais, domptant ma haine:
 « Au moins, si je pouvais dormir! »

Comme un qui n'est pas à son aise,
 Et qui n'ose pas s'en aller,
 Je frottais de mon cul ma chaise,
 Rêvant de le faire empaler.

Ce monstre se nomme Bastogne;
 Il fuyait devant le fléau.
 Moi, je fuirai jusqu'en Gascogne,
 Ou j'irai me jeter à l'eau,

Si dans ce Paris, qu'il redoute,
 Quand chacun sera retourné,
 Je trouve encore sur ma route
 Ce fléau, natif de Tournai.

– Yet still he favoured carnal love
And once, in Rome, had played his part;
A young consumptive girl who loved him
Had perished with a broken heart.

For three long hours and a half
This blathering booby from Tournai
Spilled out the story of his life –
My head's still reeling, by the way.

I can't describe the pains I suffered,
Waiting for him to shut his trap;
I kept my anger down by thinking:
“If only I could take a nap!”

Like someone itching to clear off
Who stays because his courage failed,
I squirmed on my uneasy chair
And dreamed of seeing him impaled.

This monster (called Bastogne) would flee
The epidemic. As for me,
I'll hide in Gascony or take
A running jump into the sea

If, when we're back in Paris, where
It seems he's too afraid to stay,
I come across that pest again,
That plague, the terror of Tournai.

23

Un cabaret folâtre

Sur la route de Bruxelles à Uccle

Vous qui raffolez des squelettes
Et des emblèmes détestés,
Pour épicer les voluptés,
(Fût-ce de simples omelettes!)

Vieux Pharaon, ô Monselet!
Devant cette enseigne imprévue,
J'ai rêvé de vous : *À la vue*
Du Cimetière, Estaminet!

23

A Jolly Tavern

On the road from Brussels to Uccle

I know you relish skeletons
And emblems other folk detest,
To spice the simplest of your pleasures
(An omelette would pass the test),

And so, old Pharaoh, Monselet,
Here on the road I thought of you
Because an unexpected sign
Said: *Tavern, Cemetery View*.

Poems Added to
the Third Edition of
The Flowers of Evil

(Poèmes apportés par la
troisième édition, 1868)

1
Épigraphe
pour un livre condamné

Lecteur paisible et bucolique,
Sobre et naïf homme de bien,
Jette ce livre saturnien,
Orgiaque et mélancolique.

Si tu n'as fait ta rhétorique
Chez Satan, le rusé doyen,
Jette ! tu n'y comprendrais rien,
Ou tu me croirais hystérique.

Mais si, sans se laisser charmer,
Ton œil sait plonger dans les gouffres,
Lis-moi, pour apprendre à m'aimer ;

Âme curieuse qui souffres
Et vas cherchant ton paradis,
Plains-moi !... Sinon, je te maudis !

1
Epigraph
for a Condemned Book

Dear Reader, peaceable, bucolic,
With simple style and sober look,
I warn you, throw away this book:
It's sensual and melancholic.

Unless you've done your rhetoric
With Satan, that old cunning Dean,
Junk it! You won't know what it means,
Or else you'll think that I'm hysteric.

But if your eye, uncharmed, can pierce
And probe the deep, then scan this verse
And learn to love me as you read;

Even as you seek your paradise,
O questing suffering soul, take heed:
Pity my fate... or take my curse!

2

À Théodore de Banville

Vous avez empoigné les crins de la Déesse
Avec un tel poignet, qu'on vous eût pris, à voir
Et cet air de maîtrise et ce beau nonchaloir,
Pour un jeune ruffian terrassant sa maîtresse.

L'œil clair et plein du feu de la précocité,
Vous avez prélassé votre orgueil d'architecte
Dans des constructions dont l'audace correcte
Fait voir quelle sera votre maturité.

—Poète, notre sang nous fuit par chaque pore—
Est-ce que par hasard la robe du Centaure
Qui changeait toute veine en funèbre ruisseau

Était teinte trois fois dans les baves subtiles
De ces vindicatifs et monstrueux reptiles
Que le petit Hercule étranglait au berceau ?

3

La Prière d'un païen

Ah ! ne ralentis pas tes flammes ;
Réchauffe mon cœur engourdi,
Volupté, torture des âmes !
Diva ! supplicem exaudi !

Déesse dans l'air répandue,
Flamme dans notre souterrain !
Exauce une âme morfondue,
Qui te consacre un chant d'airain.

2

To Théodore de Banville

You seize the Goddess by her curly hair
With such a grasp, such casual mastery,
That one might easily take you to be
Some brash young bully beating up his whore.

With the precocious fire of your clear gaze
You flaunt your talents as an architect
In new constructions daringly correct
That promise greater things in riper days.

– Poet, from every pore we leak our blood –
Could it be that the Centaur's poisoned cloak,
Changing each vein into a deadly flood,

Was dyed three times, steeped in the seething pot
Of slime from those vindictive monstrous snakes
That little Hercules strangled in his cot?

3

A Pagan's Prayer

Ah, do not dampen down those flames,
But heat this frozen heart in me,
Pleasure, you torturer of souls!
Diva! supplicem exaudi!

Goddess, a presence in the air,
And in our buried lives a blaze,
Hear the despairing voice that sings
A brazen anthem in your praise.

Volupté, sois toujours ma reine!
Prends le masque d'une sirène
Fait de chair et de velours,

Ou verse-moi tes sommeils lourds
Dans le vin informe et mystique,
Volupté, fantôme élastique!

4

Le Couvercle

En quelque lieu qu'il aille, ou sur mer ou sur terre,
Sous un climat de flamme ou sous un soleil blanc,
Serviteur de Jésus, courtisan de Cythère,
Mendiant ténébreux ou Crésus rutilant,

Citadin, campagnard, vagabond, sédentaire,
Que son petit cerveau soit actif ou soit lent,
Partout l'homme subit la terreur du mystère,
Et ne regarde en haut qu'avec un œil tremblant.

En haut, le Ciel! ce mur de caveau qui l'étouffe,
Plafond illuminé pour un opéra bouffe
Où chaque histrion foule un sol ensanglanté;

Terreur du libertin, espoir du fol ermite;
Le Ciel! couvercle noir de la grande marmite
Où bout l'imperceptible et vaste Humanité.

Voluptuous pleasure, be my queen,
Put on your siren's mask again,
Fashioned of velvet and of flesh;

Pour heavy sleep into my glass
Of mystic wine, O formless ghost
Of multiform voluptuousness.

4

The Lid

Wherever he may go, by land or sea,
Under a sun enflamed or frozen white,
Servant of Christ or courtier of Venus,
Drab beggar or a Croesus shining bright,

Townsman or peasant, vagrant, stay-at-home,
Whether his little brain be slow or quick,
Man always has this fear of mystery:
The Heavens above receive a trembling look.

The Heavens above! This roof that stifles him,
Painted inside a vault where players strut
On bloodstained boards in some cheap operette;

Mad hermit's hope, dread of the libertine,
The Heavens, black lid of the great cooking pot
That boils vast imperceptible Mankind.

5

L'Examen de minuit

La pendule, sonnant minuit,
 Ironiquement nous engage
 À nous rappeler quel usage
 Nous fîmes du jour qui s'enfuit :
 — Aujourd'hui, date fatidique,
 Vendredi, treize, nous avons,
 Malgré tout ce que nous savons,
 Mené le train d'un hérétique.

Nous avons blasphémé Jésus,
 Des Dieux le plus incontestable !
 Comme un parasite à la table
 De quelque monstrueux Crésus,
 Nous avons, pour plaire à la brute,
 Digne vassale des Démons,
 Insulté ce que nous aimons
 Et flatté ce qui nous rebute ;

Contristé, servile bourreau,
 Le faible qu'à tort on méprise ;
 Salué l'énorme Bêtise,
 La Bêtise au front de taureau ;
 Baisé la stupide Matière
 Avec grande dévotion,
 Et de la putréfaction
 Béni la blafarde lumière.

Enfin, nous avons, pour noyer
 Le vertige dans le délire,
 Nous, prêtre orgueilleux de la Lyre,
 Dont la gloire est de déployer
 L'ivresse des choses funèbres,

5

Midnight Examination of Conscience

The clock strikes midnight and reminds us
 With its clear ironic chime
 To think how we have used the time
 This day that now we leave behind:
 – Today (a date I wouldn't pick
 Because it's Friday the thirteenth)
 We have, despite what we believe,
 Behaved like any heretic.

We have blasphemed against Christ Jesus
 (One god at least who's not a fable);
 And, as a scrounger at the table
 Of some inflated monstrous Croesus,
 We have, to please the wretched brute,
 Fit vassal of the Fiend below,
 Insulted what we love and know
 And flattered everything we hate.

We have put down the humble and low
 As victims of our servile scorn,
 And knelt before the exalted horns
 Of crass Stupidity's bovine brow;
 Bent to kiss mindless Matter's feet
 With great devotion, for we pay
 Our pious homage to decay
 And bless its sickly pallid light.

Lastly, to drown our vertigo
 In the delirium of a feast,
 We, the immortal Lyre's high priest,
 Whose greatest glory is to show
 The rapture morbid things can work,

Bu sans soif et mangé sans faim !...
— Vite soufflons la lampe, afin
De nous cacher dans les ténèbres !

6

Madrigal triste

I

Que m'importe que tu sois sage ?
Sois belle ! et sois triste ! Les pleurs
Ajoutent un charme au visage,
Comme le fleuve au paysage ;
L'orage rajeunit les fleurs.

Je t'aime surtout quand la joie
S'enfuit de ton front terrassé ;
Quand ton cœur dans l'horreur se noie ;
Quand sur ton présent se déploie
Le nuage affreux du passé.

Je t'aime quand ton grand œil verse
Une eau chaude comme le sang ;
Quand, malgré ma main qui te berce,
Ton angoisse, trop lourde, perce
Comme un râle d'agonisant.

J'aspire, volupté divine !
Hymne profond, délicieux !
Tous les sanglots de ta poitrine,
Et crois que ton cœur s'illumine
Des perles que versent tes yeux !

Have drunk and eaten without thirst
Or hunger in our hearts... So, quick,
Put out the lamp and hide us in the dark!

6

Sad Madrigal

I

Why should I care if you be wise?
Be lovely and be sad! A charm
Belongs to cheeks bedewed with tears,
To landscapes where a river flows;
Flowers are freshened by a storm.

I love you most when joy departs
And when your brow is overcast;
When sudden horror drowns your heart
And when your present feels the weight
Of the dark cloud that dims your past.

I love you when your great eyes shed
A stream as warm as blood; and when,
Despite my soothing hand, your dread
Breaks through, too strong to go unheard,
Like the groans of a dying man.

There is a music that I find
In all your heaving sobs and sighs,
A hymn so sensual and divine
I almost think your heart must shine
With pearls cascading from your eyes.

II

Je sais que ton cœur, qui regorge
De vieux amours déracinés,
Flamboie encor comme une forge,
Et que tu couves sous ta gorge
Un peu de l'orgueil des damnés ;

Mais tant, ma chère, que tes rêves
N'auront pas reflété l'Enfer,
Et qu'en un cauchemar sans trêves,
Songeant de poisons et de glaives,
Éprise de poudre et de fer,

N'ouvrant à chacun qu'avec crainte,
Déchiffrant le malheur partout,
Te convulsant quand l'heure tinte,
Tu n'auras pas senti l'étreinte
De l'irrésistible Dégout,

Tu ne pourras, esclave reine
Qui ne m'aimes qu'avec effroi,
Dans l'horreur de la nuit malsaine
Me dire, l'âme de cris pleine :
« Je suis ton égale, ô mon Roi ! »

7

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 ! »

II

I know that in your heart you hide
Old loves uprooted, still enflamed
As in a forge, and that you hoard
Deep in your breast some of that pride
By which the fallen souls are damned;

And yet until your dreams, my dear,
Reflect the inner Hell you feel,
Until a nightmare atmosphere
Spreads deadly poison in the air,
Visions of gunpowder and steel;

Until you tremble at a knock
Upon your door, numb with mistrust,
Fearing the chiming of the clock;
Until you know that you are locked
In irresistible Disgust,

My queen and slave, who loves me but
With terror like a fearful thing,
You cannot, in the sickly night,
Turn your soul to me and cry out:
“I am your equal, O my King!”

7

The Warning

There is a yellow serpent all men know
As long as they deserve the name of men;
It sits within the heart as on a throne,
And gives to each “I want” the answer “No”.

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.

8

Le Rebelle

Un Ange furieux fond du ciel comme un aigle,
Du mécréant saisit à plein poing les cheveux,
Et dit, le secouant : « Tu connaîtras la règle !
(Car je suis ton bon Ange, entends-tu ?) Je le veux !

Sache qu'il faut aimer, sans faire la grimace,
Le pauvre, le méchant, le tortu, l'hébété,
Pour que tu puisses faire à Jésus, quand il passe,
Un tapis triomphal avec ta charité.

Tel est l'Amour ! Avant que ton cœur ne se blase,
À la gloire de Dieu rallume ton extase ;
C'est la Volupté vraie aux durables appas ! »

Et l'Ange, châtiant autant, ma foi ! qu'il aime,
De ses poings de géant torture l'anathème ;
Mais le damné répond toujours : « Je ne veux pas ! »

Let your eyes gaze on the unblinking eyes
Of nixies and of naiads who entice:
The Serpent's Tooth will say: "Your duty first."

Make children, sculpt in marble, or plant trees,
Shape verses fit for long posterities:
And the Tooth says: "This night could be your last."

Whatever he may hope or undertake,
Man cannot live a moment and not hear
The warning ever ringing in his ear
Of the insufferable Snake.

8

The Rebel

An angry angel swoops down like an eagle,
Grasps in his fist the unbeliever's hair,
And shaking it declares: "Now learn the rule
(Because I'm your good Angel, do you hear?):

Here's what I want: you'll love – and make no faces –
Cripples and criminals, the mad, the poor:
And thus, for Jesus' triumph when he passes
Your charity will lay a carpet there.

For such is Love! Before your heart grows cool
Rekindle in God's glory all your rapture;
No sensual pleasure lasts as long as that."

The Angel loves, but punishes just as well
With giant fists that pummel the blasphemer:
Still the damned soul replies, "No, I will not."

9

Bien loin d'ici

C'est ici la case sacrée
Où cette fille très parée,
Tranquille et toujours préparée,

D'une main éventant ses seins,
Et son coude dans les coussins,
Écoute pleurer les bassins :

C'est la chambre de Dorothée.
— La brise et l'eau chantent au loin
Leur chanson de sanglots heurtée
Pour bercer cette enfant gâtée.

Du haut en bas, avec grand soin,
Sa peau délicate est frottée
D'huile odorante et de benjoin.
— Des fleurs se pâment dans un coin.

10

Le Gouffre

Pascal avait son gouffre, avec lui se mouvant.
— Hélas ! tout est abîme, — action, désir, rêve,
Parole ! et sur mon poil qui tout droit se relève
Mainte fois de la Peur je sens passer le vent.

En haut, en bas, partout, la profondeur, la grève,
Le silence, l'espace affreux et captivant...
Sur le fond de mes nuits Dieu de son doigt savant
Dessine un cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve.

9

So Far from Here

Here is the sacred hut where she,
Decked out in all her finery,
Waits tranquil, ever-ready, keeping

One elbow cushioned as she rests
Upon her side and fans her breasts
And listens to the fountains weeping:

Yes, this is Dorothea's room.
– Far off the winds and seas intone
A sighing song to lull her dream
And soothe this pampered child alone.

From head to foot strange scents perfume
Her smooth and delicate dark skin,
With precious oil and benjamin.
– In a corner flowers swoon.

10

The Abyss

Pascal's abyss moved with him everywhere.
– Alas, it is all one void – action, desire,
Dream, word. And I have often felt my hair
Standing on end, brushed by the wind of Fear.

Above, below, around, the depths, the shore,
The silence of that dread seductive space...
On my night canvas God's skilled hand has traced
A constant nightmare, vast and multiform.

J'ai peur du sommeil comme on a peur d'un grand trou,
Tout plein de vague horreur, menant on ne sait où ;
Je ne vois qu'infini par toutes les fenêtres,

Et mon esprit, toujours du vertige hanté,
Jalouse du néant l'insensibilité.
— Ah ! ne jamais sortir des Nombres et des Êtres !

11

Les Plaintes d'un Icare

Les amants des prostituées
Sont heureux, dispos et repus ;
Quant à moi, mes bras sont rompus
Pour avoir étreint des nuées.

C'est grâce aux astres nonpareils,
Qui tout au fond du ciel flamboient,
Que mes yeux consumés ne voient
Que des souvenirs de soleils.

En vain j'ai voulu de l'espace
Trouver la fin et le milieu ;
Sous je ne sais quel œil de feu
Je sens mon aile qui se casse ;

Et brûlé par l'amour du beau,
Je n'aurai pas l'honneur sublime
De donner mon nom à l'abîme
Qui me servira de tombeau.

Sleep frightens me like a great hole whose formless
Horrors lead who knows where; and all I see
Through windows is a dark infinity;

Mind dizzied, ever-falling, envious
Of the unfeeling nothingness.
– Ah, never to be free of Numbers and of Beings!

11

The Lament of an Icarus

Lovers of harlots are so calm,
Jovial, happy, satisfied;
But I, who have embraced the clouds,
Am left with tired aching arms.

Thanks to the matchless stars that burn
In the long vistas of the sky,
My eyes extinguished only see
The memories of distant suns.

In vain I sought through space to solve
The problems of its end and centre:
Scorched by some unknown eye of fire,
I felt my waxen wings dissolve;

By love of beauty so consumed,
I shall not have the honour to give
My name to the unplumbed abyss
That now will serve me as a tomb.

12

Recueillement

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.
Tu réclamaïs le Soir ; il descend ; le voici :
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,
Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.

Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,
Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,
Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main ; viens par ici,

Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défunes Années,
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées ;
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant ;

Le Soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche,
Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l'Orient,
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.

13

La Lune offensée

Ô Lune qu'adoraient discrètement nos pères,
Du haut des pays bleus où, radieux sérail,
Les astres vont te suivre en pimpant attirail,
Ma vieille Cynthia, lampe de nos repaires,

Vois-tu les amoureux sur leurs grabats prospères,
De leur bouche en dormant montrer le frais émail ?
Le poète buter du front sur son travail ?
Ou sous les gazons secs s'accoupler les vipères ?

12

Meditation

Have patience, O my Sorrow, settle down.
You longed for Evening; Evening now is here:
A dusky air falls and enfolds the town,
To some men bringing peace, to others care.

While the dull mortal crowd, sweating beneath
The whip of Pleasure and his pitiless sway,
Reaps the remorse born of some servile feast,
Give me your hand, my Sorrow, come this way,

Far from them all. See the dead Years lean out
From Heaven's balconies in faded robes;
See, rising from the deep, smiling Regret;

The dying Sun asleep beneath an arch;
And, like a long shroud trailing from the East,
Hear, love, that footfall... hear Night's soft approach.

13

The Insulted Moon

O moon, adored discreetly by our fathers,
From high in sky-blue lands where gaudy stars,
A radiant harem, follow you together,
Old Cynthia, lantern to our shady lairs,

Do you see lovers on their lucky beds
Sleeping with open mouths that show white teeth?
Or sterile poets pummelling their heads?
Or vipers coupling in the long dry grass?

Sous ton domino jaune, et d'un pied clandestin,
Vas-tu, comme jadis, du soir jusqu'au matin,
Baiser d'Endymion les grâces surannées ?

« — Je vois ta mère, enfant de ce siècle appauvri,
Qui vers son miroir penche un lourd amas d'années ;
Et plâtre artistement le sein qui t'a nourri ! »

Under your yellow mask, with stealthy paces,
Do you still go, as in the days of old,
To kiss all night Endymion's faded graces?

– “Child of this sordid age, I see your mother
Lean heavy years towards the glass she faces,
Daubing the shrivelled breast that nourished you.”

Three Early Poems

(Poésies de jeunesse)

1

Tout là-haut, tout là-haut, loin de la route sûre,
Des fermes, des vallons, par-delà les coteaux,
Par-delà les forêts, les tapis de verdure,
Loin des derniers gazons foulés par les troupeaux,

On rencontre un lac sombre encaissé dans l'abîme
Que forment quelques pics désolés et neigeux ;
L'eau, nuit et jour, y dort dans un repos sublime,
Et n'interrompt jamais son silence orageux.

Dans ce morne désert, à l'oreille incertaine
Arrivent par moments des bruits faibles et longs,
Et des échos plus morts que la cloche lointaine
D'une vache qui paît aux penchants des vallons.

Sur ces monts où le vent efface tout vestige,
Ces glaciers pailletés qu'allume le soleil,
Sur ces rochers altiers où guette le vertige,
Dans ce lac où le soir mire son teint vermeil,

Sous mes pieds, sur ma tête et partout, le silence,
Le silence qui fait qu'on voudrait se sauver,
Le silence éternel et la montagne immense.
Car l'air est immobile et tout semble rêver.

1

Up there, high up, far from the farms and vales,
Beyond the hillsides and the beaten track,
Beyond the greensward and the forest ways
And the last meadows trampled by the flock,

One finds a lake, dark, sunk in a cleft
Between the snowy solitary peaks;
There night and day the water sleeps, a rest
Sublime, whose stormy silence nothing breaks.

In that bleak waste, the listener seems to hear
Sporadic sounds, long-dying, faint and low,
Echoes more muffled than the tinkling bells
Of cattle grazing on the slopes below.

Here on these summits that the wind sweeps bare,
These glittering glaciers kindled by the sun,
These dizzy crags, this lake where the red sky
Sees its reflection when the day is done,

Under my feet, above my head, is silence,
Silence that makes one fearful to be there,
Eternal silence of the mighty mount,
For all things dream in that immobile air.

On dirait que le ciel, en cette solitude,
Se contemple dans l'onde, et que ces monts, là-bas,
Écoutent, recueillis, dans leur grave attitude,
Un mystère divin que l'homme n'entend pas.

Et lorsque par hasard une nuée errante
Assombrit dans son vol le lac silencieux,
On croirait voir la robe ou l'ombre transparente
D'un esprit qui voyage et passe dans les cieux.

2

Je n'ai pas pour maîtresse une lionne illustre ;
La Gueuse de mon âme emprunte tout son lustre.
Invisible aux regards de l'univers moqueur,
Sa beauté ne fleurit que dans mon triste cœur —

Pour avoir des souliers elle a vendu son âme ;
Mais le bon Dieu rirait si près de cette infâme
Je tranchais du Tartuffe, et singeais la hauteur,
Moi qui vends ma pensée, et qui veux être auteur.

Vice beaucoup plus grave, elle porte perruque.
Tous ses beaux cheveux noirs ont fui sa blanche nuque ;
Ce qui n'empêche pas les baisers amoureux
De pleuvoir sur son front plus pelé qu'un lépreux.

Elle louche, et l'effet de ce regard étrange,
Qu'ombragent des cils noirs plus longs que ceux d'un ange,
Est tel que tous les yeux pour qui l'on s'est damné
Ne valent pas pour moi son œil juif et cerné.

The heaven above regards its watery image,
The mountains in their solemn forms appear
Attentive to a sacred mystery
And listen to what man can never hear.

And when, perchance, a single journeying cloud
Darkens the silent lake beneath the sky,
It seems the robe or the transparent shade
Trailed by a heavenbound spirit passing by.

2

My mistress is no famous lioness:
My soul has lent her all her loveliness,
A beggar that the mocking world sees not,
Whose beauty flowers only in my heart.

She sold her soul to buy herself some shoes;
But God himself would laugh if I should choose
To play the moralist – I who have sought
To be an author and to sell my thought.

Much worse, she wears a wig; her shining black
Tresses have fled the ivory of her neck;
Yet on her brow my showered kisses fall,
Although it's balder than a leper's skull.

She squints, and that long-lashed peculiar glance
Works its effect on me – Strange consequence!
Men damn themselves for other brighter eyes,
But none are worth that dark-ringed Jewish gaze.

Elle n'a que vingt ans ; sa gorge — déjà basse
Pend de chaque côté comme une calebasse,
Et pourtant me traînant chaque nuit sur son corps,
Ainsi qu'un nouveau né, je la tête et la mords —

Et bien qu'elle n'ait pas souvent même une obole
Pour se frotter la chair et pour s'oindre l'épaule —
Je la lèche en silence avec plus de ferveur,
Que Madeleine en feu les deux pieds du Sauveur—

La pauvre créature au plaisir essoufflée
A de rauques hoquets la poitrine gonflée,
Et je devine au bruit de son souffle brutal
Qu'elle a souvent mordu le pain de l'Hôpital.

Ses grands yeux inquiets durant la nuit cruelle
Croient voir deux autres yeux au fond de la ruelle —
Car ayant trop ouvert son cœur à tous venants,
Elle a peur sans lumière et croit aux revenants.—

Ce qui fait que de suif elle use plus de livres
Qu'un vieux savant couché jour et nuit sur ses livres
Et redoute bien moins la faim et ses tourments
Que l'apparition de ses défunts amants.

Si vous la rencontrez, bizarrement parée,
Se fauflant au coin d'une rue égarée,
Et la tête et l'œil bas — comme un pigeon blessé —
Traînant dans les ruisseaux un talon déchaussé,

Messieurs, ne crachez pas de jurons ni d'ordure,
Au visage fardé de cette pauvre impure
Que déesse Famine a par un soir d'hiver
Contrainte à relever ses jupons en plein air.

She's twenty, but her breasts already sag
 And hang on both sides like two empty bags;
 But still I press her body every night
 And like a newborn baby suck and bite.

Although she can't afford a drop of scent
 Or oil to rub into her aching joints,
 I lick her with a fervour no less sweet
 Than that of Magdalen at her Saviour's feet.

Breathless with pleasure, when at last she rests,
 A brutal bout of coughing shakes her chest,
 A rasping sound that tells me she has fed
 On what the hospitals dish out as bread.

Wide-eyed and waking, shivering with fright,
 She feels strange eyes observing her at night,
 Because her heart, too often given and lost,
 Demands a lamp and lives in fear of ghosts,

So that she wastes more tallow night and day
 Than some old sage who reads his life away;
 She has less fear of hunger and its horrors
 Than of a room that's haunted by dead lovers.

If, on a drab street corner you should see
 Her slipping past in crazy finery,
 Dragging a broken heel through slime and mud,
 With head hung down like some sad wounded bird,

Gentlemen, do not spit out filth or swear
 Into the painted face of this poor whore,
 Whom Goddess Hunger once obliged to raise
 Her skirts in the cold air of winter days.

Cette bohème-là, c'est mon tout, ma richesse,
 Ma perle, mon bijou, ma reine, ma duchesse,
 Celle qui m'a bercé sur son giron vainqueur,
 Et qui dans ses deux mains a réchauffé mon cœur.

3

[À Sainte-Beuve]

Tous imberbes alors, sur les vieux bancs de chêne,
 Plus polis et luisants que des anneaux de chaîne,
 Que jour à jour la peau des hommes a fourbis,
 — Nous traînions tristement nos ennuis, accroupis
 Et voûtés sous le ciel carré des solitudes,
 Où l'Enfant boit, dix ans, l'âpre lait des études.
 — C'était dans ce vieux temps mémorable et marquant,
 Où forcés d'élargir le classique carcan,
 Les professeurs encor rebelles à vos rimes,
 Succombaient sous l'effort de nos folles escrimes,
 Et laissaient l'écolier, triomphant et mutin,
 Faire à l'aise hurler Triboulet en latin.
 — Qui de nous, en ces temps d'adolescences pâles,
 N'a connu la torpeur des fatigues claustrales,
 — L'œil perdu dans l'azur morne d'un ciel d'été,
 Ou l'éblouissement de la neige — guetté,
 L'oreille avide et droite, — et bu, comme une meute,
 L'écho lointain d'un livre, ou le cri d'une émeute ?

C'était surtout l'été, quand les plombs se fondaient,
 Que ces grands murs noircis en tristesse abondaient,
 Lorsque la canicule ou le fumeux automne
 Irradiait les cieux de son feu monotone,
 Et faisait sommeiller dans les sveltes donjons,
 Les tiercelets criards, effroi des blancs pigeons ;

I have no wealth but this wild outcast girl,
 My queen, my duchess, my best gem, my pearl,
 Who lulled me on her lap with conquering art
 And in her two hands warmed my chilly heart.

3

[To Sainte-Beuve]

All beardless then, sitting on old oak benches
 More polished than the bright rings of a chain
 Rubbed smooth day after day by prisoners' skin,
 We dragged our troubles after us, bent down,
 Lonely beneath square patches of the sky,
 Where the child drinks the sour milk of study
 For ten long years. – Old unforgotten days
 When, forced to loosen the tight syllabus,
 Reluctant teachers, hostile to your rhymes,
 Yielded at last before our freakish pranks
 And gave the saucy and triumphant schoolboy
 Leave to make Triboulet clown about in Latin.
 – Who, in those pallid youthful days, did not
 Droop with the torpor of a cloistered rule,
 His gaze lost in the empty summer sky
 Or dazzlement of snow? Who has not hearkened,
 Ears pricked and straining like a hound, to catch
 A book's faint echo or a riotous shout?

In summer, above all, when roof leads melted,
 The massive blackened walls exuded sadness;
 The dog days or the sultry mists of autumn
 Inflamed the sky with their relentless heat
 And even the shrill tarsels slept within
 Their narrow cells and left the doves in peace;

Saison de rêverie, où la Muse s'accroche
 Pendant un jour entier au battant d'une cloche ;
 Où la Mélancolie, à midi, quand tout dort,
 Le menton dans la main, au fond du corridor, —
 L'œil plus noir et plus bleu que la Religieuse
 Dont chacun sait l'histoire obscène et douloureuse,
 — Traîne un pied alourdi de précoces ennuis,
 Et son front moite encor des langueurs de ses nuits.

— Et puis venaient les soirs malsains, les nuits fiévreuses,
 Qui rendent de leur corps les filles amoureuses,
 Et les font aux miroirs — stérile volupté —
 Contempler les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité —
 Les soirs italiens, de molle insouciance,
 — Qui des plaisirs menteurs révèlent la science,
 — Quand la sombre Vénus, du haut des balcons noirs,
 Verse des flots de musc de ses frais encensoirs.

Ce fut dans ce conflit de molles circonstances,
 Mûri par vos sonnets, préparé par vos stances,
 Qu'un soir, ayant flairé le livre et son esprit,
 J'emportai sur mon cœur l'histoire d'Amaury.
 Tout abîme mystique est à deux pas du Doute.
 — Le breuvage infiltré, lentement, goutte à goutte,
 En moi qui dès quinze ans vers le gouffre enchaîné,
 Déchiffrais couramment les soupirs de René,
 Et que de l'inconnu la soif bizarre altère,
 — A travaillé le fond de la plus mince artère.
 J'en ai tout absorbé, les miasmes, les parfums,
 Le doux chuchotement des souvenirs défunts,
 Les longs enlacements des phrases symboliques,
 — Chapelets murmurants de madrigaux mystiques ;
 — Livre voluptueux, si jamais il en fut.
 Et depuis, soit au fond d'un asile touffu,
 Soit que, sous les soleils des zones différentes,

The dreaming season when all day the Muse
 Is measured by the chiming of a bell;
 Then at midday the melancholy youth,
 While all are sleeping, sits with head in hand
 And eyes as dark and blue as Diderot's Nun,
 Whose tragic obscene history we all know;
 He walks with step slowed by precocious cares
 And brow still moist from languors of the night.

Then came those sickly evenings, feverish nights,
 That teach young girls to love their own fresh bodies
 And (sterile pleasure) contemplate in mirrors
 The first ripe fruits of their nubility
 – Those casual carefree soft Italian nights
 Giving instruction in deceptive pleasures,
 When Venus from her darkened balcony
 Pours from her censers a cool shower of musk.

It was in such a time of tender strife,
 Groomed by your stanzas, ripened by your sonnets,
 That having guessed the spirit of the book,
 I took to heart the tale of Amaury.
 The mystic depths are never far from Doubt.
 At little more than fifteen years of age
 I was already drawn to that abyss,
 Construed the sighs of René, and imbibed
 Slowly and drop by drop the magic potion
 That fed my curious thirst for the unknown;
 – It worked in me down through the smallest vein
 And I absorbed it all, sick mists and scents,
 Sweet whisperings of memories decayed,
 The long enlacement of symbolic phrases,
 Soft rosaries of mystic madrigals;
 – No book is better called *Voluptuous*.
 Since then, whether in shelter or exposed

L'éternel bercement des houles enivrantes,
 Et l'aspect renaissant des horizons sans fin,
 Ramenassent ce cœur vers le songe divin, —
 Soit dans les lourds loisirs d'un jour caniculaire,
 Ou dans l'oisiveté frileuse de frimaire —
 Sous les flots du tabac qui masque le plafond,
 — J'ai partout feuilleté le mystère profond
 De ce livre si cher aux âmes engourdies
 Que leur destin marqua des mêmes maladies,
 Et devant le miroir j'ai perfectionné
 L'art cruel qu'un Démon en naissant m'a donné,
 — De la douleur pour faire une volupté vraie, —
 D'ensanglanter son mal et de gratter sa plaie.

Poète, est-ce une injure ou bien un compliment ?
 Car je suis vis-à-vis de vous comme un amant
 En face du fantôme, au geste plein d'amorces,
 Dont la main et dont l'œil ont pour pomper les forces
 Des charmes inconnus ; — tous les êtres aimés
 Sont des vases de fiel qu'on boit les yeux fermés,
 Et le cœur transpercé que la Douleur allèche
 Expire chaque jour en bénissant sa flèche.

To foreign suns, the endless lullaby
Of the sea swell, the ever-new horizons,
Remind my heart to dream of the divine –
Whether amid hot summer's sluggish pleasures
Or in the chilly idleness of winter
When thick tobacco smoke obscures the ceiling –
Everywhere I have plumbed the mystery
Of this one book so dear to souls benumbed
Whom fate has marked with the same maladies;
And in the looking glass I have perfected
The cruel inborn art a Demon gave me
To make of Suffering voluptuous pleasure,
To bleed the sickness and to scratch the scar.

Is this an insult or a compliment?
Poet, I stand before you like a lover
Before a ghost whose strange and occult signs
Of hand and eye have the peculiar force
Of unknown charms. All beings that we love
Are flasks of venom that we drink eyes shut,
And the pierced heart, seduced by its own sorrow,
Expires every day blessing the arrow.

Note on the Text

The French text is that of the magisterial standard edition, *Baudelaire, Œuvres complètes*, edited by Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, Éditions de la Pléiade, 1975 and 1976). Some recent English editors have inserted the six condemned poems into the 1861 text of *Les Fleurs du Mal*; but since we cannot be certain about Baudelaire's intentions, Pichois prefers to leave them, as they were first published, in *Les Épaves* (*Wreckage*).

Notes

Readers should not be bullied into consulting notes that they may not need. Since number and title are provided for every poem annotated, there seemed to be no good reason for these notes to be marked by asterisks in the text.

Abbreviations: FM *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*, 1861); E *Les Épaves* (*Wreckage*, 1866), TE *Troisième édition* (*Third Edition*, 1868), PJ *Poésies de jeunesse* (*Early Poems*).

THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

To the Reader

See Extra Material, p. 420.

Trismegist: “Thrice great”, adjective associating Satan with the alchemist god, Hermes Trismegistus.

Ennui: Roughly equivalent to “spleen”, but with specifically French connotations that render the term untranslatable.

Hypocrite reader – kindred spirit – brother: Adopted by T.S. Eliot as the conclusion to the first section of *The Waste Land*, (“The Burial of the Dead”).

Spleen and the Ideal

See Extra Material, p. 421.

FM 1 Benediction

Baudelaire's resentment towards his mother gives an autobiographical dimension to this variation on the theme of the poet as an outcast whose isolation is a sign of his elevated calling.

among all women: Ironic echo of the *Ave Maria*: "*Benedicta tu in mulieribus*" ("Blessèd art thou amongst women").

Gehenna: Synonym for Hell, from the Hebrew "Hinnon", a valley where children were once sacrificed.

Thrones and Virtues and Dominions: Three of the Nine Orders of Angels.

Palmyra: Ancient Syrian city famed for its luxury.

FM 4 Correspondences

Baudelaire may have been influenced by the utopian thinker Charles Fourier (1772–1837) in positing an exact correspondence between physical objects and spiritual realities. What remains problematic in the poem is the precise status of these analogies. Are they rooted in the objects themselves as a symbolic system or are they the construction of the poet's intellect and intuition? The idea of nature as a key to the spiritual world is a commonplace of Romantic poetry and art. Baudelaire remarked that, for the painter Delacroix, "nature is a vast dictionary".

FM 5

Phoebus: Apollo, the Sun God, patron of poetry and music.

Cybele: Goddess of nature and fertility.

those places where... nakedness: The artist's studio.

maternal vice: The capacity to bear children. The passage seems to contradict the celebration of Cybele in the first section, but the sense may be that maternity, not in itself repugnant, has become so in modern times, given the unhappy offspring it produces.

FM 6 The Beacons

Rubens: Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), prolific Flemish painter, celebrated for his exuberant representation of ample female flesh.

Leonardo: Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). The quatrain may refer to *The Virgin of the Rocks* in the Louvre.

Rembrandt: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), noted for the religious feeling that suffuses much of his work and for his unsentimental but moving portrayals of old age.

Michelangelo: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564). The association of Christ with Hercules suggests the powerful muscular figure that dominates the fresco of *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

Puget: Pierre Puget (1622–94), French sculptor who used convicts condemned to the galleys as models for the caryatids on the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville in Toulon.

Watteau: Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), painter of elegant amorous encounters veiled with melancholy, as in the Louvre's *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (see FM 116).

Goya: Francisco Goya (1746–1828), major Spanish artist who, in 1798, produced a series of six paintings representing various forms of witchcraft.

Delacroix: Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), prominent figure of the Romantic movement in art, regarded by Baudelaire as unquestionably the greatest painter of his time.

Weber: Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826), German composer whose work is seen here as a musical equivalent to the Romantic manner in painting.

Te Deum: Latin hymn of praise and thanksgiving (“We praise thee, O God”).

This ardent sob... eternity: The conclusion suggests that what links all these artists is an unsatisfied aspiration towards transcendence.

FM 7 The Sick Muse

succubus: Evil spirit who takes the form of a woman to tempt a man.

fabled slough: Marshes near the town of Minturno in Latium.

Pan: Pastoral goat god, renowned for his skill in playing the reed pipes, although his music proved no match for that of Apollo.

FM 8 The Venal Muse

Boreas: the North Wind.

FM 9 The Bad Monk

A manuscript variant mentions Andrea Orcagna (1308–68), presumed at the time to be the painter of the frescoes known as *The Triumph of Death* in the Camposanto of Pisa.

FM 11 The Jinx

The poem exploits two distinct sources:

Art is long and time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'A Psalm of Life'

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Thomas Gray, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'

Sisyphus: In the Greek myth Sisyphus is condemned to push a large boulder up a hill; just before the summit, the boulder rolls back down the hill and Sisyphus has to begin the task all over again.

FM 13 Gypsies on the Road

Sonnet inspired by an engraving by Jacques Callot (1592–1635).

FM 14 Man and the Sea

Between man and the sea there is a *correspondence* in the sense of FM 4; but correspondence need not imply harmony: man and the sea struggle with each other precisely because they are so alike.

FM 15 Don Juan in Hell

Baudelaire imagines the arrival of the impenitent seducer in a Hell that resembles the Underworld of classical mythology. Here he is ferried across the Styx by the boatman Charon and greeted by the characters he has known on earth in Molière's play *Dom Juan* (1665): his servant Sganarelle, his father Dom Louis, his abandoned wife Elvira and the vengeful Commander, the "great stone man" whom he has killed.

Antisthenes: Greek philosopher reputed to have chosen a life of extreme poverty.

FM 16 The Punishment of Pride

Doctor of the Church: Allegedly Simon of Tournai (c.1130–1201).

FM 18 The Ideal

Gavarni: Paul Gavarni (1804–66), fashionable caricaturist and illustrator.

Aeschylean dream: Lady Macbeth resembles such characters as Clytemnestra and Electra in the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus.

great Night: Michelangelo's celebrated sculpture of Night, pictured as a sleeping female nude, in the Medici Chapel in Florence. The Titans were the sons of Night.

FM 19 The Giantess

Perhaps a faint echo of *Gulliver's Travels*, but the monstrous disproportion matters less than the nostalgia for security in the maternal lap (see FM 36).

FM 20 The Mask

The sculpture by Baudelaire's friend, Ernest Christophe (1827–92), was originally entitled *The Human Comedy*; Christophe renamed it *The Mask* after reading the poem. It is now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Tomorrow... like us!: The fear that death may be an illusion and that suffering continues beyond the grave recurs in 'The Digging Skeleton' (FM 94) and 'The Dream of a Curious Man' (FM 125).

FM 21 Hymn to Beauty

Beauty appeals to the poet's desire for transcendence ("an Infinite I love and have never known"). It is free of any moral dimension, but stanzas 4 and 5 stress its destructive power.

FM 22 Exotic Perfume

Baudelaire is surely the most olfactory poet in the history of literature. In this, the first poem of the Jeanne Duval cycle, the perfume of his mulatto mistress awakes memories of the island of La Réunion, to which Baudelaire had travelled in 1841. The Jeanne Duval cycle runs from FM 22 to FM 39, with the exception of FM 25.

FM 25

Addressed to Baudelaire's first mistress, Sara, a Jewish prostitute also known as *Louchette* (the Squinter), but its insertion into the Jeanne Duval cycle can be explained by its obvious link to the theme of the subsequent poem 'Sed non satiata'.

FM 26 *Sed non satiata*

The Latin phrase comes from Satire VI of Juvenal, where Messalina, wife of the Emperor Claudius, is described as "tired but not sated" after a night of debauchery.

Constantia: Sweet wine from the Cape region of South Africa.

Styx: Mythical river encircling the Underworld nine times.

Maegera: One of the Furies who live in the Underworld and punish erring humans.

Proserpina: Wife of Pluto, god of the Underworld. By regretting that he cannot become Proserpina, Baudelaire may be suggesting that Jeanne has lesbian tendencies.

FM 27

The sterile woman: Sterile beauty suggests lesbian love. See FM 111 and E 3.

FM 29 A Carcass

See Extra Material, p. 422–23.

FM 30 *De profundis clamavi*

The Latin title is the beginning of Psalm 130 (“Out of the depths”) in the Vulgate. It forms part of the Office of the Dead in the liturgy of the Catholic Church.

FM 32

The poet remembers lying with a prostitute (Sara) and thinking of another woman (Jeanne Duval), whose beauty still attracts him but who is devoid of human emotion.

FM 33 Posthumous Remorse

The opening recalls the celebrated sonnet of Pierre de Ronsard (1525–85), “*Quand vous serez bien vieille*” (“When you are very old”), but the development is significantly different. Where Ronsard imagines himself sleeping peacefully in the grave and his disdainful mistress as a disconsolate old woman, Baudelaire pictures the woman sleepless in the tomb. Ronsard’s *carpe diem* conclusion, “*Cueillez dès aujourd’hui les roses de la vie*” (“Gather today the roses of life”) is replaced by a vision of devouring worms. The submerged pun on *remords* (“remorse” is etymologically a “re-bite”) is more visible in French.

FM 35 *Duellum*

Duellum, the archaic form of the Latin *bellum* (war), recalls “duel”, suggesting that the conflict between Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval has a ritual, rule-bound quality. Paradoxically, it is the conflictual nature of the relationship that guarantees its permanence.

FM 36 The Balcony

This intensely musical poem blends eroticism with a nostalgia for maternal calm and domestic security that resembles the atmosphere of FM 99.

FM 37 The Possessed

Beëlzebub: Hebrew: “Lord of the Flies”, a demonic spirit.

FM 38 A Phantom

Four-part poem, written in 1860 after Jeanne Duval had been seriously ill in hospital. Violence and irony now give way to a tender elegiac mood in which the poet, visited at night by the shade of his mistress (‘Darkness’), remembers the enticing savagery of her fragrance (‘The Perfume’), celebrates her skills of self-adornment (‘The Frame’) and finally vows to preserve her memory (‘The Portrait’). The animal analogies in the last lines of ‘The Perfume’ (“a scent of fur”) and ‘The Frame’ (“a monkey’s agile childish grace”) recall FM 34 and are to be taken as indicative of natural grace and spontaneity.

FM 39

The last poem in the Jeanne Duval cycle, an ironic take on the immortality that poets traditionally promise to their mistresses. Here the memory of the woman will be a “dim fable” that tires its readers, and the “lofty rhymes” provoke no response beyond that of the poet himself.

FM 40 *Semper eadem*

The title is Latin for “Always the same”. After the exacerbated sensitivity of the poems for Jeanne Duval, this sonnet expresses a relaxed, almost amused melancholy that provides a transition to the more meditative tone of the Sabatier cycle.

FM 41 All One

First poem of the Sabatier cycle. Though elsewhere not averse to specifying a woman’s physical attributes (see FM 52, E 6 and E 11), the poet resists the temptation to itemize and insists on an overall harmony, powerfully expressed in the synaesthesia of the conclusion.

FM 43 The Living Torch

Sent to Mme Sabatier with an anonymous letter on 7th February 1854. As in FM 42, the metaphor of the torch and the insistent religious imagery combine to present a vision of the ideal woman as spiritual guide in the tradition of Petrarch's Laura or Dante's Beatrice.

FM 44 Reversibility

Reversibility, in Catholic teaching, is a consequence of the Communion of Saints and allows for the merits of the saints to be of benefit to sinners. It plays an important role in the thought of the counter-revolutionary philosopher and politician Joseph de Maistre (1752–1821), much admired by Baudelaire. It is not said, however, that Mme Sabatier's merits work in this way. One could, indeed, read the first four stanzas as a reproach to her ignorance or indifference with regard to human suffering and evil. Reversibility is implored rather than asserted.

David: The young and beautiful Abishag the Shunammite was brought to lie with the aged King David in a futile attempt to restore his vigour (1 Kings 1:4).

FM 45 Confession

A corrective to 'Reversibility' (FM 44), enclosed in a letter to Mme Sabatier. Here the angelic woman knows all too well the world that she has been implicitly accused of not knowing. A rare instance of Baudelaire seeing the world from a woman's standpoint.

FM 46 The Spiritual Dawn

Enclosed in a letter to Mme Sabatier and preceded in the manuscript by the English inscription: "After a night of pleasure and desolation, all my soul belongs to you."

FM 47 The Harmony of Evening

Based on only two rhyme sounds (*oir* and *ige*) and on a patterned repetition of lines, this poem is almost a *pantoum*, the complex

Malayan form popular with Baudelaire's contemporaries. A perfectly regular *pantoum* would begin and end with the same line. *monstrance*: A receptacle that displays the consecrated host in Catholic worship.

FM 48 The Perfume Flask

This last poem in the Sabatier cycle puzzled its first readers. The poet's love for Mme Sabatier (or his memory of it) will one day be like the perfume released by an old flask; but the last stanza where the poet is both a coffin and a witness makes sense only if we extend the analogy *flask-poet* to something like *flask-poet-coffin-book*. The oxymorons ("cherished plague", "Dear poison") suggest that in retrospect Mme Sabatier will lose her spiritual aura and be seen in a far more ambiguous light.

FM 49 Poison

First poem in the Marie Daubrun cycle, which runs from FM 49 to FM 57. The title echoes the last stanza of the preceding poem, thus providing a transition between the two cycles.

opium: Baudelaire discussed the effects of opium in *Artificial Paradises* (1860).

FM 51 The Cat

In FM 34 the cat was explicitly associated with a woman (Jeanne Duval). Here, although the cat in question belonged to Marie Daubrun, the animal is celebrated for its own sake.

FM 52 The Splendid Ship

This formally complex poem, where quatrains 1, 2 and 3 are repeated as 4, 7 and 10, provides an example of the itemization rejected in 'All One' (FM 41). The *ship-woman* analogy is traditional; in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* Dalila is compared at length to "a stately ship".

FM 53 Invitation to the Voyage

Like FM 50, the poem develops a correspondence between woman and landscape. In this case “the land that resembles you” is an idealized Holland derived from Dutch paintings. The rhythm suggests a lullaby. There is a celebrated musical setting by Henri Duparc (1848–1933).

FM 54 The Irreparable

Inspired by a dramatized fairytale, *La Belle aux cheveux d’or* (*The Girl with the Golden Hair*), in which Marie Daubrun had taken the leading role. Baudelaire seems to have been impressed by the figure of Sombre-Accueil (Dark-Greeting), who can only demonstrate his love for the princess by persecuting her and who dies unrepentant. The “remorse” of the opening shifts into the “irreparable”, because it is less the Christian remorse for some given transgression than a diffuse Byronic sense of guilt as destiny. The ending, with its sense of a constantly postponed *dénouement*, recalls that other theatre poem ‘The Dream of a Curious Man’ (FM 125).

FM 56 Autumnal

my head upon your lap: An echo of ‘The Giantess’ (FM 19) and ‘The Balcony’ (FM 36).

FM 57 To a Madonna

The movement from eroticized worship to sadistic violence recalls Baudelaire’s remark in his *Intimate Journals*: “Spain puts into religion the natural ferocity of love.”

Ex-voto: A plaque or image placed in a church in fulfilment of a vow.

moon... Serpent: Both belong to the traditional iconography of the Virgin Mary: the first deriving from Rev. 12:2 and the second from Gen. 3:15.

Seven Swords: In images of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, her sufferings are usually represented by swords, echoing Simeon’s prophecy in Luke 2:35.

FM 59 *Sisina*

Sisina: Baudelaire's name for Elisa Nieri, an Italian friend of Mme Sabatier; in 1858 she expressed her admiration for Felice Orsini's attempted assassination of Napoleon III.

Diana: Goddess of hunting.

Théroigne: Théroigne de Méricourt (1762–1817), heroine of the French Revolution, reputed to have led the women of Paris in storming up the staircase at Versailles.

FM 60 *Franciscæ meæ laudes* (Praises for My Francisca)

Reappears as E 13. Baudelaire appreciated what he saw as the uncultivated yet powerful language of “the last Latin decadence”. There are echoes of the Latin hymns *Stabat Mater* and *Veni sancte Spiritus*. *Lethe*: River of forgetfulness in the Underworld.

FM 61 To a Creole Lady

Written in 1841 for Emmeline de Carcenac (1817–57) at the request of her husband, the planter Adolphe Autard de Bragard (1808–76). The couple had entertained the poet during his stay in Mauritius.

FM 62 *Mœsta et errabunda*

The title is Latin for “Sad and wandering”. Agatha has not been identified. The desire for evasion and the emotional impact of the sea, recurrent themes in Baudelaire, are linked to nostalgia for a childhood Eden that the final stanza recognizes as subtly ambiguous.

FM 64 Autumn Sonnet

Marguerite: Name of the heroine of Goethe's *Faust*, which Baudelaire would have known in the 1828 translation by the poet Gérard de Nerval (1808–55).

FM 66 Cats

A celebrated test case for structuralist analysis (Roman Jakobson and Claude Levi-Strauss, 1962).

FM 67 Owls

In *Paris Spleen*, 23, Baudelaire paraphrases Blaise Pascal (1623–62), who wrote in his *Pensées* (*Thoughts*) that “All man’s ills come from one thing: that he cannot sit quietly in a room”.

FM 69 Music

The subject is Baudelaire’s own inconstant creative energy. The conclusion echoes Sainte-Beuve’s poem ‘*Le calme*’ (‘Calm’).

FM 70 Burial

You will hear: The fear of a sentient life after death recurs in FM 72, FM 94 and FM 125.

FM 71 A Fantastical Engraving

The engraving, illustrating the biblical “Death on a Pale Horse” (Rev 6:8), is by Joseph Haynes (1760–1829) after a drawing by John Hamilton Mortimer (1740–79).

FM 73 The Cask of Hate

Danaïds: Daughters of Danaus, king of Argos, who murdered their husbands. They were condemned to spend eternity filling sieve-like vessels with water.

Hydra: A monster with seven heads that multiplied when severed.

FM 75 Spleen (I)

Pluvius: The fifth month (21st January–19th February) in the calendar of the French Revolution.

FM 76 Spleen (II)

Memory, so often the only source of happiness in Baudelaire, is here a repository of faded trivialities, failed initiatives and desiccated emotions, a site of spleen and ennui.

Boucher: François Boucher (1703–70), mildly erotic French painter.

sphinx: The statue of Memnon was reputed to sing when struck by the rays of the rising sun. Here the Sphinx (as metaphor for the petrified poet) sings only in the setting sun.

FM 77 Spleen (III)

A prince whose excessive sensibility renders him cruel and despotic appears in the prose poem 'A Heroic Death' (*Paris Spleen*, 27).

impotent: The adjective points to creative difficulties rather than to any sexual inadequacy.

fleurs-de-lis: Heraldic lily flowers, emblematic of the French monarchy.

Lethe: Here the water of Lethe induces lethargy rather than the more traditional forgetfulness.

FM 78 Spleen (IV)

a heavy lid: The image provides the title for a later poem, 'The Lid' (TE 5).

FM 79 Obsession

Great woods: A famous passage in Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* (*Genius of Christianity*, 1802) argues that forests were the first temples and the origin of all architecture.

FM 80 Longing for Nothingness

I contemplate the round globe: Despite the poem's overall despairing tone, this sudden elevation sounds like a welcome release from the claustrophobic atmosphere of FM 78.

FM 81 Alchemy of Suffering

Hermes: Hermes Trismegistus; see first note to 'To the Reader'.

Midas: Unlike Midas, the mythical king who turned whatever he touched into gold, the poet is a negative alchemist who turns gold into iron.

FM 82 Congenial Horror

Ovid: Banished from Rome by the Emperor Augustus, Ovid (43 BC–17 AD) lived out his last years at Tomi on the Black Sea. He laments his exile in the *Tristia*.

FM 83 Heautontimoroumenos

Baudelaire intuits the link between sadism and masochism as the torturer becomes the mirror image of his victim. The Greek title means “One who punishes himself” and is the title of a comedy by the Latin dramatist Terence (c.190–159 BC). *J.G.F.* has not been identified.

Moses: Moses struck the rock to bring forth water (Exodus 17:5–7), but the desert was Sinai, not Sahara.

FM 84 The Irremediable

Baudelaire follows Gnostic tradition in seeing creation as an irremediable Fall into the world of Evil, hence the nightmarish images of entrapment. Man’s awareness of his condition (“Evil that knows itself”) does not relieve his torment, but it gives him a perverse kind of dignity that the rest of creation does not possess.

Parisian Scenes

A new section created for the 1861 edition, consisting of ten new poems and eight poems transferred from the ‘Spleen and the Ideal’ section of the 1857 edition. See Extra Material, p. 425–26.

FM 86 Landscape

eclogues: Traditionally poems in praise of country life, as in Virgil’s *Eclogues*. Baudelaire announces his intention to write urban eclogues, but his description of the city gives way to a fantasy landscape of his own. The personified “Riot” may allude to his own participation in the disturbances of 1848 and his resolve to avoid political engagement in the future.

FM 88 To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl

Baudelaire imagines the beggar girl as a sixteenth-century beauty courted by royalty and celebrated by poets such as Belleau and Ronsard. Véfour is still an expensive restaurant.

FM 89 The Swan

See Extra Material, p. 426–29.

Victor Hugo: An appropriate dedication, given the theme of the poem. The great French writer was living in self-imposed exile on the island of Guernsey in protest against the regime of Napoleon III. He had expressed his support for Baudelaire when the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) was condemned.

Andromache: Wife of Hector in Homer's *Iliad*. After the death of her husband and the fall of Troy, she was taken as a concubine by the Greek Pyrrhus, who later passed her on to Helenus, Hector's brother and also a slave, but destined to succeed Pyrrhus as king of Epirus. Baudelaire relies on Virgil's *Aeneid* III, where we see Andromache in exile, mourning Hector before an empty tomb by a little stream that serves as a substitute for the river Simoeis.

Place du Carrousel: Situated between the two wings of the Louvre and the Carrousel Arch. The old quarter had been cleared to make an imposing square, and the poem looks back to when it was still a building site with shacks, building materials and a menagerie.

full-breathed horn: Recalls perhaps the music of Weber ('The Beacons', FM 6), but also the melancholy horn of Alfred de Vigny (1797–1863) sounding deep in the woods ("*Dieu! que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois!*").

FM 90 The Seven Old Men

See Extra Material, p. 426.

Not an allegory, but a hallucination where the city, "swarming with dreams" and inhabited by "daylight ghosts", is both the source and the reflection of the poet's own disturbed condition. In his translation of De Quincey (1785–1859), Baudelaire draws our

attention to how, in opium dreams, a single figure may reappear “multiplied in a terrible way”.

three-legged Jew: The traditional image of the Wandering Jew leaning on a staff.

Phoenix: The mythical bird who resurrects from his own ashes.

Could I have lived to see the eighth?: An echo of Macbeth’s reaction to the vision of Banquo’s royal descendants: “And yet the eighth appears” (*Macbeth*, Act IV, Sc. 1, ll. 116–18).

FM 91 The Little Old Women

See Extra Material, p. 426.

In a letter to Auguste Poulet-Malassis (1825–78), Baudelaire stated that in this poem he had tried to imitate the manner of Hugo. The poem, in fact, recalls Hugo’s ‘Fantômes’ (‘Phantoms’) in *Les Orientales* (1829), but the association only serves to highlight crucial differences. Where Hugo laments the death of beautiful young girls, Baudelaire provides a brutally detailed description of the little old women who live on, witnesses to the human condition in the modern metropolis. The poem’s hard-won compassion arises from a radically unsentimental outlook.

Lais or Éponine: Contrasting female types: the first a beautiful Greek courtesan, the second a Gaulish heroine of austere virtue.

Vestal of love: An ironic phrase: the priestesses of Vesta were vowed to virginity.

Frascati’s: The only gaming house where women were admitted, closed in 1836.

Thalia: The Muse of Comedy.

Tivoli: A pleasure garden.

Hippogriff: A legendary winged creature, half horse, half griffon.

FM 92 The Blind

The adjective “ridiculous” and the raised head link the blind to the swan in FM 89; the resemblance to “tailor’s dummies” echoes the marionette-like old women of FM 91.

FM 94 Digging Skeletons

For Baudelaire's fear of a sentient life after death see FM 70, FM 72 and FM 125. The plates may be those made for the anatomist Vesalius (1514–64) after drawings from the school of Titian.

FM 95 Dusk

Originally published together in 1852, Baudelaire's 'Dusk' and 'Dawn' (FM 103) constitute an iconoclastic urban challenge to the many rural dusk and dawn poems of the period.

FM 97 The Dance of Death

Inspired by Ernest Christophe's allegorical statue of Death as a female skeleton dressed for a ball. For Christophe see also 'The Mask' (FM 20).

Antinoüs: Model of male beauty, favourite of the Emperor Hadrian.

Lovelace: Libertine protagonist of Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* (1748).

FM 99

This poem and FM 100 look back to the brief happy period when the child Baudelaire lived with his widowed mother before her remarriage to Major Aupick. The sun, attentive but distant, fills, perhaps, the reduced role assigned to the deceased father. The atmosphere of simplicity, intimacy and reticence (even the goddesses hide their nudity) is conveyed by the easy unemphatic movement of the poem's single sentence.

Pomona: Goddess of fruit trees and gardens.

FM 100

The nurse is Mariette, employed by Baudelaire's mother to help look after her son. In his *Intimate Journals* Baudelaire speaks of offering prayers to three intercessors: Mariette, his father and Edgar Allan Poe. One suspects that he accuses his mother of being jealous of the old nurse only because he wishes this had in fact

been the case. The last eight lines imply that he himself is guilty of not having recognized in Mariette the real maternal affection that his biological mother ultimately failed to provide.

FM 102 Parisian Dream

The poem shares many features with the opium dreams of De Quincey, with the difference that here the dream is constructed like a work of art. The dream is a dream of control.

Constantin Guys: Constantin Guys (1805–92), the subject of Baudelaire's essay *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863).

FM 103 Dawn

Counterpart to 'Dusk' (FM 95). The vivid personifications of the last four lines link not only night and day but also two forms of human suffering.

Wine

In 1857 this section provided a temporary respite, an "artificial paradise" between 'Revolt' and 'Death'. In 1861 it follows 'Parisian Scenes' and precedes 'Flowers of Evil', 'Revolt' and 'Death' in a more obvious downward progression.

FM 104 The Soul of Wine

An early poem (c.1844). Some details of phrasing ("dispossessed mankind", "brotherhood and light") suggest the poet's youthful attraction to socialist ideals.

FM 105 The Ragman's Wine

In the caricatures of Honoré Daumier (1809–79) and others, the ragman had become an emblematic figure of the Parisian proletariat. *hoary veterans*: Survivors of the Napoleonic wars intoxicated by dreams of military glory.

fabulous river: The river Pactolus, which turned to gold when Midas used it to wash off his golden touch.

FM 106 The Murderer's Wine

The story outlined in this uncharacteristic attempt to use a proletarian voice is derived from Baudelaire's unfulfilled project of a drama to be called *L'Ivrogne* (*The Drunkard*).

Flowers of Evil

Title first used for eighteen poems published by the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1855. The placing of the section is significant. The man who has tried to evade spleen in the artificial paradise of 'Wine' now turns to the more violent stimulants of sadism and masochism.

FM 109 Destruction

In 'To the Reader', the condition of ennui was presented as the work of the Devil, but there was no mention of God. Here the theological dimension is more explicit. To be "far from the sight of God" is a definition of damnation.

FM 110 A Martyr

An extreme example of the destructive potential of love, seen as infinite desire for a finite body. It is surprising that this poem, which pictures decapitation and hints at necrophilia, was not among those condemned in 1857. The "Drawing by an Unknown Master" has not been identified and may never have existed.

FM 111 Doomed Women

Lesbian lovers attract the poet's admiration because they opt for the infinity of insatiable desire and "despise reality" in the form of procreative sexual fulfilment.

Saint Antony: St Antony of Egypt, hermit, abbot and patriarch; his temptation in the desert by demons in the form of voluptuous women is a frequent theme in religious painting.

Bacchus: God of wine, celebrated with orgiastic rites, especially by women, as in Euripides's tragedy *The Bacchae*.

FM 112 The Two Good Sisters

cypress... myrtle: Representing death and debauchery: the cypress is often planted in cemeteries; the myrtle is the tree of Venus.

FM 114 Allegory

Most commentators have assumed that the allegory concerns prostitution. Prostitutes were often reputed to be sterile, and this would provide a link with the lesbians of FM 111.

FM 115 My Beatrice

The sniggering demons represent a society that has no place for poetry, but poets have deserved this derision by their conformity to Romantic stereotypes. Here the poet has the lucidity to see that he cannot simply turn away from the society to which he belongs.

Beatrice: Ironic use of the name of Dante's muse in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*.

FM 116 A Voyage to Cythera

Cythera: Greek island sacred to Venus. The poem's title echoes that of a famous painting by Antoine Watteau (see sixth note to FM 6), but the immediate stimulus came from the poet Gérard de Nerval (1808–55), who had sailed past the island in 1843 and noted the contrast between its mythical status and its barren aspect. More particularly, he was struck by a form which he first took for the statue of some protective deity, but which turned out to be a three-branched gibbet. From this passage Baudelaire constructs his own self-lacerating allegory ("Deep in that allegory lay my heart") as a man punished for crimes of love. Nerval felt that the island had been punished for abandoning the cult of Venus, but for Baudelaire – who had contracted syphilis – love and evil, sex and sickness were inseparably linked; hence the surprising conclusion where the address to the goddess is interrupted by an anguished appeal to the Christian God.

FM 117 Love and the Skull

Colophon: A publisher's or printer's emblem. The baroque emblem of Cupid and the skull is found in an engraving by Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617).

Revolt

These three early poems express a juvenile and fairly conventional revolt against orthodox religion. They constitute the shortest section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

FM 118 Saint Peter's Denial

There is nothing new in the idea of God as a sadistic tyrant. Baudelaire's originality lies in his portrait of a Christ whose dream has not borne fruit in action and who has failed to fulfil "the eternal promise". It is this failure that justifies St Peter's denial.

FM 119 Abel and Cain

Developing what is a commonplace of Romantic literature (see Byron's *Cain*, 1821), the poem presents Abel as the archetypal bourgeois and Cain as forefather of both outcast poet and down-trodden proletariat.

FM 120 The Litanies of Satan

In the form of a Catholic litany with supplications and fixed response. See Extra Material, p. 429.

Croesus: Legendary King of Lydia whose name has become synonymous with vast wealth.

Tree of Knowledge: From which Eve ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:9).

Death

In 1857 this final section ended with 'The Death of Artists' (FM 123). The 1861 edition concludes far more powerfully with two

new poems, ‘The Dream of a Curious Man’ (FM 125) and that great recapitulative masterpiece, ‘The Voyage’ (FM 126).

FM 122 The Death of the Poor

the inn that’s promised in the book: Probably referring to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). Death as an inn is traditional (see Christina Rossetti’s ‘Up-Hill’, 1858).

FM 123 The Death of Artists

A sonnet describing the toils of the artist in his quest for absolute beauty; the vision that evades him in life may perhaps be granted to his work by death.

armature: The internal frame supporting a sculpture.

Capitol: One of the Seven Hills of Rome, site for the celebration of military triumphs.

FM 125 The Dream of a Curious Man

FN.: Félix Nadar (1820–1910), pioneer photographer, friend of Baudelaire. See FM 20 and FM 94 for the fear that life after death will be a continuation of the life we already know.

FM 126 The Voyage

See Extra Material, p. 431.

Baudelaire’s longest poem recapitulates some of the dominant themes of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: youthful dreams, disillusion, ennui, the failure of political utopias, original sin, the need for evasion, the gap between man’s infinite aspirations and his finite world.

Maxime du Camp: Poet and traveller (1822–94). Du Camp was a naive believer in progress, but he admitted that no journey had ever brought relief to his melancholy dreaming.

Circe: Enchantress in Book X of Homer’s *Odyssey*, where she changes the hero’s crew into swine.

Happy Isle: Baudelaire’s *Icaria* is an ideal community imagined by the philosopher Étienne Cabet (1788–1856); *Eldorado* in the next stanza suggests a similar utopian fantasy.

Capua: City near Naples on the Appian Way, a byword for wealth and luxury, credited with softening up the soldiers of Hannibal during the Second Punic War.

My image and my master: “So God created man in his own image” (Gen. 1:27).

Wandering Jew: A medieval legend tells of a Jew who taunted Christ on the Way of the Cross and was condemned to wander the earth until the Second Coming. See FM 90.

Lotus: In Book IX of the *Odyssey* the hero reaches the Land of the Lotus-Eaters, where some of his crew eat the plant and lose interest in the voyage. Details of ‘The Voyage’ suggest the influence of Tennyson (‘The Lotus-Eaters’, 1832, and ‘Ulysses’, 1833).

Pylades... Electra: Pylades is the faithful friend of Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; in some versions of the Greek legend he marries Electra, the sister of Orestes.

WRECKAGE

Les Épaves (1866) was published by Poulet-Malassis in Brussels and contained twenty-two poems that do not appear in the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, including the six poems condemned in 1857. Only ‘*Franciscae meæ laudes*’ (E 13) appears in both *Fleurs* and *Épaves*.

E 1 The Setting of the Romantic Sun

A farewell to the golden age of Romanticism and a recognition of the difficulties that the new poetry will have to face.

Condemned Poems

E 2 Lesbos

Lesbos: Greek island where Sappho presided over the cult of love between women.

Phrynes: Phryne was a beautiful Greek courtesan.

Paphos: Town in Cyprus associated with Venus.

Plato: The Greek philosopher, presumably seen as a strict moralist.
me alone on earth: For Baudelaire's identification with lesbian lovers, see note to FM 111.

Leucadian peak: Sappho committed suicide by leaping from a cliff on the island of Leucas. Here she punishes herself for sinning against her own cult by making love to a man.

E 3 Doomed Women

Go down, go down: Baudelaire claimed that this and the subsequent quatrains were written in an unsuccessful attempt to ward off prosecution.

E 4 Lethe

Probably written for Jeanne Duval.

hemlock and nepenthe: Powerful sedatives.

E 5 Too Cheerful

Enclosed in a letter of 1852 to Mme Sabatier.

hate no less than love: An echo of Catullus 85, 'Odi et amo'.

Humiliated... growing things: Baudelaire associates the woman's cheerfulness with nature, in whose unthinking fruitfulness he sees both a rival and enemy to art.

poison: Baudelaire insisted that the poison is his own melancholy temperament and not, as his detractors assumed, syphilis.

E 6 The Jewels

Originally intended to open the Jeanne Duval cycle. It is typical of the period's confused moral standards that a subject so acceptable in painting (the female nude) should have proved unacceptable in literature.

Antiope: Sister of the Amazon Queen Hippolyta.

E 7 Metamorphoses of the Vampire

A fashionable exercise in Gothic horror: there is a similar metamorphosis in *Albertus* (1832), a long poem by Théophile Gautier (1811–72).

Gallantries

E 8 The Fountain

Intended for music, now familiar through the setting by Debussy.

E 9 The Eyes of Berthe

Berthe has not been identified, but she seems to have been Baudelaire's mistress in Brussels.

E 10 Hymn

Enclosed in a letter to Mme Sabatier (4th May, 1854). Not included in the 1857 or 1861 editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, probably because the sentiments are too similar to those of FM 42.

E 11 The Promises of a Face

Probably addressed to Berthe. The poem recalls the sixteenth-century *blasons* (poems describing parts of the female body), but gives a new turn to the erotic itemization by assigning it to the speaking eyes of the woman.

E 12 The Monster

Veillot: Louis Veillot (1813–83), reactionary Catholic writer.
Witches' Sabbath: A gathering of witches for orgiastic and blasphemous rites.

Epigraphs

E 14 On the Portrait of Honoré Daumier

Honoré Daumier: Engraver, caricaturist, painter, much admired by Baudelaire.

Melmoth: Faustian protagonist of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by the Irish novelist Charles Maturin (1782–1824).

Mephisto: The Devil in Goethe's *Faust*.

E 15 Lola de Valence

Lola: Celebrated Spanish dancer. The quatrain was attached to Manet's portrait of her, now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

E 16 On Tasso in Prison

Tasso: Torquato Tasso (1544–95), Italian poet, author of *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*), confined to a madhouse for ten years. Goethe (*Torquato Tasso*, 1790) and Byron (*The Lament of Tasso*, 1817) saw him as a type of the misunderstood and outcast poet. The Delacroix painting is in the National Gallery, London.

Miscellaneous Poems

E 18 The Unforeseen

There are, in fact, two unforeseen events: the first is the arrival of the Devil, who appears, as in a morality play, to claim the sinners presented in the first four stanzas; the second is the trumpet of God's unexpected mercy that interrupts the Devil's triumph. At one stage of its composition the poem was dedicated to the novelist Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808–89), who, after reading the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, had declared that its author was now left with only two options: to blow his brains out or become a Christian. Baudelaire has an ironic note which informs us that "here the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* turns towards the Life Eternal... Like all fresh converts, he appears very strict and fanatical".

Harpagon: Protagonist of Molière's play *L'Avare* (*The Miser*, 1668).

Célimène: The heartless flirt in Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (1666).

E 20 To a Malabar Girl

An early poem (1846) anticipating the Negress in FM 89 ('The Swan').

Buffooneries

Three rather damp squibs expressing Baudelaire's contempt for all things Belgian.

E 22 To M. Eugène Fromentin

Fromentin: Eugène Fromentin (1820–76), painter, art critic, novelist.

Corot: Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), French landscape painter.

Nord: Railway company.

Oppenord: Gilles-Marie Oppenordt (1672–1742), decorator and designer.

Niboyet: Jean Alexandre Paulin (Fortunio) Niboyet (1825–1905), author of moralizing novels.

E 23 A Jolly Tavern

Monselet: Acquaintance of Baudelaire, noted for his dislike of the macabre.

POEMS ADDED TO THE THIRD EDITION (1868)

The third edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, edited by Charles Asselineau and Théodore de Banville, was published in the year after the poet's death and contained twelve poems that had not appeared either in the second edition (1861) or in *Les Épaves* (1868).

TE 1 Epigraph for a Condemned Book

Originally intended for the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.
your rhetoric: The final year of secondary studies was known as the Class of Rhetoric.

TE 2 To Théodore de Banville

Banville: Théodore de Banville (1823–91), poet and friend of Baudelaire, and his rival for the favours of Marie Daubrun.

Hercules: The application of the Hercules story to Banville and Baudelaire is hopelessly obscure, but the “poisoned cloak” and “monstrous snakes” of the myth may indicate the kind of negative criticism that true poets can expect to receive.

TE 3 A Pagan’s Prayer

Diva! supplicem exaudi!: “Goddess, hear my prayer!” (Latin).

TE 4 The Lid

For the sky as lid see FM 78 (Spleen [IV]). Despite the reference to a “cheap operette”, one suspects Shakespearean echoes (*Macbeth*, Act v, Sc. 5, ll. 18–27, *Hamlet*, Act II, Sc. 2, ll. 295–310).

TE 5 Midnight Examination of Conscience

A pendant to the prose poem ‘At One O’Clock in the Morning’ (*Paris Spleen*, 10). The general condemnation in the first three stanzas moves to a lucid self-accusation in the last.

TE 6 Sad Madrigal

For the blend of sadism and masochism see FM 83 (‘Heautontimoroumenos’).

TE 8 The Rebel

The Good Angel is also the Avenging Angel. In the introduction to the tales of Edgar Allan Poe (*Contes extraordinaires*, 1856), Baudelaire wrote: “It is as if the blind Angel of expiation seizes certain men and whips them relentlessly for the edification of others.”

TE 9 So Far from Here

A memory of his stay on the island of La Réunion. For the prostitute Dorothea, see also *Paris Spleen*, 25.

TE 10 The Abyss

The fear and fascination of the abyss is a recurrent theme in Baudelaire and one that he shares with Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889).

Pascal: Blaise Pascal (1623–62), philosopher, theologian, mathematician. It was said that Pascal always sensed a yawning abyss to his left.

TE 11 The Lament of an Icarus

Icarus: An example of overweening ambition, Icarus escaped captivity in Crete thanks to the wings made by his father Daedalus. When Icarus flew too near the sun, the wax that held his wings melted and he fell into the sea and was drowned.

embraced the clouds: In the classical legend, Ixion tries to seduce Juno, wife of Jupiter, but ends up clasping a mere cloud that the god has put in her place.

TE 12 Meditation

A luminous example of Baudelaire's talent for giving concrete resonance to abstractions (Sorrow, Evening, Pleasure, Years, Regret).

A long shroud trailing: An echo of Longfellow's 'Hymn to the Night' (1839): "I heard the trailing garments of the Night / Sweep through her marble halls".

TE 13 The Insulted Moon

An iconoclastic reworking of the classical legend, beloved of Renaissance poets, where the Moon (Cynthia) falls in love with the shepherd Endymion and visits him at night. Old Cynthia is now seen as a procuress providing a "radiant harem" for the "shady lairs" of her clients. The closing tercet, however, calls this iconoclasm into question. If the Cynthia-Endymion story has lost its romantic aura, this is not because it is intrinsically shallow, but because it finds no reflection in the "sordid age" that has given birth to the poet.

EARLY POEMS

PJ 1

Written in 1838 after a trip to the Pyrenees. Influenced by the lyrical Romanticism of Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869).

PJ 2

Inspired by the prostitute Sara (see FM 25 and FM 32), the poem begins as a fairly conventional piece of satirical anti-idealization, like Shakespeare's sonnet 30 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), but shifts into an expression of serious compassion. *Magdalen at her Saviour's feet*: A daring inversion of the New Testament story (Matt 26:6–13); here the woman takes the place of Christ and the poet that of the repentant sinner.

PJ 3 [A Sainte-Beuve]

Sainte-Beuve: Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–69), novelist, poet and influential literary critic, later severely criticized by Marcel Proust both for his inadequate critical theory and for his lukewarm endorsement of Baudelaire's poetry. But Baudelaire himself never wavered in his admiration for Sainte-Beuve, in whose *Joseph Delorme* (1829) he recognized the forerunner of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Triboulet: Court jester during the reign of Francis I (1515–47).

Diderot's Nun: La Religieuse (The Nun), a novel by Denis Diderot (1713–84), tells the story of a young woman forced to enter a convent and subjected to lesbian harassment.

Amaury... René: Protagonists of a novel by Sainte-Beuve (*Volupté*, 1834) and a novella by Chateaubriand (*René*, 1802). We are reminded that Baudelaire's poetry, for all its modernity, grew out of French Romanticism.

Extra Material

on

Charles Baudelaire's

The Flowers of Evil

Baudelaire's Life

Baudelaire's career is a succession of financial and emotional crises so catastrophic and so frequent that it might seem he courted failure as a necessary condition of his creative achievement. Jean-Paul Sartre famously accused him of "bad faith", in that "having chosen Evil, he also chose to feel guilty", which implies that ultimately Baudelaire judged himself by the bourgeois standards he had decided to flout. But it is not clear why inconsistency of this kind should be an artistic defect, and Sartre is obviously more interested in expounding his own existentialist philosophy than in engaging with Baudelaire as a poet. Moreover, though no one can doubt that Baudelaire had a self-destructive streak, a brief look at his biography is enough to show that not all his wounds were self-inflicted.

Charles-Pierre Baudelaire was born in Paris on 9th April 1821, the son of François Baudelaire, an ex-priest who had accepted secularization under the Revolution, and of his much younger second wife, Caroline Defayis. After the death of François Baudelaire in 1827 at the age of sixty-eight, Charles spent eighteen happy months alone with the young widow, a period that he would later recall as a lost golden age of innocence and security. The idyll was brought to an abrupt end in November 1828 by his mother's remarriage to Colonel (later General) Aupick, who, though by no means the monster that he later became in Baudelaire's imagination, was by training and temperament ill-prepared for dealing with a sensitive and introverted only child.

Baudelaire began his schooling in Lyon, and then, in 1836, as a consequence of Aupick's new appointment, returned with his mother to Paris and was placed as a boarder at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, where he excelled in Greek and Latin but was otherwise a wayward and undisciplined student. In his spare time he cultivated his poetic vocation, reading Hugo, Lamartine and Sainte-Beuve before finally managing to get himself expelled in 1839. Now nominally a law student, he plunged headlong into

*Youth and
Education*

the literary and bohemian life of Paris, accumulating serious debts and frequenting prostitutes, from whom he contracted the venereal disease that was to plague him for the rest of his life. In 1841, in the hope of saving his stepson from such a deleterious environment, Aupick arranged for him to leave on a therapeutic voyage to India, but Baudelaire disembarked first in Mauritius and then in La Réunion, before returning to Paris in 1842 after an absence of eight months.

Life in Paris

In April 1842, Baudelaire came of age and inherited a modest fortune, but within eighteen months he had dilapidated almost half the sum, and once again Aupick felt obliged to intervene by persuading the family to begin a legal process that ended in 1844 with the imposition of a trustee (the notary Narcisse Ancelle), from whom in future Baudelaire would receive only the annual interest on the remaining capital. Though this was a wise precaution, for the poet himself it became a humiliation that he would never forgive. It certainly did not have the desired effect of encouraging a more sober lifestyle, and Baudelaire was soon caught up in the old spiral of debt and borrowing, while repeated bouts of sickness and self-disgust led him to opium addiction and a botched attempt at suicide in 1845.

Baudelaire's relations with women, poisoned perhaps by his oedipal attachment to his mother, are a complex blend of sensuality, idealization and sadomasochism. In the *Fleurs du Mal* biographers have recognized three distinct cycles of love poems. The first of these is devoted to Jeanne Duval, a half-literate mulatto actress whom he first met in 1842 and who remained his mistress for the next twenty years. The second is inspired by his relationship with Apollonie Sabatier, a celebrated beauty, mistress of a wealthy art collector and presiding genius of a salon frequented by prominent artists and writers. It is clear that Baudelaire idealized Mme Sabatier and, when she finally gave herself to him for one night in 1857, he recoiled at the shock: "A few days ago you were a divinity," he wrote, "today you are just a woman." Finally, there is the cycle associated with the actress Marie Daubrun, whom the poet seems to have courted with scant success in 1854–55 and again in 1859.

The period between Baudelaire's return to Paris in 1842 and the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 is neatly bisected by the events of 1848–51 that saw the fall of the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe, the brief interlude of the Second Republic and the establishment of the Second Empire under Napoleon III.

When the revolution broke out, Baudelaire emerged as a strong republican. That he was heard shouting “We must shoot General Aupick” has been taken as proof that this revolutionary ardour was no more than another manifestation of his old oedipal impulses, but there is no need to doubt that at the time he had a genuine sympathy for such socialist thinkers as Fourier and Proudhon. If he later withdrew from all forms of political commitment, it may have been less because of the disappointing turn of events than because he found the utopian strain in revolutionary thought incompatible with his religious belief in evil as an essential element in the human condition. Under the influence of the reactionary thinker Joseph de Maistre, Baudelaire’s political outlook became increasingly illiberal. What remained with him, however, was an awareness of the hypocrisy in conventional bourgeois moralism and, as the ‘Parisian Scenes’ amply demonstrate, a hard-edged solidarity with the poor.

In the early 1840s, Baudelaire was already writing many of the poems that would eventually appear in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but his first published work was in the field of art criticism, where, with his *Salon of 1845* and *Salon of 1846*, he revived a genre created in the previous century by Diderot. The first of these essays is a fairly conventional review, but the second develops into something like an aesthetic treatise with discussions on the function of criticism, the nature of Romanticism and the theory of colour. This comes together with the first of his many celebrations of Delacroix, whose paintings, unlike those of the descriptive “naturalist” school, he sees as atmospheric and suggestive in a way that stimulates the imagination and embodies spiritual aspiration. Art criticism would continue to occupy Baudelaire at fairly regular intervals until 1863. In 1848 he published the first of a long series of translations from the tales of Edgar Allan Poe and in 1852 the first of three substantial articles on the life and work of the American writer, in whose theory of poetry he found support for his own increasingly aesthetic and anti-didactic outlook. Another significant anglophone influence is that of Thomas De Quincey, who contributed to Baudelaire’s exploration of the link between creativity and drugs: *Artificial Paradises* (1860) is a recomposition (part translation, part commentary) of De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, coupled with a revised version of Baudelaire’s own earlier essay *On Wine and Hashish* (1851). Finally, there is Baudelaire’s only venture into fiction, the novella

*Essays and
Translations*

*Publication
and Trial of
Les Fleurs
du Mal*

La Fanfarlo (1847), whose hero Samuel Cramer has aspects of an ironic self-portrait.

By 1857, despite the debts and the drugs, Baudelaire was already a recognizable figure in the cultural life of the capital, accepted in circles where he met authors of both older and younger generations, ranging from Hugo, Nerval, Vigny and Sainte-Beuve to Gautier, Banville and Flaubert. His poems had already begun to appear in literary periodicals, and he had reason to be optimistic about the reception of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. His disappointment and anger were all the greater when in July, at the order of the Public Prosecutor, the whole edition was confiscated and the author and his publisher (Auguste Poulet-Malassis) committed for trial. In August the court imposed fines on Baudelaire, his publisher and his printer, as it ordered that six poems be excluded from future editions as “offensive to public morals”. Though this episode contributed to Baudelaire’s self-image as outcast and victim, it did no real harm to his reputation as a poet. A group of friends, led by his later editor and biographer Charles Asselineau, had already been organized in his defence. Stripped of the six condemned poems, the volume was given a generally favourable reception, including comment from both Hugo and Flaubert, who recognized an original voice and a new departure in French poetry. Moreover, the exclusion of six poems provoked a new burst of creativity. Between 1858 and 1860, while staying for long and relatively happy periods with his newly widowed mother in Honfleur (Aupick had died in 1857), Baudelaire composed new poems to fill the gap, among them most of the section entitled ‘Parisian Scenes’ that appeared in the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861). He also continued to experiment with a new genre, the prose poems, which would eventually be collected under the title *Le Spleen de Paris*. With their urban subject matter and sharp social observation, these sketches suggest an intention to rival the artist Constantin Guys, whom he celebrated as *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863). In 1862 he turned his attention to the literary scene with articles in Eugène Crépet’s anthology *Les Poètes français* on Hugo, Banville, Gautier and Leconte de Lisle. In 1861, Baudelaire extended his critical range with an essay on Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* which, though written with little technical knowledge of music, remains one of literature’s most compelling accounts of a musical experience.

The old self-destructive Baudelaire was, however, still very much in evidence when, in 1861, he took the provocative step of seeking election to the Académie Française, only to withdraw when Sainte-Beuve persuaded him that he had no chance of receiving a significant number of votes. His financial affairs meanwhile had gone from bad to worse. No income could be expected from his Poe translations, since the rights had been sold for a lump sum to the publisher Michel Lévy. Nor could he expect to be bailed out by the bankrupt Poulet-Malassis, who had taken refuge in Brussels. In 1864 Baudelaire himself arrived in Brussels in the hope of making some money with lectures and public readings. The result was a predictable failure, though in 1866 Poulet-Malassis, being outside French jurisdiction, did at least manage to publish the six condemned pieces in *Les Épaves* (*Wreckage*).

*Later Years
and Death*

Baudelaire's health was now beyond repair, with ever more frequent bouts of neuralgia, rheumatism, stomach cramps and nausea. In 1862 he had already suffered an attack of giddiness in which he had felt "the wing of imbecility passing over". A few weeks after the publication of *Les Épaves*, he collapsed during a visit to a church in Namur. Suffering from apoplexy, aphasia and hemiplegic paralysis, he was taken to a nursing home in Paris, where, comforted by his mother and a group of devoted friends, including the painter Manet, he lingered on for fourteen months without regaining the power of speech. Some of his last notes suggest a return to the simple pieties of the Catholic Church. He died on 31st August 1867 and is buried in the cemetery of Montparnasse next to his mother and stepfather.

Les Fleurs du Mal

There are two things that every reader of *Les Fleurs du Mal* should remember: the first is that it was conceived and developed as a book where the poems are arranged not in order of composition, but according to a primarily thematic structure; the second is that we do not have this book in a form that corresponds to the author's mature intentions. The connection between these two points will become clear if we take a brief look at the volume's publishing history. Many of the poems that form the first edition had been written before 1846, the year in which Baudelaire announced the forthcoming appearance of a volume entitled *Les Lesbienues*. By 1851, when eleven sonnets

Composition

appeared in *Le Messager de l'Assemblée*, the projected volume had become *Les Limbes* (*Limbo*), advertised as "the story of the spiritual turmoil of modern youth". In 1855 the *Revue des Deux Mondes* published eighteen more poems under the sensational title, suggested by Baudelaire's friend Hippolyte Babou, of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. With this title the collection of exactly a hundred poems finally appeared in 1857. During the notorious trial that followed, Baudelaire, through his lawyer, argued that the book should be read as a whole in which every blasphemy is opposed by heavenward flights and every obscenity by platonic flowers; judged in this light, he claimed, it would reveal "a terrible morality". There may be something faintly disingenuous here, as if Baudelaire were hoping to distract attention from some genuinely disturbing poems by claiming a moral rather than an aesthetic design; but at least one perceptive reader, the novelist Barbey d'Aurevilly, understood that each poem, in addition to its specific qualities, gained from its placing within the volume a special significance that would be lost if it were read in isolation. The book had, he believed, "a secret architecture, a plan calculated by the poet, meditated and deliberate".

Baudelaire again insisted on the essential unity of his book when, in 1861, the second edition appeared, still without the six "condemned pieces", but with thirty-five new poems. It is not a miscellany, he tells Alfred de Vigny, but a book with a beginning and an end, where "all the new poems have been made to fit the particular frame that I had chosen". In fact, the old frame had been radically altered to accommodate the new material. The most obvious change lies in the insertion of a new section, 'Parisian Scenes', which contains the major new urban poems such as 'The Swan', 'The Seven Old Men' and 'The Little Old Women', together with eight poems transferred from the 1857 'Spleen and Ideal'. Moreover, the section 'Wine', which had preceded 'Death' in 1857, now follows 'Parisian Scenes' and precedes 'Flowers of Evil'. These changes have two important consequences: the first is to shift the overall emphasis from personal confession to something of broader and more collective import; the second is to give a stronger sense of downward progression. In 1857 the long first section, 'Spleen and Ideal', had concluded with 'Music' and 'The Pipe', poems which envision some form of appeasement or escape from suffering; in 1861 the descent from the Ideal into an irremediable Spleen is accentuated by new poems such as 'Longing for Nothingness',

‘Alchemy of Suffering’ and ‘Congenial Horror’, ending with the final damning sentence of ‘The Clock’: ‘When all say: Die, old coward! it’s too late!’ In 1857 the final section ‘Death’ had contained only three poems, ending somewhat lamely with ‘The Death of Artists’, which, in its final tercet, seems to offer some hope of fulfilment in death: in 1861 there are six poems, the last of which is the long recapitulative ‘The Voyage’. By 1861 Baudelaire’s great creative period was over, but the complex publishing history of *Les Fleurs du Mal* was not quite complete. In 1866 *Les Épaves* (*Wreckage*) contained the six condemned poems together with sixteen other poems of uneven quality that had not appeared in either 1857 or 1861. We can only speculate about what the third edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* would have looked like if Baudelaire had lived to oversee it. What we call the third edition, prepared by his friends Asselineau and Banville as the first volume of the *Œuvres complètes* (*Complete Works*), finally appeared in 1868 and contained more or less every Baudelaire poem that they could lay their hands on, including some that he would almost certainly have omitted. The 1861 edition remains, therefore, the nearest thing we have to the book that Baudelaire intended us to read.

Need I tell you that into this terrible book I have put all my *heart*, all my *tenderness*, all my *religion* (disguised), all my *hatred*? It is true that I shall write the opposite, that I shall swear by all the gods that it is a work of *pure art*, of *mimicry*, of mere *dexterity*; and I shall be lying through my teeth.

– Letter to Narcisse Ancelle, 18th February 1866

*From
Romanticism
to Modernity*

This celebrated passage, complete with its feverish italics, has suffered from being quoted out of context. On the face of it, Baudelaire seems to be making the claim, all too common during the first period of French Romanticism, that his poetry is a direct record of personal experience, much like Victor Hugo’s *Les Contemplations* (1856); but in the same letter he rails against those apparently confessional poets known as “the elegists” (Lamartine and Musset) for their indulgence in “*sentiment, heart* and other such effeminate slop”. Where then does Baudelaire stand with regard to the poetry of his time? Flaubert praised him both for giving new life to romanticism and for being “like no one else – which is the most important quality”; and in fact *Les Fleurs du Mal* faces both ways – continuing the Romantic insistence on the

centrality of the poet's own subjectivity, yet doing so in a radically new fashion that points forward to modernism.

One aspect of that modernism can be illustrated by a brief look at two poems: the prefatory 'To the Reader' and the first poem of the volume proper, 'Benediction'. 'Benediction' presents an image of the poet that Shelley would have recognized – a divinely inspired misfit, an almost Christlike figure, persecuted but untainted by a world whose perversity and vindictiveness are embodied in the two female figures of mother and wife. On a first reading one assumes, perhaps too easily, that the Poet is a projection of the author himself, or at least of the ideal to which he aspires. In 'To the Reader', however, we have a speaker who rejects the Romantic artist-society dichotomy. The use of the first-person plural announces from the start the poet's inevitable complicity in the corruption that surrounds him; and the famous final line – "Hypocrite reader – kindred spirit – brother!" – undermines the narrative of 'Benediction' by indicating that in the relation between poet and society neither has the moral authority to pass judgement on the other. The prefatory poem thus constitutes a kind of instruction as to how *Les Fleurs du Mal* should be read, establishing a distance, not typical of Romanticism, between overall authorial intention and the speaker's voice in specific poems; it gives rise to a disturbing ambiguity of tone where we suspect a degree of ironic detachment behind the most apparently passionate lyrical utterance.

It is in this context that we can begin to understand what Baudelaire meant when, in a letter of 1858, he insisted on "the deliberate impersonality" of his poems. What matters in the long run is not whether the experience represented is personal or not, but whether it is conveyed in terms subtle, precise and concrete enough for us to appreciate its full exemplary resonance. The personal dimension is not so much evacuated as raised to a level where it is invested with a broader significance, not by explicit generalization or moralizing, but by a heightened imaginative grasp. And this is ultimately a matter of technique. What Baudelaire wrote in his 1859 essay on Théophile Gautier could well be applied to his own poetry: "The sensibility of the heart is not absolutely favourable to the poet's work. Taken to extremes, it can even be harmful. The sensibility of the imagination is of another kind: it knows how to choose, to judge, to compare, to avoid this and to seek that, rapidly, spontaneously." The emphasis on selection, judgement and comparison suggests a redefinition

of the imagination and a conscious break with the conventional poetics of Romanticism. It is not surprising that Baudelaire prefers the condensed, well-crafted poem to the more expansive structures of Hugo and Lamartine; only two of his poems exceed a hundred lines, and he has a predilection for the sonnet, where, as he argued in a letter of 1860, the idea emerges with greater intensity precisely because the form is so restrictive.

‘Spleen and the Ideal’ is the first and by far the longest section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The terms are not quite antithetical and require some comment. The *Ideal*, in this context, is not some vague idea of perfection, but the Platonic realm of pure ideas or forms which possess a substantial reality beyond that of the pale and botched copies that we perceive through the senses. *Spleen*, one of the four humours in medieval psychology and also the eighteenth-century English term for depression, had already entered French to indicate the Romantic melancholy into which the high-minded poet is plunged by his awareness of the gap between the ideal and the real; but for Baudelaire, who uses the word almost interchangeably with *ennui*, it has a stronger moral dimension that recalls the medieval concept of *acedie*, a culpable state of morosity and listlessness that saps the will and renders us incapable of good works like the failed artist of ‘The Bad Monk’.

The section takes up the standard themes of lyric poetry – love, beauty, decay, death and the function of art; but Baudelaire subjects the traditional material to a radical revision. Although the cycles for Jeanne Duval, Apollonie Sabatier and Marie Daubrun may recall Ronsard’s sonnet sequences for Cassandre, Marie and Hélène, the Renaissance genre is transformed by its place within the section’s overall movement from an active quest for the Ideal to the culpable passivity of Spleen. All three love cycles follow a ternary scheme that passes from initial attraction to ecstasy and torment and concludes with a meditation on the experience and its realization in poetry. Jeanne Duval and Apollonie Sabatier seem at a first reading to take up the traditional opposition between sensual and spiritual love, but this easy contrast is called into question by poems that suggest underlying similarities. For example, ‘The Balcony’, which belongs to the Jeanne Duval cycle, conveys a mood we would be more likely to associate with Apollonie Sabatier, whereas ‘Too Cheerful’ (part of the Sabatier cycle before the 1857 verdict) gives vent to a sadistic sexual violence exceeding anything addressed to Jeanne and pointing forward to the savage

close of the Marie Daubrun cycle ('To a Madonna'), where the woman falls victim to the poet's urge simultaneously to create and destroy an idol. Thus all three relationships are revealed as chronically unstable; neither Jeanne Duval nor Apollonie Sabatier nor Marie Daubrun are allowed to settle in their initial roles of sensual temptress, spiritual guide or autumnal soulmate. There is a danger in insisting unduly on the biographical dimension of the three cycles as representing three distinct episodes in the poet's life. Baudelaire's love poems do not constitute a narrative, but rather an unprecedented exploration of the amorous relationship that covers a wide range of situations and emotions and does not flinch before love's darker aspects or its most extreme and contradictory manifestations.

One central aspect of Baudelaire's modernism and of his shift away from Romanticism lies in his attitude towards the poetry of earlier periods, and notably of the Renaissance. 'A Carcass' is a remarkable example of how old conventions like the *memento mori* and the immortalizing power of the poet can be put to a new and provocative use. The opening ("Remember that fine summer morning, my soul") might lead us to expect a nostalgic recollection of the kind we find in 'The Balcony', but what we get is the brutal physical reality of "that thing at a bend in the road". The woman is addressed with high-flown Petrarchan terms ("my soul", "star of my eyes, sun of my nature", "my angel", "queen of graces"), but the hollowness of that religious vocabulary is suggested by the image of "legs in the air like a woman in heat", which reminds us of the continuity between the living woman and the carcass. The woman making love and the decomposing corpse are both, in a sense, engaged in an act of reproduction, as if the corpse "could live and be multiplied".

Baudelaire sometimes envisages with horror the idea of an existence that continues beyond death and perpetuates life's injustice and lack of meaning (FM 70, FM 94, FM 100, FM 124), but here the body undergoes a transformation into something that, despite the horror of the stench and the flies and the maggots, begins to create its own kind of beauty:

And that world resounded with eerie music
 Like running water or wind,
 Or grain when the winnower shakes his basket
 With a steady rhythmical swing.

As Rilke recognized in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, this is an example of a new more inclusive aesthetic which does not reject elements that may appear repulsive. The *memento mori* is not used in traditional fashion to elevate the immortal soul at the expense of the mortal body (like “Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant’s loss” in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 146), and its implications go far beyond the conventional recognition that all beauty is destined to decay. Matter is permanent, and the ugliness of decomposition is both the antithesis of beauty and the stuff out of which beauty is made. The ambivalence extends to the poem’s conclusion, where Baudelaire’s version of the immortalizing claim (“I keep the essence divine and the form / Of my decomposed old loves”) is not without the kind of ironic overtones that are typical of modernism’s recuperation of tradition.

Baudelaire’s style at its most characteristic is a striking blend of tradition and innovation. On the traditional side we have Baudelaire’s adherence to classical forms and metrics such as sonnets and stanzaic poetry in the twelve-syllable French alexandrine, his love of allegory and personification and his exploitation of a wide range of time-honoured rhetorical devices which, he argued (in a review of the Salon of 1859), have never hindered originality, but on the contrary have favoured its emergence. One need only think of the poise and resonance of lines like “*Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches*” (“Stubborn in sin, and cowards in repentance”, “To the Reader”), or “*Chaque instant te dévore un morceau du délice / À chaque homme accordé pour toute sa saison*” (“Each moment eats a piece of that delight / To each man granted for his earthly season”, FM 85) or “*Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit / L’immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve*” (“A poor sad mirror where in bygone years / Shone the vast majesty of your widowed grief”, FM 89) to see how much Baudelaire owes to the seventeenth century, whether it be the sermons of Bossuet or the tragedies of Racine. This mastery of the high style, however, coexists with an almost unprecedented recourse to the prosaic. English readers, unaccustomed to the heavy hand of traditional French poetic diction, may not appreciate just how revolutionary and “unpoetic” much of Baudelaire’s vocabulary must have sounded at the time, but it is highly unlikely that the words “omnibus”, “bulletin”, “saliva” and “corset” had appeared in French poetry before *Les Fleurs du Mal*. And the prosaic is not necessarily or

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simply a reflection of subject matter: it surfaces as metaphor in ways and in places that we would not expect. Man's insatiable quest for sexual pleasure is like squeezing an old orange ('To the Reader'), the anguished heart resembles a crumpled piece of paper (FM 44), night becomes "a sullen landlady" and a woman's supple beauty recalls "a monkey's agile childish grace" (FM 38). Baudelaire's skill in blending or juxtaposing different registers within a single poem enables complex effects of irony and ambiguity, interactions of past and present, sacred and profane, sublime and banal – sudden or subtle shifts of tone that correspond to the movements of a sensitive and unquiet mind reacting to the most varied manifestations of desire and to the multiple encounters of the modern city.

Increasingly, towards the end of his poetic career, Baudelaire allowed himself liberties with the traditional forms over which he had such complete command. In the sonnet '*Semper eadem*', for example, the syntax rides over the conventional break between the quatrains and even more dramatically, with the repeated colloquial "hold your tongue!", over the gap between octave and sestet. More extreme examples of this *enjambement* are to be found in the great poems of 'Parisian Scenes'. Take the phrase "*Tout cassés / Qu'ils sont*" ("Broken down / The way they are") which links stanzas four and five of 'The Little Old Women'. It would be quite impossible to pause after *cassés*, but the very fact that the syntax continues when the stanzaic division would demand that it stop lends the phrase an extraordinary force. Or again, in 'The Seven Old Men', a sentence whose subject is "*un vieillard*" ("an old man") occupies the whole of the fourth stanza, but concludes with the verb "*M'apparut*" ("Appeared to me") at the beginning of stanza five. The effect is that of a mimetic jolt as the stroller of the poem is stopped in his tracks by the ghastly apparition. This working of the syntax against the order dictated by the units of verse line or stanza is only one of several ways in which the major poems of 'Parisian Scenes' announce a new departure in French poetry. Baudelaire himself seemed to be conscious of the fact, to judge by his own comment in a letter of 1859 accompanying an early draft of 'The Seven Old Men': "It is the first number of a new series that I am trying out, and I really fear that I have simply overstepped the limits assigned to Poetry." The prose poems of *Paris Spleen* may be seen as confirming that transgression, but it was *Les Fleurs du Mal* that opened the way for a whole new generation

of French poets. As Paul Valéry remarked: “Neither Verlaine nor Mallarmé nor Rimbaud would have been what they were if they had not read *Les Fleurs du Mal* at the decisive age.”

In a passage of *The Salon of 1846* entitled ‘On the Heroism of Modern Life’ and envisaging “a new and particular beauty” not wedded to classical subjects, Baudelaire had insisted on the potential of Paris as a theme for art: “Parisian life is fertile in poetic and marvellous subjects. The marvellous envelops us and nourishes us like the atmosphere, but we fail to see it.” In ‘Parisian Scenes’ he seeks to accomplish in poetry the task he had urged upon the painters, and it is therefore inevitable that much of the discussion of his modernity should centre on this section of the volume. It must be said, of course, that Baudelaire cannot be credited with having introduced urban themes into French poetry. When Baudelaire dedicates the three major poems of ‘Parisian Scenes’ (FM 89, FM 90, FM 91) to Victor Hugo, he is both acknowledging a precursor and inviting us to appreciate what is new in his own approach, which steers clear of Hugo’s sentimental moralizing and didacticism. Baudelaire wrote at a time when the old Paris of narrow streets and close-packed buildings was being transformed by Baron Haussmann into the metropolis of spacious squares and broad boulevards that we know today. Paris was also being changed by the rapid industrialization that had started in the 1830s, by the growth of an urban proletariat and by the increasing power of a wealthy bourgeoisie. So Baudelaire’s poetry does indeed register the sights and sounds of the “teeming city”, the chimneys belching smoke, the fashionable restaurants, the theatres, brothels and gambling dens, the glittering shops and the jumble of building sites, the plodding workmen and the ageing coquettes, the clouds of dust raised by the street-cleaners, the dense yellow fog, the blaring of brass bands, the clatter of the omnibus, the rattling of carts and the hiss of kitchens – an abundance of detail worthy of the Balzac that he admired so much. And yet it is not ultimately this kind of realism that makes Baudelaire’s ‘Parisian Scenes’ a crucial episode of modernism. Rather, as Walter Benjamin pointed out in a seminal essay, it is his exploration of life in the industrialized city as qualitatively unlike anything that had preceded it – as ever-changing, alienating and phantasmagoric. Traditional lyric poetry is set against a background that is essentially immutable, governed by the rhythm of the seasons, where the only change is cyclic. But the modern industrial city

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is in a state of constant and increasingly rapid transformation, geared to a mode of production that leaves its inhabitants alienated and bewildered by a process they cannot keep up with, much less understand and control. The lack of social cohesion or meaningful human contact in Baudelaire's Paris is seen not only in such obviously failed or fragile encounters as those recounted in 'To a Woman Passing By' or 'Mist and Rain', but also in the way poems tend to stress images of isolation – the faithful servant lying unvisited in her grave (FM 100), the old men dying in hospital who "have never known the love / A hearth can offer, and have never lived" (FM 95), or the emblematic figure of dawn as a shivering woman making her way up the empty Seine at first light (FM 105). Above all, the poet himself, in his persona as *flâneur* ("stroller"), embodies alienation as he takes his observant way around Paris, irrevocably detached from the characters who receive his unsentimental sympathy. The gesture that might help the girl in the 'Red-Haired Beggar Girl' is envisaged but not made; the little old women of the eponymous poem may be addressed as "my family, kindred minds", but they are followed from afar and will hardly be aware of the "grave farewell" he offers them each night. As John E. Jackson has noted, the poem moves back and forth between closeness and distance, as sympathy for the women's plight is combined with a detached pleasure in finding such a rich topic for his art. Ultimately, as in 'The Swan', the poet can only respond to the dislocation of continuity and community by withdrawing to his own imaginative world ("the forest where my mind seeks exile") and making art out of "the chaos of our living cities".

The "teeming city", we should remember, is also a city "that swarms with dreams", a hallucinatory mirror for Baudelaire's own inner demons. In the case of 'The Seven Old Men', for example, where the influence of Poe and De Quincey is strongly felt, the multiplied hunchback figure recalls both the visions of Macbeth and the legend of the Wandering Jew, conveying a sense of guilt and exclusion that is all the stronger because its origin remains mysterious, hidden like the maze of sewers beneath the city. Fatal to his finances and damaging to his health, Paris was necessary to Baudelaire's creative self-examination: in more ways than one it was the city where he found himself.

The Swan

Composed in late 1859, 'The Swan' occupies a special place in Baudelaire's work for two reasons. The first is that it marks the end of his great creative period, even though he was not

yet forty and would live for another eight years. The second is that, more than any other poem, it has been cited as demonstrating the qualities that make Baudelaire a founding father of modern poetry.

In a letter to Victor Hugo in December 1859, Baudelaire gave a brief account of the poem:

What was important for me was to record rapidly all that a casual occurrence, an image, can offer by way of suggestions, and how the sight of a suffering animal can urge the mind towards all those beings that we love, towards all those who are absent and who suffer, towards all those who have lost something that cannot be found again.

The keyword here is *suggestion*, a recurrent term in Baudelaire's critical writings. Behind it lies his distrust of a poetry that is too explicit about its own logic, that explains its own metaphors, that too obviously instrumentalizes the experience that gave it rise. What Baudelaire does in 'The Swan' is to reconstruct the experience in all its randomness and unpredictability so that the reader is forced to join with the poet in his search for meaning. We follow what seems to be the free association of ideas in the mind of the *flâneur* as he wanders through the city – and only slowly do we begin to grasp how the various images are related. T.S. Eliot, in his essay on the Metaphysical Poets, contrasted the "ordinary man", whose experience remains "chaotic, irregular, fragmentary", with the poet, whose mind "is constantly amalgamating disparate experience" and "forming new wholes". What is distinctive about 'The Swan' is that we are not presented with the new whole as something already achieved, but invited to see the amalgamation taking place and to participate in the process. Thus the poem reflects on its own creation and draws attention to its own limits as a tentative and fragile way of dealing with a shifting and fragmented environment.

'The Swan' begins the first of its two sections by bringing together a literary reminiscence, the Andromache episode in Virgil's *Aeneid* (III, 294–305), and an immediate contemporary experience: that of walking through the new Paris of Baron Haussmann. Andromache, the wife of Hector, is seen as a widowed exile after the fall of Troy, weeping for her husband by a mere rivulet that serves as a substitute for the river Simoeis of her homeland; the poet, as he crosses the Place du Carrousel,

recalls what it once looked like as a building site and the home of a menagerie. As Andromache is an exile from her native Troy, so the poet, without moving, has become an exile in Paris since the city that he once knew now exists only in his mind's eye. Both Andromache and the poet seek to reconstruct a world they have lost. A third figure of exile emerges with his memory of the swan, far from its native lake, reduced to clumsy flapping in the dust. Swans have long been associated with lyric poetry, and the link between bird and poet does not need to be spelled out as explicitly as it was in 'The Albatross'. Suddenly – and perhaps surprisingly in a poem that has such a precise historical and topographical setting – the bird begins to speak as it becomes invested with mythical status ("This hapless creature, mythical and doomed"). The subsequent comparison between the suffering swan and "the man in Ovid" is sharply ironic. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1, 84–86), the god of creation blesses man with an erect stance and uplifted face to stress his difference from the downward-looking animals and his superior status in the hierarchy of living creatures; but here that same stance is one of suffering rather than dignity ("Stretching his writhing neck and hungry head") and the swan's imitation of man's position is made to suggest a common protest against an unfeeling deity.

That intense climax ends the first section of the poem, giving the reader (and the poet) a pause for thought. The second part then reflects on the myth-making process of the first, as if only now does the poet fully understand how the fragmentary images of past and present ("New houses, scaffolding, stone blocks, / Old suburbs") have fused into a single experience. "All turn allegorical": in other words, all the various images of Paris are imbued with significance insofar as they recall other images that combine, as F.W. Leakey puts it, "to crystallize a central emotion or idea, and thereby become an allegory – or a myth". The basic structure of the poem now appears to be almost a chiasmus: the first section moves from Andromache to the swan and concludes with the creation of a myth; the second section moves from the myth or allegory to the swan and then back again to Andromache. But this is not in fact where 'The Swan' comes to an end, because the image that burdens the poet at the Louvre is not only that of the swan but of all exiles who are "ridiculous and sublime" in their hopeless longing. Thus, carried forward by the anaphoric "I think" that has been picked up from the poem's opening line, the last three stanzas form a coda in which

the idea of exile is expanded to include the consumptive Negress, orphans, castaways, captives and all those who have suffered an irreparable loss. To this community of exiles the poet himself belongs as the distant memories resound like the plangent notes of the horn through the internalized “forest where [his] mind seeks exile”. The poem has expanded geographically from Paris and Troy to Africa and the unnamed islands; its concluding line suggests a corresponding temporal expansion as the succession of exiles stretches from the past of classical antiquity down to the present of Haussmann’s renovated Paris and on into the future, a long line “of captives, the defeated... and of many, many more”. One need hardly stress the continuing resonance of that line in the twenty-first century – not only for the hapless millions uprooted by poverty and war, but for all those who feel left behind – exiled in the extended Baudelairean sense – by a society that moves inexorably onwards, destroying our old landmarks with such bewildering speed.

The poetry of Baudelaire is steeped in religion: the monstrosity and the crucifix, the bad monk and the Doctor of the Church, St Antony and St Peter, Cain and Abel, myrrh and frankincense, prayers and blasphemies, the ‘Te Deum’ and the ‘De Profundis’, the Madonna, angels and demons galore and, notoriously, Satan himself. It may be thought that much of this was fairly natural in a poet who had received a traditional Catholic education, but the religious imagery and reference in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is not of that instinctive kind; it does not spring to mind merely to furnish a metaphor or bolster a hyperbole: it belongs to the essence of Baudelaire’s art and thought. But how are we to define Baudelaire’s religion? The answers to that question have gone from one extreme to the other. Seventy or eighty years after being condemned and celebrated as a Satanist, Baudelaire was, if not canonized, at least comfortably installed in the modern pantheon of Catholic poets.

That Baudelaire was fascinated by the figure of Satan cannot be denied, but that does not, by any means, make him the Satanist so dear to some late Victorians in their rejection of an oppressive sexual morality. The Satanist image derives largely from the three poems in the ‘Revolt’ section which belong to an early stage of his career and reflect a typically adolescent reaction against organized religion. The Satan of the ‘Litanies’, like the Satan that Blake and Shelley found in *Paradise Lost*, is a heroic rebel against tyranny who, in his sympathy for the oppressed,

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and Death*

comes increasingly to resemble Christ (another victim of the divine despot). But the Satan who figures so prominently in the rest of the volume corresponds perfectly to the subtle deceptive figure of orthodox Christianity who “dissolves our will” (“To the Reader”) and uses “specious arguments” to confuse the poet and leave him stranded in the desert of Ennui, “far from the sight of God” (“Destruction”). Above all, far from being the noble rebel, he is the hidden patron of the established order, whose hypocritical members “have kissed [his] arse in secret” (“The Unforeseen”).

Why then does the poetry pay such attention to this slightly comic creation of superstition? When Flaubert suggested that he had made too much of “the Spirit of Evil”, Baudelaire replied: “I have always been obsessed by the impossibility of accounting for some of man’s sudden actions or thoughts without presupposing the intervention of an evil force outside him – there’s a huge admission for which the whole combined nineteenth century won’t make me blush.” Baudelaire was convinced of the existence of evil as something that could not be explained (or explained away) in the psychological, social or economic terms proposed by progressive thinkers. As he wrote in a letter of 1856, “the great modern heresy [is] the suppression of the idea of original sin.” Original sin, however, is easier to conceive as a condition than as an active force. For the latter, Baudelaire’s dramatic and allegorical temperament needed Satan. To speak of this as a mere personification is to underestimate the intensity with which Baudelaire experienced evil as an almost physical presence.

Where does this leave the Catholic Baudelaire? The explicitly Catholic statements of his last years were set down by a man facing death and not by the man who wrote *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Paul Claudel, the exuberant Catholic poet-dramatist, saw Baudelaire’s religion as tainted by Jansenism, with its emphasis on man’s natural depravity; but even the most deep-dyed Jansenist could hardly approve the strange form of Christianity which gets no further than original sin, which offers no opening to grace and to which Christ’s redemptive sacrifice seems to have no relevance. There is, perhaps, a glimmer of hope in the “Evil that knows itself” (“The Irremediable”). This, at least, escapes the mediocrity of the cowardly sinners in ‘To the Reader’ and is, as he claims elsewhere, “less horrible and nearer cure than evil ignorant of itself”; but we do not get much beyond this vague intuition. Precisely because redemption is absent, *Les*

Fleurs du Mal cannot envisage the afterlife as anything but a continuation of the suffering, neglect and dissatisfaction endured in this life ('The Mask', 'The Digging Skeleton', 'The Dream of a Curious Man').

Baudelaire's attitude towards religion while he was still in his creative prime is, perhaps, summed up in a letter written to his mother in 1861. "I long with all my heart (and with what sincerity only I can know!) to believe that some external and invisible being takes an interest in my destiny; but what must one do to believe it?" The great recapitulative poem that concludes the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* ('The Voyage') is essentially agnostic; man's life journey frustrates all his aspirations by presenting him everywhere with images of his own condition, "an oasis of horror in a desert of ennui". At the end, however, we set out on a new voyage under the captaincy of Death "to find the *new*!" The phrase is ambiguous. It would be comforting to read it as the expression of a residual hope (no more than that) in death as a gateway to some more satisfying afterlife, yet this is difficult to support from the context and may well be a misreading of the metaphor. Death is not the destination of the journey: it is the "old captain" who leads us in search of the new. As Yves Bonnefoy has suggested, this death is "not so much an end as a means". Or, to put it another way, if, instead of simply accepting our finitude as a given, we cultivate our awareness of death, we shall accede to a knowledge that gives greater significance to our actions and places our lives in a new and truer light.

Claudél hailed Baudelaire as "the only truly religious spirit in the sad nineteenth century": it is, however, part of Baudelaire's modernity and our own that we are never quite sure whether he is using poetry as a refuge for religion or as a substitute for it.

No other French poet has exercised an influence on English literature comparable with that of Baudelaire. What is most remarkable is that the impact of Baudelaire has proved crucial on two separate occasions, both of which signalled an important shift in literary sensibility. And in both cases the shift was embodied in the work of a major poet-critic, the first being Algernon Charles Swinburne and the second T.S. Eliot.

Swinburne first drew attention to the importance of Baudelaire in his 1862 *Spectator* review of the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This concise appreciation grasps most of the volume's essential characteristics – the sheer musicality, the technical mastery and bias towards traditional forms, the Keatsian

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power of sensuous apprehension especially in terms of colour and perfume, “the acrid relish of suffering felt or inflicted” and, above all, a rejection of didacticism that is not to be equated with a lack of moral seriousness. In a manner that anticipates Rilke’s comment on the same poem, he takes ‘A Carcass’ as an example of Baudelaire’s power to extract beauty from the most unlikely and recalcitrant material and gives a scrupulously fair idea of Baudelaire’s variety and flexibility by citing passages from poems such as ‘To a Passer-by’, ‘Song of the Afternoon’, ‘A Martyr’ and ‘To a Madonna’. ‘The Seven Old Men’ and ‘The Little Old Women’ are among those listed as demonstrating the poet’s “strength and beauty of manner”. Only his choice of ‘The Litanies of Satan’ as “the keynote to this whole complicated tune of poems” is regrettable insofar as it contributed to the Satanist legend, but from every other angle this is a remarkably prescient and perceptive essay. What Baudelaire meant for Swinburne’s own poetry is seen at its best in his ‘Ave Atque Vale’ (1867), which, in the tradition of Milton’s ‘Lycidas’, Shelley’s ‘Adonais’ and Arnold’s ‘Thyrsis’ is both an elegy for Baudelaire and a poetic manifesto where metrical virtuosity and lush imagery blend with echoes of *Les Fleurs du Mal* to create a convincingly Baudelairean atmosphere. Elsewhere in Swinburne’s work, the influence is less successfully absorbed, marred by the prolixity, repetition and overemphasis that he had praised Baudelaire for avoiding. But the seed had been sown. As Patricia Clements has shown, in Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, in the Decadents and Aesthetes and in all those writers we associate with the phrase “art for art’s sake”, Baudelaire remained a powerful presence.

It follows that when T.S. Eliot hailed Baudelaire as “the greatest exemplar of *modern* poetry in any language”, the statement was somewhat less revolutionary than it might seem. Baudelaire was already in the poetic atmosphere that he breathed. What Eliot did, in a series of essays between 1919 and 1930, was to replace the decadent aesthetic Baudelaire with a rigorous classicist and stern Catholic moralist “born out of his time”, a theological innocent in a rationalist century who is “discovering Christianity for himself”. We have already suggested the limits of this approach. One accepts that “Baudelaire is concerned not with demons, black masses and romantic blasphemy, but with the real problem of good and evil”, yet the fact is that Eliot here is setting up something like a straw adversary, since the superficial Satanist image had already gone out of fashion and, in any

case, perceptive readers (including Swinburne and Tennyson) had from the start recognized the moralist strain in Baudelaire. Eliot is more convincing when, in a 1950 lecture on Dante, he sums up what Baudelaire has meant for his own poetic practice:

I think that from Baudelaire I learned first a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic.

There, in a nutshell, we have Baudelaire as the poet who makes *The Waste Land* possible.

It is not just that Eliot's "Unreal city / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn" is, as he tells us himself, an echo of "*Fourmillante cité, cité plein de rêves*" ("The teeming city, city that swarms with dreams") or that 'The Burial of the Dead' concludes with a direct quotation from 'To the Reader' ("*hypocrite lecteur – mon semblable – mon frère!*"). It is the whole procedure and perspective of *The Waste Land* – the dislocations, the juxtaposition and blending of colloquial and literary registers, the casual and nightmarish encounters, the distanced yet strangely participating observer (the *flâneur* or Tiresias) – that root Eliot's great modernist poem in the 'Parisian Scenes' of Baudelaire. Twenty years later, in *Four Quartets*, the influence no longer needed to be so clearly advertised, but the concluding passage of 'East Coker' ("Home is where we start from") echoes 'The Voyage'; and the "blowing of the horn" that ends the hallucinatory wartime street encounter of 'Little Gidding' is both the all-clear siren and the "full-breathed horn" of the last stanza of 'The Swan'. The "familiar compound ghost" who instructs the ageing poet surely contains Baudelaire as well as Yeats and Dante.

In the long run, despite the obvious differences in culture and sensibility, there is a certain continuity between Swinburne and Eliot. Both realized that the English poetic tradition, for all its glories, needed a renovation of language, a revision of subject matter and a broader frame of reference. In turning to Baudelaire, they extended into poetry the task already begun by Matthew Arnold in criticism – that of rescuing English literature from its insularity and replacing it in a European context.

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– Anthony Mortimer, 2016

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