Intratextual Baudelaire
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THE LAST WORDS of the Fleurs’ liminary “Au lecteur” [To the Reader]—

Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!

[You know him, reader, that subtle monster,
—Hypocritical reader—my likeness, my brother!]

stick in the memory. For many or most readers they persist when the rest of the poem has been forgotten. But how many remember them—remember in particular the hypocrisy with which the reader is charged—when they read the following line in “Bénédiction”? “Avec hypocrisie ils jettent ce qu’il touche” [They hypocritically throw away what he touches] (l. 35).

It is my contention that we should remember that hypocrisy when encountering this one because Baudelaire wants us to. We know that because, as I argued in my introduction, he approvingly quotes Liszt saying of Wagner’s music that it forces “notre méditation et notre mémoire à un si constant exercice” [our meditation and memory to such constant exercise] that the composer “arrache, par cela seul, l’action de la musique au domaine des vagues attendrissements et ajoute à ses charmes quelques-uns des plaisirs de l’esprit” [tears music’s effect away from the realm of vague sentiments and to its charms adds some of the pleasures of the mind] (OC II: 802), and he immediately goes on to cite Wagner’s music as a model
for the poetic work. The ideal “œuvre poétique” would be like this music that makes demands on the listener’s memory for the sake of greater pleasures than that granted by the mere representation of sentiments, however touchingly conveyed.

I invite you to read the *Fleurs du mal* and the *Spleen de Paris* as poetic works that force us to remember, and our minds to labor. I invite you to read their poems not for the sentiments that each may express (or appear to), for the world is full of commentaries that minister to that, but for pleasures from another domain. In the 1857 version of “Je te donne ces vers . . . ,” Baudelaire expressed the hope that he would at some future time “Fai[re] travailler un soir les cervelles humaines” (l. 4) (that in 1861 he would change “travailler” to “rêver” is one of many details I will invite you to join me in puzzling out). That time, I hope, is now.

**“Au lecteur”/ “Bénédiction”**

So why does Baudelaire immediately follow the hypocrisy of which he accuses his reader in the concluding lines of “Au lecteur” with another hypocrisy in “Bénédiction” [Blessing] (1857: 1)? It is a question even more worth asking when we realize that these are the only two instances of hypocrisy in the *Fleurs du mal* in either 1857 or 1861. Here is the passage again, at greater length: “Tous ceux qu’il veut aimer . . . / Avec *hypocrisie* . . . jettent ce qu’il touche, / Et s’accusent d’avoir mis leurs pieds dans ses pas” [All those he wants to love . . . / With *hypocrisy* . . . throw away all that he touches, / And accuse themselves of having stepped in his footsteps] (ll. 29, 35–36). Their hypocrisy is to pretend that he is so objectionable to them, so alien, that they must throw away whatever he has touched and are ashamed of having followed in his footsteps. But if they have followed in his steps, they are more like him than they want to admit. At this point their hypocrisy begins to resemble that of the reader in “Au lecteur”—if, as is likely, the reader’s hypocrisy is to pretend not to know “ce monstre,” Ennui: “Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat, /—Hypocrite lecteur. . . .” Especially if we exercise our memory once more and meditate on the detail that the Poet himself in “Bénédiction,” the man whom other men hypocritically pretend not to know (as Simon Peter pretended not to know Jesus—and elsewhere in the poem Baudelaire encourages us to think of the Poet as a sort of Jesus), is also called “ce monstre”: his mother, parodying Mary’s Magnificat, complains, “Puisque tu m’as choisie entre toutes les femmes / . . . / Et que je ne puis pas rejeter dans les flammes, / . . . ce monstre rabougri” [Because you have chosen me among all women / . . . / And I cannot cast into the flames, / . . . this stunted *monster*] (ll. 9, 11–12).
So in both poems the hypocrisy is to claim not to know, not to have an intimate connection with, an entity called “ce monstre.” Yet with all this similarity the monsters themselves are not the same. One is Ennui; the other is the Poet. The two are not equivalent, nor should these two poems’ networks of similarities be read as suggesting they are. Nevertheless, the parallels are there: what is going on? Why is it that such a network of associations—and there will be many more instances in the poems to come—passes from one poem to the next? It is as if the poems themselves were double-dealing hypocrites, pretending to be about one thing but in reality not, for each follows in the footsteps of its predecessor as the hypocrites in “Bénédiction” follow in those of the one they claim to reject.

It is as if the poems were hypocrites in the original Greek sense of the word as well: actors in a play. In that play, in that context larger than their individual role, “Bénédiction” and “Au lecteur” act out an opposition between going down and going up, going to hell and going to heaven. In “Au lecteur” each day “vers l’Enfer nous descendons d’un pas” [toward Hell we descend a step] (l. 15); in “Bénédiction,” the Poet lifts his arms and his gaze “Vers le Ciel” [Toward Heaven] (l. 53), and near the end of the poem he knows he will attain it. And it is with parallel gaiety that both we and the Poet pursue our oppositely tending paths: in “Au lecteur,” we “rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux” [gaily return to the muddy path] (l. 7) that leads to hell; in “Bénédiction” the Poet, “gai comme un oiseau des bois” [gay as a forest bird] (l. 28), sings of the “chemin de la croix” [the path of the cross] (l. 26) as he makes his way “dans son pèlerinage” [in his pilgrimage] (l. 27).

“Bénédiction”/“Le Soleil”

In “Bénédiction,” the Poet “s’enivre de soleil” [is intoxicated with sun] (l. 22), and the heaven to which he aspires will offer him a diadem made entirely “de pure lumière, / Puissée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs” [of pure light, / Drawn from the holy source of the original rays] (ll. 73–74). His association with the sun persists in the poem that immediately followed this one in 1857, “Le Soleil” [The Sun] (1857: 2). The sun there is a “père nourricier” [nourishing father] (l. 9) who “remplit les cerveaux et les ruches de miel” [fills brains and hives with honey] (l. 12). As the Poet is made “gai” in “Bénédiction,” so too are those on whom the sun shines: he “rajournit les porteurs de béquilles / Et les rend gai” [rejuvenates those who carry crutches / And makes them gay] (ll. 13–14). In contrast to Satan in “Au lecteur,” by whom “le riche métal de notre volonté / Est tout vaporisé” [the rich metal of our will / Is completely vaporized] (ll.
11–12), the Sun “fait s’évaporer les soucis vers le ciel” [makes cares evaporate toward the sky] (l. 11). Satan vaporizes our will in order to facilitate our descent “vers l’Enfer” [toward Hell] (l. 15), whereas God as the Sun draws the Poet in the other direction both in “Bénédiction” (“Vers le Ciel, où son œil voit un trône splendide, / Le Poète serein lève ses bras pieux” [Toward Heaven, where his eye sees a splendid throne, / The Poet, serene, lifts up his pious arms] [ll. 53–54]) and in “Le Soleil.” The Poet in “Bénédiction” becomes quasi-divine in becoming royal, receiving his “couronne mystique . . . ce beau diadème éblouissant et clair” [mystic crown . . . that beautiful diadem dazzling and bright] (ll. 67, 72); in “Le Soleil,” the solar divinity, conversely, becomes like a poet in behaving like a king: “Quand, ainsi qu’un poète, il descend dans les villes, / Il ennoblit le sort des choses les plus viles, / Et s’introduit en roi” [When, like a poet, he goes down to the cities, / He enobles the lot of the vilest things, / And enters as a king] (ll. 17–19).

“Le Soleil” / “Élévation”

The “nectar” of “Bénédiction” that became “miel” [honey] in “Le Soleil” becomes “une pure et divine liqueur” [a pure and divine liquor] (l. 12) in “Élévation” [Elevation] (1857: 3). Here the poet continues his ascent, going even “Par-delà le soleil” [beyond the sun] (l. 3) into what is called in “Bénédiction” the “foyer saint des rayons primitifs” [holy source of the original rays] (l. 74) and described in “Élévation” as “Le feu clair qui remplit les espaces limpides” [the bright fire that fills the limpid spaces] (l. 12). In “Le Soleil,” this nourishing and paternal Sun had the same filling effect when it “remplit les cerveaux et les ruches de miel” [fills brains and hives with honey] (l. 12). In “Élévation,” the Poet continues the ascent begun in “Bénédiction” and with the same gaiety: “Mon esprit, . . . / Tu sillonnnes gaiement l’immensité profonde” [My mind, . . . / You gaily plow the deep immensity] (ll. 5, 7) of the upper reaches of the sky. It is worth recalling just how persistent a motif this has been: “nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux” [we gaily return to the muddy path] (l. 7) in “Au lecteur”; in “Bénédiction,” the Poet is “gai comme un oiseau” [gay as a bird] (l. 28); the Sun in “Le Soleil” makes the crippled “gais” [gay] (l. 14). As “soucis” [cares] in “Le Soleil” are made by the Sun to “s’évaporer . . . vers le ciel” [evaporate . . . toward the sky] (l. 11) in “Élévation,” “les pensers, comme des alouettes, / Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor” [thoughts, like larks, / Toward the sky in the morning take free flight] (ll. 17–18). That prepositional phrase has been nearly as persistent as the gaiety motif. In “Bénédiction” it was the Poet who made
a pious gesture “Vers le Ciel” [toward Heaven] (l. 53), contrasting with those of us in “Au lecteur” who each day take a downward step “vers l’Enfer” [toward Hell] (l. 15).

“The Fabric of the First Edition”

“Élévation” / “Correspondances”

The last words of “Élévation”—“Heureux celui qui . . . comprend sans effort / Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes!” [Happy he who . . . effortlessly understands / The language of flowers and mute things!] (ll. 15, 19–20)—are soon echoed in the “confuses paroles” [confused words] (l. 2) that emerge from nature’s living pillars at the beginning of “Correspondances” (1857: 4). Pichois, among others, acknowledges the connection, remarking that the language of flowers and mute things is itself the “correspondances” (OC I: 838n).

“Correspondances” / “J’aime le souvenir de ces époques nues . . .”

Similarly, the end of “Correspondances” is what connects it to the next poem, “J’aime le souvenir de ces époques nues . . .” [I love the memory of those naked epochs . . . ] (1857: 5). The tercets of “Correspondances” set up an opposition between two kinds of perfumes, those that are “frais comme des chairs d’enfants” [fresh like the flesh of children] (l. 9) and those that are “corrompus, riches et triomphants” [corrupt, rich, and triumphant] (l. 11). “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” sets up an opposition between humanity in its “sainte jeunesse” [holy youth] (l. 36), its “époques nues” [naked epochs] (l. 1), and the humanity of the nineteenth century that is so ugly and out of shape it has to wear clothes. There is a correspondence between these oppositions and those in “Correspondances.” At first glance that might seem unlikely, since Baudelaire so highly praises humanity’s youth and so damn its present, while condemning neither sort of perfume. Yet he has more to say about the present state of the human race:

Nous avons, il est vrai, nations corrompues,
Aux peuples anciens des beautés inconnues:
Des visages rongés par les chancre de cœur,
Et comme qui dirait des beautés de langueur.

[It is true that we, corrupt nations, have
Beauties unknown to the ancients:]
Is he serious about this? Pichois thought not, saying, “this expression appears to be intended ironically” (OC I: 847). But F. W. Leakey argues that Baudelaire really did find “authentic beauty . . . in modern life.” In fact, Leakey finds this part of the poem so out of character with the rest that he suspects “these lines to have been intended originally for some quite separate poem,” and in his words, the result is “the signal incoherence of the poem’s structure.” In the Salon de 1846, as he notes, Baudelaire wrote of “un élément nouveau, qui est la beauté moderne” [a new element, which is modern beauty] (OC II: 496). This comes at the end of a passage in which the poet finds other instances of modern beauty in the defiance of a government minister before his critics and in the courage of a condemned criminal before the guillotine. Pichois, who thinks Baudelaire was being ironic in praising modern beauty in the poem, did not think he was being ironic in the Salon, but in light of that apparent contradiction he argues that the poem must date from before 1846. The fact is, however, that the Fleurs du mal date from 1857 and are not, as Baudelaire emphasized in a letter to Alfred de Vigny, “un pur album” [merely an album] (Corr. II: 196). They are not just a collection of the poems he had written up until that date. Instead, the poems form “une ténébreuse et profonde unité” [a shadowy and deep unity]—to borrow the language of “Correspondances” (l. 6)—of blending echoes. In “Correspondances” those echoes come “de loin” [from a distance] (l. 5). But in the Fleurs du mal they also come from right next door. The two kinds of perfumes, which, as Pichois aptly notes, form “a relationship of opposition between innocence and corruption” (OC I: 847), correspond with precision to the two ages of man, the “parfums frais comme des chairs d’enfants” [perfumes fresh as the flesh of children] to the fleshy childhood of the “époques nues” [naked epochs], to that innocent time when “sans mensonge et sans anxiété” [without lies and without anxiety] (l. 4) men and women were clothed only in their skin; and the other perfumes, “corrompus” [corrupted], correspond to the modern age of “nations corrompues” [corrupted nations] (l. 29), not simple but complex, not young but old. Pichois, without realizing it, put his finger on what unites the two poems, what makes one the mirror of the other (or at least the second the mirror of the tercets of the first), for the two

2. Richter likewise notes the connection between the “parfums . . . corrompus” and the “nations corrompues” (Baudelaire, 76).
epochs, naked and clothed, are likewise to each other, as he says, in “a relationship of opposition between innocence and corruption.”

“J’aime le souvenir de ces époques nues . . . ”
/ “Les Phares”

Despite their different subjects—perfumes and human history—there is something that persists as we move forward from “Correspondances” and “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” The same phenomenon takes place within “Les Phares” [The Beacons] (1857: 6); in fact, it is the argument of the poem. From Rubens to da Vinci to Rembrandt to Michelangelo to Puget to Watteau to Goya to Delacroix, despite the varying subjects evoked by their artistic production (“malédictions, . . . blasphèmes, . . . plaintes, / . . . extases, . . . cris, . . . pleurs, . . . Te Deum” [curses, . . . blasphemies, . . . complaints, / . . . extasies, . . . cries, . . . tears, . . . Te Deums]), the narrator sees but a single “écho redit” [restated echo] (l. 35), a single “cri répété” [repeated cry] (l. 37), a single “ordre renvoyé” [order relayed] (l. 38), a single “long hurlement qui roule d’âge en âge” [long wail rolling from age to age] (l. 43). But at the same time as this assertion parallels the relationship of sameness-despite-difference that exists between “Correspondances” and “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” it is nevertheless the opposite of what takes place within the latter poem, for there is no continuity between the “époques nues” [naked epochs] and the corrupted present. Things were absolutely different then from what they are now. In other words, “Les Phares” and “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” are to each other as are the two ages in the latter: symmetrical opposites.

“Les Phares” / “La Muse malade”

But, continuing the sequence of oppositions, the narrator of “La Muse malade” [The Ailing Muse] (1857: 7) takes toward the two different ages of “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” an attitude akin to that expressed toward different yet continuous ages in “Les Phares,” expressing the wish that the pagan past and the sickly present could somehow coexist. In the tercets, he desires that, “exhalant l’odeur de la santé” [exhaling the odor of health], his Muse’s “sein de pensers forts fût toujours fréquenté” [breast be always frequented by strong thoughts] (ll. 10–11), that her

. . . sang chrétien coulât à flots rythmiques,
Comme les sons nombreux des syllabes antiques,
Où règnent tour à tour le père des chansons,
Phoebus, et le grand Pan, le seigneur des moissons.

[. . . Christian blood flow in rhythmic waves,
Like the measured sounds of ancient syllables,
Where alternately reign the father of songs,
Phoebus, and the great god Pan, lord of harvests.] (ll. 11–14)

The idea of mixing the pagan with the Christian was already broached in “Les Phares” in the stanza devoted to Michelangelo: “lieu vague où l’on voit des Hercules / Se mêler à des Christs” [vague region where one sees Herculeses / Mix with Christs] (ll. 13–14). As Adam notes, both “La Muse malade” and “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” are based “on the opposition between a strong and healthy primitive epoch and the modern epoch, in which degenerate man falls into folly and horror. The modern muse is an ailing muse” (FM Adam, 283). Nevertheless, some of the details of the muse’s condition seem to come out of paintings described in “Les Phares”: in her coloration the narrator sees reflected

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 . . .
T’a-t-il noyée . . . ?

Cold and taciturn madness and horror.

[The greenish succubus and the rosy elf,
Have they poured your fear and love from their urns?
The nightmare . . .
Has it drowned you . . .?] (ll. 4–7, 8)

The “cauchemar” recalls “Goya,—cauchemar” [Goya,—nightmare] (l. 25); the “folie” and the pouring recall Watteau, where “des lustres / . . . versent la folie à ce bal tournoyant” [chandeliers . . . pour madness onto this whirling dance] (ll. 23, 24); the colors of “Le succube verdâtre et le rose lutin” [The greenish succubus and the rosy elf] (l. 5) recall colors prevalent in the stanza devoted to Delacroix: “lac de sang . . . / Ombragé par un bois de sapins toujours vert” [lake of blood . . . / Shaded by a forest of pines ever green] (ll. 29, 30). Commenting on these lines, Baudelaire drew out the
importance of red and green as complementary colors (OC II: 595; noted by Pichois, OC I: 854n).

“La Muse malade” / “La Muse vénale”

While in “La Muse malade” the poet wants his muse to adapt her Christian blood to pagan music, in “La Muse vénale” [The Venal Muse] (1857: 8) he acknowledges the latter’s obligation to sing Christian music: “Il te faut . . . / Chanter des Te Deum auxquels tu ne crois guères” [You have to . . . / Sing Te Deums in which you hardly believe] (ll. 9, 11). In a kind of chiasmus, Christian identity is combined in one poem with non-Christian (i.e., pagan) song, while in the other Christian song is combined with a non-Christian identity. The poems are opposed in that in “La Muse malade” the direction to be taken is from Christian to non-Christian, but in “La Muse vénale” it would be from non-Christian to Christian.

Apart from that, the two muses are remarkably similar. Both suffer or will suffer from the cold: the poet can see reflected in the skin (“ton teint” [your coloration] [l. 3]) of the ailing muse “froides” [cold] (l. 4) folly and horror; he asks the venal muse what she will do when January’s wind and snow arrive. He asks if the winter sky’s “nocturnes rayons” [nocturnal rays] (l. 6) can bring back to life her “épaules marbrées” [veined (like marble) shoulders] (l. 5), echoing the “visions nocturnes” [nocturnal visions] (l. 2) that gave the ailing muse her hollow-eyed look.

“La Muse vénale” / “Le Mauvais Moine”

Chilliness continues to be a problem in “Le Mauvais Moine” [The Bad Monk] (1857: 9), where ancient cloister walls “Étalaient en tableaux la sainte Vérité, / Dont l’effet rechauffant les pieuses entrailles / Tempéraient la froideur de leur austérité” [Displayed in paintings the holy Truth, / Whose effect, warming pious entrails, / Tempered the coldness of their austerity] (ll. 2–4). That “rechauffant” recalls the “chauffer” of the preceding poem: “Auras-tu . . . / Un tison pour chauffer tes deux pieds violets?” [Will you have . . . / A log to warm your two violet feet?] (ll. 2, 4). In an intriguing inversion, what the cloister walls did when they “étalaient” [displayed] the holy Truth is what the poet sees his muse obliged to do: “étaler tes appas / Et ton rire trempé de pleurs qu’on ne voit pas” [display your charms / And your laughter soaked with tears they cannot see] (ll. 12–13), earning her living by amusing the vulgar. Thus, what is “étalé” [displayed]
in “Le Mauvais Moine” is the holy Truth, but in “La Muse malade” it is a lie, whether it be the laughter with unseen tears that contradict it or the Te Deums in which the singer does not believe.

Belief versus nonbelief is at issue in “Le Mauvais Moine” as well, for the poet looks back to the age of belief, to “ces temps où du Christ florissaient les semaines” [those times when what Christ sowed flourished] (l. 5), when a monk could be warmed by paintings that proclaimed a holy Truth. Alas, that was then and this is now. The poet is the bad monk of the title, unable to fulfill that role, his soul a tomb, an odious cloister where “Rien n’embellit les murs” [Nothing embellishes the walls] (l. 11). Apparently an unbelieving monk, since the paintings that are missing from his walls would be those depicting the holy Truth, he criticizes himself as well for being a “moine fainéant” [a do-nothing monk] (l. 12), and he asks himself when he will finally transform the spectacle of his misery into “Le travail de mes mains” [The work of my hands] (l. 14)—the work of poetic creation.

Of course, he is doing that here, and each of these poems builds not only on the one that immediately precedes it but also on the one before that, and often on several before. As the Te Deums the venal muse must sing in the eighth poem (“La Muse vénale”) recall the Te Deums in the sixth (“Les Phares”)—“Ces extases, ses cris, ces pleurs, ces Te Deum, / Sont un écho” [These ecstasies, these cries, these tears, these Te Deums, / Are an echo] (ll. 34–35)—so too does the ninth poem (“Le Mauvais Moine”) repeat a theme essential to the seventh (“La Muse malade”), though it inverts it, too. It is the theme of an earlier, more vigorous age versus a sickly present (the theme as well of the fifth poem, “J’aime le souvenir . . . ”). The “Muse malade” lacks the “odeur de la santé” [fragrance of health] (l. 9) and the “pensers forts” [strong thoughts] (l. 10) of ancient pagan times, as the “mauvais cénobite” [bad cenobite] (l. 9) the poet is lacks the strong faith his predecessor monks had. The irony of it is that the muse’s weakness comes from her being too Christian (being afflicted with “sang chrétien”), whereas the poet’s comes from not being Christian enough. Thanks to a consistent play of opposites from one poem to the next, it happens that every other poem in the sequence running from “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” to “Le Mauvais Moine” actually comes close to saying the same thing. In “J’aime le souvenir . . . ” (1857: 5), “La Muse malade” (1857: 7), and “Le Mauvais Moine” (1857: 9) there is a regrettable disparity between the healthy vigor of the past and the sickness of the present. In “Les Phares” (1857: 6) and “La Muse vénale” (1857: 8) there is no such problem, either because the claim is made that artistic production from age to age has all been saying the same thing (in “Les Phares”) or because the past is simply not an issue (in “La Muse vénale”).
“Le Mauvais Moine” / “L’Ennemi”

The theme is given a new formulation in “L’Ennemi” [The Enemy] (1857: 10), where vigor is to be found in the future, not the past. The poet asks if the new flowers of which he dreams “Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève / Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur” [Will find in this earth washed like a beach / The mystic food that would give them vigor] (ll. 10–11). The “fleurs nouvelles” are, of course, the Fleurs du mal, the poems that he hopes will grow in his storm-ravaged garden, once he has gone to work with “la pelle et les râteaux / Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées, / Où l’eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux” [shovel and rakes, / To gather together anew the inundated grounds, / Where water hollows out holes as big as tombs] (ll. 6–8). In “Le Mauvais Moine” he found that “Mon âme est un tombeau” [my soul is a tomb] (l. 9). If he can fill in the tombs in the garden of his soul in “L’Ennemi,” and if he can find the mystical food that will nourish his dreamed-of new flowers, he will in effect achieve what seemed but a dubious hope in “Le Mauvais Moine”: by the work of his hands (with shovel and rakes) to create the equivalent of what used to take place in those times when what Christ sowed flourished. These two poems trace the passage from the flowering of what Christ sowed to the flowers the poet dreams of writing.

“L’Ennemi” / “Le Guignon”

The “pelle” and “râteaux” [shovel and rakes] the poet must employ to make his garden grow, and those new flowers appear, are matched in “Le Guignon” [Rotten Luck] (1857: 11) by the “pioches” and “sondes” [picks and sounding lines (or drills)] (l. 11) that would have to be used to unearth “Maint joyeau” [Many a gem] that “dort enseveli / Dans les ténèbres et l’oubli” [sleeps buried / In shadows and oblivion] (ll. 9–10). Appropriately those gems in the first tercet are paralleled in the second by “Mainte fleur” that “épanche à regret / Son parfum doux . . . / Dans les solitudes profondes” [spreads, to its regret, / Its sweet perfume . . . / In deep solitudes] (ll. 12–14). Therefore, the “fleurs nouvelles” the poet dreams of producing by working the earth with shovel and rake in “L’Ennemi” are paralleled by the flowers that bloom unseen in the manner of jewels that can be brought to light by working with picks and sounding lines—or drills: “sondes” can mean either. In the word’s only other appearance, in “Le Balcon” [The Balcony] (1857: 34), it clearly means the former: “d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes” [from an abyss forbidden to our sounding lines] (l. 27). To the extent that Baudelaire is reflecting his source,
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Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard,” the meaning is more likely to be the same as in “Le Balcon.” The relevant word in Gray’s poem is “unfathomed”: “Full many a gem of purest ray serene / The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.”

But that the gems may be buried under water is not without relevance to the garden in “L’Ennemi,” for it is under water, too, “les terres inondées . . . ce sol lavé comme une grève” [inundated terrain . . . earth washed like a beach] (ll. 7, 10). The work he must perform to restore the garden is enormous—Sisyphean, as he says in “Le Guignon,” where Art is long and Time is short. Time is short in “L’Ennemi,” too: “Le Temps mange la vie” [Time eats life] (l. 12), and Art and Time are thus at odds there as well, for if the “fleurs nouvelles” are to pass from dream to reality, there is work to be done. It is spadework in both poems, though in one garden dirt must be gathered together for the flowers to grow, while in the other the gems—that is, the flowers—must be dug up. The two poems offer competing versions of the origin of the Fleurs du mal: flowers cultivated versus flowers rescued from oblivion.

“Le Guignon” / “La Vie antérieure”

“La Vie antérieure “ [The Former Life] (1857: 12) offers a third origin. The flowers, which in “L’Ennemi” were something the poet could find a way to nourish in his rain-flooded garden, and which in “Le Guignon” were likened to gems awaiting discovery in an ocean cave, now become the poet himself, who inhabits a place he likens to an ocean cave:

J’ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient . . .
Et que leurs grands piliers . . .
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

[I have long lived beneath vast porticoes
That marine suns tinted . . .
And made their tall pillars . . .
Resemble, in the evening, basaltic grottoes.] (ll. 1–4)

And he is assisted by slaves “dont l’unique soin” [whose only task] is to “approfondir” [deepen] his “secret douloureux” [painful secret] (ll. 13, 14). Baudelaire’s word linkages underscore this conclusion: “d’approfondir / Le secret” in the second tercet of “La Vie antérieure” parallels “Son parfum doux comme un secret / Dans les solitudes profondes” [Its sweet
perfume like a secret / In deep solitudes] (ll. 13–14) in the second tercet of “Le Guignon.” “Approfondir” means both to deepen and to get to the bottom of, to learn more about something by going deeper into it. In any case, the “secret” is deep, like the buried jewel, and like the flower’s perfume it is “secret.” The flowers and the gems in “Le Guignon” are far-off things the poet might come to possess by dint of hard work, whereas their equivalent in “La Vie antérieure” is within the poet himself.

“La Vie antérieure” / “Bohémiens en voyage”

“Bohémiens en voyage” [Traveling Gypsies] (1857: 13) offers yet another kind of flowering: “Cybèle . . . / Fait couler le rocher et fleurir le désert” [Cybele . . ./ Makes water flow from the rock and the desert to flower] (ll. 11, 12) for the wandering tribe. The flowers in “Le Guignon” bloomed in a wilderness; similarly, flowers here spring up in a desert. The poet in “La Vie antérieure” had a past he recalled with sadness (“Le secret doloureux qui me faisait languir” [The painful secret that made me languish] [l. 14]); so too the Gypsy men, “Promenant sur le ciel des yeux appesantis / Par le morne regret des chimères absentes” [Gazing at the sky with eyes weighed down / By the doleful regret for absent chimera] (ll. 7–8). The parallel between their “regret” and the poet’s “secret” is corroborated by the rhyming linkage those words display in “Le Guignon”: “Mainte fleur épanche à regret / Son parfum doux comme un secret” [Many a flower spreads, to its regret, / Its sweet perfume like a secret] (ll. 12–13). The first thing we learn about the Gypsies—“La tribu prophétique aux prunelles ardentes” [The prophetic tribe with burning eyes] (l. 1)—is that they have fire in their eyes; so too did the poet in “La Vie antérieure,” where marine suns tinted the vast porticoes “de mille feux” [with a thousand fires] (l. 2) and those suns’ “couleurs” [colors] were reflected “par mes yeux” [by my eyes] (l. 8). The Gypsies stare at the sky (“Promenant sur le ciel des yeux appesantis”), paralleling the poet’s visual contact with the “couleurs du couchant” [colors of the setting sun] (l. 8). As his contemplation is given a musical accompaniment, “Les tout puissants accords” [The all-powerful harmonies] of the “riche musique” [rich music] (l. 7) of the ocean’s swell, so too is the travelers’ sky-gazing: “le grillon, / Les regardant passer, redouble sa chanson” [the cricket, / Seeing them pass, intensifies his song] (ll. 9–10). Nature smiles upon them, through the cricket and Cybele (who was similarly generous to the naked humanity of an earlier epoch in “J’aime le souvenir . . .”). Baudelaire cannot count on receiving the same treatment, so the “fleurs nouvelles” he dreams of will have to come from his own toil.
“Bohémiens en voyage” / “L’Homme et la mer”

“L’Homme et la mer” [The Man and the Sea] (1857: 14) combines elements from the two poems that precede it. As the poet did in “La Vie antérieure,” the protagonist here also stares at the sea; like the Gypsies, he is free, an “Homme libre” [free man], as the poem’s first words declare (its original title was “L’Homme libre et la mer” [The Free Man and the Sea]). Pichois calls freedom “a tie between” the two poems (OC I: 867n) and notes that Baudelaire “envies the freedom” that Gypsies enjoy (OC I: 864n). Like the poet in “La Vie antérieure,” the protagonist here (as well as the sea, of whom each is the other’s mirror reflection) has a secret: “Tant vous”—both the man and the sea—“êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets!” [So jealous are you both to guard your secrets] (l. 12). Pichois is right to connect that line to the tercets of “Le Guignon” (OC I: 867n), where many a jewel lies buried (perhaps in a sea cave, as in Gray’s original) and many a flower spreads its sweet scent “comme un secret” [like a secret] in an unfrequented wilderness. “Homme, nul ne connaît le fond de tes abîmes; / O mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes” [Man, no one knows the depth of your abysses; / O sea, no one knows your intimate riches] (ll. 10–11)—though the poet, with the help of the naked slaves, seeks to get to the “fond” [depth] (in “approfondir” [l. 13]) of his secret.

“L’Homme et la mer” / “Don Juan aux enfers”

The theme of a musical accompaniment, appearing in “La Vie antérieure” as “Les tout puissants accords” of the ocean’s “riche musique” and in “Bohémiens en voyage” as the cricket’s “chanson,” is transformed in “L’Homme et la mer” into an accompanying noise of complaint, the “bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage” [noise of that untamable wild complaint] (l. 8) produced, as in “La Vie antérieure,” by the ocean. In “Don Juan aux enfers” [Don Juan in Hell] (1857: 15) it returns as the “long mugissement” [long moaning] that the seducer’s victims “Derrière lui traînaient” [behind him were moaning] (l. 8) when Don Juan “descendit vers l’onde souterraine” [descended to the underground wave] (l. 1). His descent to the river that he will cross in Charon’s boat recombines the two elements of descent and water that were present in “L’Homme et la mer.” The sea there was a “gouffre” [abyss] (l. 4) into which, as the narrator says to his protagonist, “Tu te plais à plonger” [you love to plunge] (l. 5). The man in that poem goes down into the water; Don Juan goes down to the water. The man stares at the water: “La mer est ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme / Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame” [The sea is your mirror; you
contemplate your soul / In the infinite unfolding of its wave] (ll. 2–3). Don Juan stares at the water, too, gazing down at the wake trailing the boat, paying no attention to anything else, to neither his victims displaying their breasts nor the dead wandering the shore, nor Sganarelle, nor Elvire: “le calme héros courbé sur sa rapière / Regardait le sillage et ne daignait rien voir” [the calm hero bent over his rapier / Gazed at the wake and did not deign to see anything] (ll. 19–20).

“Don Juan aux enfers” / “Châtiment de l’orgueil”

Those last two words of “Don Juan aux enfers” (“rien voir”) form a transition to “Châtiment de l’orgueil” [Punishment of Pride] (1857: 16), in which a theologian who loses his reason after boasting that he could have as easily attacked Jesus as exalted him wanders about “sans rien voir” [seeing nothing] (l. 23), oblivious to his surroundings. His obliviousness parallels Don Juan’s yet is its opposite, for the latter is aware of his fate and is intentionally oblivious: he deigns not to see. Both are punished, apparently by God’s hand. Their punishments are strangely similar: are their transgressions likewise? Lawler contends that both are guilty of the sin of pride (1997, 51). While this is obviously the case with the theologian, “transporté d’un orgueil satanique” [carried away by a Satanic pride] (l. 10), “Don Juan aux enfers” does not actually attribute pride to its protagonist. The only person so described is the “sombre mendiant, l’œil fier” [somber beggar with a prideful eye] (l. 3) who rows the boat, an allusion to the mendicant in Molière’s play, whom Don Juan tries to bribe into blaspheming God. The only descriptors attached to Don Juan are “fils audacieux” [brazen son] (l. 12), “époux perfide” [perfidious husband] (l. 14), and “calme héros” [calm hero] (l. 19). Molière’s Don Juan may be prideful, but we cannot say the same of Baudelaire’s.

Yet a closer look at the poems suggests another connection. What was the theologian saying when disaster struck?

« Jésus, petit Jésus! je t’ai porté 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.

[“Jesus, little Jesus! I carried you very high! But if I had wanted to attack you through the chink In your armor, your shame would equal your glory,
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And you would be nothing more than a pathetic fetus.”
Immediately his reason left him.] (ll. 11–15)

The chink in the armor (in the manner of the one in the wall between Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) provides an opening into the neighboring poem, for there too was armor: “Tout droit dans son armure, un grand homme de pierre / Se tenait à la barre” [Erect in his armor, a tall man of stone / Stood at the helm] (ll. 17–18). This is the Commander, who invited Don Juan to dinner and dragged him into hell. Thus the protagonist in both poems is brought to his downfall by someone wearing armor—the Commander in one poem, Jesus in the other. But of course Jesus did not really wear armor; he only does so in the theologian’s turn of phrase. But neither did he wear armor in Baudelaire’s probable source for this anecdote, the article by Saint-René Taillandier in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of October 15, 1848, which Pichois quotes in its entirety (*OC* I: 870n). So it was Baudelaire who added it, evidently to make a connection to the immediately following “Don Juan aux enfers.” “Armure” can be found in no other poem in the *Fleurs du mal.*

That he forges that link invites us to consider a possible analogy between one armor-clad character and the other. In attacking Jesus, the theologian was attacking God the Father, given the identity Christian theology posits between the two; Don Juan sinned against his father as well, who “avec un doigt tremblant / Montrait . . . / Le fils audacieux qui râilla son front blanc” [with a trembling finger / Pointed out . . . / The brazen son who had mocked his white brow] (ll. 10–11, 12). The Commander is a father figure Don Juan does succeed in killing, though in the end the victim returns the favor.

As Michel Quesnel writes in *Baudelaire solaire et clandestin,* “the Commander presents the figure of the punishing father who holds the tiller of Don Juan’s destiny” (135). Quesnel also notes, as we do, the close connection between these two poems: “Châtiment de l’orgueil” follows close upon, is the consequence of, ‘Don Juan aux enfers,’ of the posthumous accusation made by Don Louis, of the silent menace of the Commander. The calm hero falls into a stupor, enveloped with solar grief: ‘Immédiatement sa raison s’en alla. / L’éclat de ce soleil d’un crépe se voila’ [Immediately his reason left him. / The lustre of this sun veiled itself in crepe]” (Quesnel, 175–76). The “silent hero” is Don Juan; the man whose reason leaves him is the theologian: Quesnel sees, as we do, that it is the same protagonist. Like us, he sees the sun in *Les Fleurs du mal* as the father.
“Châtiment de l’orgueil” / “La Beauté”

The woman personifying Beauty in “La Beauté” (1857: 17) asserts that her breast inspires in the poet “un amour / Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière” [a love / As eternal and mute as matter] (ll. 3–4). As Richter observes, this is in “contradiction with the normal nature of the ‘poet,’ which is that of expressing himself, of speaking” (168). If a poet is consigned to silence, does he cease to be a poet? While this apparent contradiction may remain a mystery as long as we confine our attention to this poem, by reading the Fleurs du mal as itself a poem, and thus enlarging our view to take in the immediately preceding “Châtiment de l’orgueil,” we can see that the poet’s fate, however strange, does parallel the theologian’s. For he too was consigned to silence: “Le silence et la nuit s’installèrent en lui” [Silence and night took up residence in him] (l. 20). The poet’s muteness was like that of matter; so too the theologian’s. He became like a thing: “Sale, inutile et laid comme une chose usée” [Dirty, useless, and ugly, like a used-up thing] (l. 25).

Enlarging our view a little more to take in the fate of Don Juan, that in its own way parallels the theologian’s, and recalling that the seducer’s downfall was the result of his confrontation with an “homme de pierre” [man of stone] (l. 17), we can see the relevance of Beauty’s self-description as “un rêve de pierre” [a dream of stone] (l. 1). A woman of stone, and with breasts of stone, she is to the poet as the man of stone is to Don Juan—and as a punishing God is to the theologian. Yet while she does to the poet what God does to the theologian to the extent that she transforms him into a mute thing, in doing so she is not exacting punishment but inspiring love. Baudelaire makes an interesting change to the poem in the 1861 edition that has the effect of creating an opposing symmetry between what happens to the theologian and what happens to the poet. In line 13 “les étoiles” become “toutes choses,” thereby setting up a resonance between the penultimate line in “La Beauté” and the penultimate line in “Châtiment de l’orgueil”: “Sale, inutile et laid comme une chose usée” [dirty, useless, and ugly, like a used-up thing]. To counter this “laid[e] . . . chose” [ugly . . . thing] (and perhaps God’s making it so), Beauty’s response is to make “toutes choses plus belles” [all things more beautiful] (l. 13). Most of the changes made in 1861 to poems surviving from the 1857 edition are intended, as we will see in the next chapter, to allow them to create new connections to new neighbors in the sequence; in this case, however, the change (from “qui font les étoiles plus belles” to “qui font toutes choses plus belles”) serves to add an additional connection to poems that were already side by side.
Beauty is thematic in both “La Beauté” and “L’Idéal” [The Ideal] (1857: 18), though it is approached in different ways. In “La Beauté” Beauty is depicted as a woman with certain characteristics: she is like a dream of stone; she unites “un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes” [a heart of snow with the whiteness of swans] (l. 6); she hates “le mouvement qui déplace les lignes” [movement that displaces lines] (l. 7); her “grandes attitudes” [grand poses] are borrowed “aux plus fiers monuments” [from the proudest of monuments] (ll. 9, 10). In “L’Idéal” the poet speaks of those “beautés” [beauties] that are not to his taste, and then of those who are. Certain “beautés de vignettes” [vignette beauties] (l. 1) would never satisfy a heart like his, nor would certain anemic “beautés d’hôpital” [hospital beauties] (l. 6), roses too “pâles” [pale] (l. 7) to approach his “rouge idéal” [red ideal] (l. 8). But Lady Macbeth, “Rêve d’Eschyle éclos au climat des autans” [dream of Aeschylus born in a stormy clime] (l. 11) would, and so also “toi, grande Nuit, fille de Michel-Ange, / Qui tors paisiblement dans une pose étrange / Tes appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans!” [you, great Night, daughter of Michelangelo, / Who peacefully twist into a strange pose / Your charms shaped by Titans’ mouths!] (ll. 12–14).

On the one hand, these two visions of beauty seem to be at odds. Baudelaire detests the whiteness—the pallor—of the hospital beauties, yet the Beauty he admires in the other poem is doubly white, combining snow with the whiteness of swans. As Richter observes, the Ideal in the second poem hardly “coincides with the image that Beauty has just given of herself” in the first (175), his “red ideal” being “certainly quite different” from her “cold white beauty” (179).

But on the other hand, Beauty’s stony breasts are matched by Night’s. For Night, a statue in the Medici Chapel in Florence, really is made of stone, and Baudelaire draws our attention to her breasts. He calls them “appas” [charms], but then he says they were fashioned by (or for) the mouths of Titans. In Greek mythology, Night is the mother of the Titans. The latter, able to take their nourishment there, have better luck than the poets in “La Beauté,” who bruise themselves in vain against a stony breast. Michelangelo depicts Night asleep, giving new resonance to the “rêve de pierre” [dream of stone] in which Beauty is enveloped in “La Beauté,” for if Night is asleep she may indeed be dreaming. Yet the first two-thirds of the phrase “rêve de pierre” is evoked as well in the other feminine ideal, Lady Macbeth: “Rêve d’Eschyle” [dream of Aeschylus]. In no other poem of the Fleurs du mal does the phrase “rêve” (as a noun) + “de” appear. Thus do the two feminine ideals, Lady Macbeth and Night, seem to emerge from the “rêve de pierre” that in “La Beauté” Beauty proclaims herself to be.
Beauty’s assertion that she hates “le mouvement qui déplace les lignes” [movement that displaces lines] has proved puzzling to readers (e.g., does the “qui” introduce a restrictive or nonrestrictive clause?), but we may miss its full meaning if we neglect to consider how it resonates with Michelangelo’s statue. Twisted into a strange pose (“Qui tors paisiblement dans une pose étrange / Tes appas”), its lines are displaced from where they would have been in a more natural position. The body, despite its slumber, is under tension, movement frozen in stone.

“L’Idéal” / “La Géante”

At the end of “La Géante” [The Giantess] (1857: 19) Baudelaire effects an exact reversal of the situation with which “L’Idéal” concludes. There, we were told of giants—the Titans—at the breasts of a nongiant; but now the narrator wants to sleep beneath the breasts of a giantess: “Dormir nonchalamment à l’ombre de ses seins, / Comme un hameau paisible au pied d’une montagne” [To sleep nonchalantly in the shadow of her breasts, / Like a peaceful hamlet at the foot of a mountain] (ll. 13–14). Despite the reversal, the sleepers are peaceful in both poems: Night sleeps in a strange, twisting pose, but “paisiblement” so; the poet wishes he were a “hameau paisible” beneath those breasts. These are the only appearances of either word in either the 1857 or the 1861 edition.3

The other female figure in “La Géante,” Mother Nature, recalls the other feminine ideal, Lady Macbeth; both are “puissante” [powerful], a word that appears (in the feminine singular) only in these two poems: Lady Macbeth was “puissante au crime” [powerful in crime] (l. 10); in an earlier era Nature “en sa verve puissante” [in her powerful vigor] (l. 1) gave birth to monsters such as the giantess. In a perhaps ironic reversal, while in both poems there are two women, one a mother (Night, Mother Nature), the other not, it is the distinctly unmotherly Lady Macbeth who is linked by her “puissance” to the mother in “La Géante.”

“La Géante” / “Les Bijoux”


3. My statements about word frequency in the 1861 edition are based on Robert T. Cargo’s A Concordance to Baudelaire’s les Fleurs du mal (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965) and those about the 1857 edition by doing word searches on my computer of the transcribed text.
Poems Baudelaire was obliged to delete because of their alleged obscenity. Its third stanza could be read as a retelling of the last tercet of “La Géante” (or vice versa). In both passages, the poet is looking from below at a woman (the giantess, his jewel-bedecked mistress) who is herself lying down. He imagines that the heat of the sun makes the giantess “s’étendre à travers la campagne” [stretch out across the countryside] (l. 12), and that he can take shelter beneath her breasts like a hamlet “au pied d’une montagne” [at the foot of a mountain] (l. 14). In “Les Bijoux” the poet’s mistress is “couchée . . . / 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” [lying down . . . / And from the top of the couch she smiled with pleasure / At my love, deep and gentle as the sea / That toward her ascended as if toward its cliff] (ll. 9, 10–12). The giantess is a mountain; the mistress is a cliff. He is looking up at the giantess because her size makes her so much higher; in “Les Bijoux” he appears to be on the floor, gazing up at the woman stretched out on the couch.

Both the giantess and the woman on the couch are monstrous, though in different ways. Because of her gigantism, the former is one of Nature’s “enfants monstrueux” [monstrous children] (l. 2). The latter seems the product of some new arrangement, male from the waist up, female from the waist down: “Je croyais voir unis par un nouveau dessin / Les hanches de l’Antiope au buste d’un imberbe” [I believed I was seeing, by some new design, / The hips of an Antiope united with the chest of a beardless youth] (ll. 25–26). Her skin is of a “teint fauve et brun . . . couleur d’ambre” [tawny and brown tint . . . amber-colored] (ll. 28, 32), and consequently most scholars believe that the poem refers to Jeanne Duval, the poet’s mulatto mistress. But from the drawings he made of Duval, as well as the testimony of others (including Nadar, who had been her lover before Baudelaire), we know she was not flat-chested. Adam at one point cites the “buste d’un imberbe” as a reason for concluding that the poem is not about her (343)—though, strangely, elsewhere he says that it is (FM Adam, 304). Yet the poem is even in contradiction with itself this regard, for two stanzas earlier, she does have breasts: “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” [her belly and her breasts, those grape-clusters of my vine, // Came forward, more tempting than the angels of evil, / To disturb the repose of my soul] (ll. 20–22). Although not therefore entirely in harmony with itself, “Les Bijoux” is by this very lack of harmony harmonizing with “La Géante.” For in both poems the

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woman who occupies the speaker’s attention is a monstrosity. In other words, “Les Bijoux” can really only be understood in the context of “La Géante.”

“Les Bijoux” / “Parfum exotique”

Jeanne Duval is generally thought to be the inspiration for “Parfum exotique” [Exotic Perfume] (1857: 21), as well as for the next several poems. But the kinds of interrelationships we are discovering here between poems are independent of any common referent. In “Parfum exotique” the narrator breathes in the scent of his mistress’s breast, and in his imagination he is transported to a tropical harbor. This poem and its predecessor are each the other’s complement in this sense: In “Parfum exotique” he imagines seeing what in “Les Bijoux” he actually does see. The inhabitants of his imagined island are “Des hommes dont le corps est mince et vigoureux, / Et des femmes dont l’œil par sa franchise étonne” [Men whose bodies are thin and vigorous, / And women whose eyes astonish by their frankness] (ll. 7–8). That male slenderness had already been glimpsed in the “buste d’un imberbe” [chest of a beardless youth] (l. 26) and that frankness in a woman’s eyes when he saw her “yeux fixés sur moi” [eyes fixed on me] (l. 13) with their “candeur unie à la lubricité” [candor combined with lust] (l. 15). “Parfum exotique” blends two sensory perceptions of which one is sound: “Pendant que le parfum des verts tamariniers . . . / Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des mariniers” [While the perfume of green tamarind trees . . . / Blends in my soul with the song the sailors sing] (ll. 12, 14); “Les Bijoux” also blends sound with another sense: “ses bijoux sonores” [her sonorous jewels] (l. 2) make a “bruit vif et moqueur . . . et j’aime avec fureur / Les choses où le son se mêle à la lumière” [a lively and mocking noise . . . and I passionately love / Things in which sound blends with light] (ll. 5, 7–8). The expression “se mêle” is rare in the Fleurs du mal, linking two senses only in these two poems.

When the narrator in “Parfum exotique” shuts his eyes and inhales her odor, he tells us, “Je vois se dérouler des rivages heureux” [I see happy shores glide past] (l. 3), with their fruited trees, slender men, and candid feminine eyes. In “Les Bijoux” images also pass before his eyes, but they are images of the woman herself: “son bras et sa jambe, et sa cuisse et ses reins . . . / Passaient devant mes yeux” [her arm and her leg, her thigh and her loins . . . / Passed before my eyes] (ll. 17, 19). Although in both poems the images simply unfold, the situations are opposed, for in one his eyes are open and in the other closed.
“Parfum exotique” / “Je t’adore à l’égal de la voûte nocturne . . .”

In “Parfum exotique” the poet travels great distances, all the way to a tropical isle, transported by the scent of his mistress’s breast: “Guidé par ton odeur vers de charmants climats” [Guided by your odor toward charming climates] (l. 9). But in “Je t’adore à l’égal de la voûte nocturne . . .” [I adore you as much as the nocturnal vault] (1857: 22) just the opposite happens: he wants to travel great distances but cannot, and his mistress is far away. In “Parfum exotique” he is lying by her side, accompanied by her scent in his imaginary voyage; but in “Je t’adore . . .” she flees, increasing the distance between herself and him:

. . . tu me fuis,
Et . . . tu me parais, ornement de mes nuits,
. . . ironiquement accumuler les lieues
Qui séparent mes bras des immensités bleues.”

[ . . . you flee me,
And . . . you seem, O ornament of my nights,
. . . ironically to accumulate the leagues
That separate my arms from the blue immensities.] (ll. 3–6)

“Je t’adore à l’égal de la voûte nocturne . . .” /
“Tu mettras l’univers entier dans ta ruelle . . .”

In both “Je t’adore . . .” and “Tu mettras l’univers entier dans ta ruelle . . .” [You would put the whole universe in your bedroom] (1857: 23) the speaker complains that his mistress puts vast distances between herself and him. In “Je t’adore . . .” she piles up leagues separating him on earth from the blue immensities of the nocturnal vault where she is found; in “Tu mettras l’univers . . .” she puts the entire universe between the two of them. By “l’univers entier” he means the whole earthly world of men, rivals for his place in her bed. But the term “universe” clearly also evokes the astronomical context of the preceding poem, with its nocturnal vault and blue immensities.

Pichois argues that the “ornement de mes nuits” [ornament of my nights] (l. 4) in “Je t’adore . . .” is the moon (OC I: 882n). Since the moon borrows its light from the sun, this would seem to be echoed in the criticism the speaker levels at his mistress in “Tu mettras l’univers . . .” that “Tes yeux illuminés . . . / Usent insolemment d’un pouvoir emprunté”
The two poems are opposed in an ironic way. In “Je t’adore . . .” the narrator loves her because she is cruel: “je chéris, ô bête implacable et cruelle, / Jusqu’à cette froideur par où tu m’es plus belle!” [I cherish, O implacable and cruel beast, / Even this coldness by which you are more beautiful!] (ll. 9–10). In the other poem, her cruelty is what he does not like about her: “Femme impure! L’ennui rend ton âme cruelle . . . / Machine aveugle et sourde en cruautés féconde!” [Impure woman! Ennui makes your soul cruel . . . / Blind and deaf machine abounding in cruelties] (ll. 2, 9). The poems are precisely opposed in another way, too: in “Je t’adore . . .” the speaker devours her—“je grimpe aux assauts, / Comme après un cadavre un chœur de vermisseaux” [I climb to the attack, / like a choir of worms on a corpse] (ll. 7–8)—but in “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .” she devours him: “Pour exercer tes dents à ce jeu singulier, / Il te faut chaque jour un cœur au ratelier” [To exercise your teeth at this singular game, / You need each day a heart on the rack] (ll. 3–4).

“Tu mettrais l’univers entier dans ta ruelle . . .”
/ “Sed non satiata”

The woman addressed in “Sed non satiata” [Yet Not Sated] (1857: 24) is insatiable, but so is the woman in “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .” who would welcome the universe to her bed and needs a new heart to consume daily. An obvious topical continuity like that is of less interest, however, than that provided by a fire-in-the-eyes motif. The passage “Tes yeux illuminés ainsi que des boutiques / Et des ifs flamboyants dans les fêtes publiques” [Your eyes lit up like shop windows / And flaming trees in public festivals] (ll. 5–6) in “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .” caught our attention because the narrator goes on to remark that those eyes shine with a borrowed power, which constitutes a parallel to the moon (as the “ornement de mes nuits”) to which the woman in “Je t’adore . . .” is likened. But this passage is itself echoed in “Sed non satiata”: “Par ces deux grands yeux noirs, soupireaux de mon âme, / Ô démon sans pitié, verse-moi moins de flamme” [Through those two big black eyes, cellar windows of my soul, / O pitiless demon, pour for me less flame ] (ll. 9–10). Note in particular how “flamboyants” returns as “flamme.” Note as well that “Tes yeux” in “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .” is also matched in “Sed non satiata,” but at a moment when Baudelaire is saying just the opposite, not that her eyes are fire but that they are water: “Tes yeux sont la citerne où boivent mes ennuis” [Your eyes are the well where my ennuis drink] (l. 8). It is in the very next line that he asks for less flame from those eyes. To the contradiction between her eyes as water and as
fire must be added the contradiction between the fact that in “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .” their fire is borrowed, but the flame in “Sed non satiata” is native to her identity as a creature of hell. She is a “démon” (l. 10), the speaker alludes to “l’enfer de ton lit” [the hell of your bed] (l. 14), and he complains that he cannot be expected to play the River Styx to her hell: “Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t’embrasser neuf fois” [i am not the Styx who can embrace you nine times] (l. 11). Fire is second nature to her, which was hardly the case with the woman whose eyes burn with a power not her own. From the way in which these two poems are at odds with each other, we should conclude that they refer to no reality beyond themselves, despite whatever role Jeanne Duval may have played in their inspiration. Nevertheless, it is apparent that they do refer not just each to itself but each to the other, “Tes yeux . . . flamboyants” to “Tes yeux . . . de flamme.” The reality beyond themselves has less to do with Jeanne Duval than with the intratextual connections of the whole volume. As Pichois remarks in a note to “Tu mettrais l’univers . . .,” “to want at any cost that a poem situated between two inspired by Jeanne should of necessity have been inspired by her is to forget that she is but a pretext and that the poet has the absolute right to organize his poems according to a thematic order or according to the needs of linkage [les besoins de l’enchaînement]—whether consecutiveness [consécution] (as here) or contrast” (OC I: 883–84n). It is becoming increasingly evident that in the Fleurs’ enchaînement consecutiveness and contrast are constantly present.

“Sed non satiata” / “Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés . . .”

The same conclusion (that the poems are more about intratext than pretext) can be drawn from what Baudelaire does to the River Styx image when it returns, transformed, in “Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés . . .” [With her undulating, pearly garments . . . ] (1857: 25). In “Avec ses vêtements . . .” the river repeatedly encircles hell, like the serpents looping around a pole in “Avec ses vêtements . . .”: “ces longs serpents que les jongleurs sacrés / Au bout de leurs bâtons agitent en cadence” [those long serpents that sacred jugglers / Shake in rhythm at the end of their poles] (ll. 3–4). But who is doing the encircling is just the opposite in one poem from who it is in the other. Even though he refuses to behave like the Styx—“Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t’embrasser neuf fois” [I am not the Styx who can embrace you nine times] (l. 11)—to do so at this juncture is to play the masculine role, as Pichois explains: the line alludes to a passage in Ovid’s Amores about satisfying a woman nine times in one night,
and possibly also to Victor Hugo’s allegedly accomplishing the same feat as related to Sainte-Beuve, who Pichois believes told it to Baudelaire (OC I: 886n). But the serpents around a pole play the female role, for it is to them that the woman in the other poem is compared: “Même quand elle marche, on croirait qu’elle danse, / Comme ces longs serpents . . . ” [Even when she walks, you would think she was dancing, / Like those long serpents . . . ] (ll. 2–3). This is consistent with what Baudelaire writes in the prose poem “Le Thyrse” [The Thyrus] in Le Spleen de Paris, where the flowers entwined around the staff in the thrysus are “l’élément féminin exécutant autour du mâle ses prestigieuses pirouettes” [the feminine element performing around the male its prestigious pirouettes] (OC I: 336).

There is another role, likewise connected to hell, that the speaker in “Sed non satiata” refuses to play: “Hélas! et je ne puis, Mégère libertine, / Pour briser ton courage et te mettre aux abois, / Dans l’enfer de ton lit devenir Proserpine!” [Alas! Nor can I, libertine Megera, / To break your spirit and bring you to bay, / In the hell of your bed become Proserpine!] (ll. 12–14). Adam writes of the Proserpine allusion, “one can hardly make any sense of this line unless it means that this woman was no less avid for women’s embraces than men’s” (FM Adam, 309)—only by making love to her as a woman could the speaker satisfy this Megera. That interpretation finds support in “Avec ses vêtements . . . ,” where the woman displays “La froide majesté de la femme stérile” [The cold majesty of the sterile woman] (l. 14). For sterility in Les Fleurs du mal is associated with feminine homosexuality, in both “Lesbos,” where Lesbian lust is a “stérile volupté” [sterile pleasure] (l. 17), and “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” [Damned Women: In the pale brightness . . . ], where it is an “âpre stérilité” [bitter sterility] (l. 97).

“Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés . . . ” / “Le Serpent qui danse”

The connections between “Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés . . . ” (1857: 25) and “Le Serpent qui danse” [The Dancing Serpent] (1857: 26) are startlingly obvious, so much so that Adam concludes that in these two poems Baudelaire “is treating the same subject as the former, seeking to redo, in a different rhythm, what had first appeared in sonnet form” (FM Adam, 310). Pichois agrees, except to note that 26 concludes on a more positive note than 25 (OC I: 888n). Numerous elements of lines 2–4 of 25—“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” [Even when she walks, you would think she was dancing, / Like those long serpents that sacred jugglers / Shake in rhythm at the end of
their poles]—reappear in 26’s fifth (and central) stanza: “À te voir marcher en cadence... / On dirait un serpent qui danse / Au bout d’un bâton” [To see you walk in rhythm, ... / One would say [you were] a serpent dancing / At the end of a pole] (ll. 17, 19–20). Specifically: (1) “quand elle marche” becomes “À te voir marcher”; (2) “on croirait” becomes “On dirait”; (3) “qu’elle danse” becomes “qui danse”; (4) “ces longs serpents” become “un serpent”; (5) “Au bout de leurs bâtons” becomes “Au bout d’un bâton” (the only combinations of “Au bout de” + “bâton[s]” in the volume); (6) “en cadence” repeats as “en cadence” (the only appearances of “cadence”). In addition, as Richter remarks, the skin of the woman in “Le Serpent qui danse,” like a serpent’s, is “Comme une étoffe vacillante” [Like a swaying cloth] that is seen to “miroiter” [Shimmer], a theme “already present in the ‘vêtements ondoyants et nacrés’ of the poem before” (264). The “étoffe” recalls “vêtements,” “vacillante” parallels “ondoyants,” and “miroiter” evokes the glisten of “nacrés.”

Yet the two poems take this nearly identical image and go in different directions with it. The woman in “Avec ses vêtements...” is spoken of in the third person; the other is addressed as “tu.” The woman in 25 is unapproachable, “Insensible... / Elle se développe avec indifférence” [Insensitive... She unfolds with indifference] (ll. 6, 8); she is an “ange inviolé” [unviolated angel] combined with “un sphinx antique” [an ancient sphinx] (l. 11), displaying “La froide majesté de la femme stérile” [The cold majesty of the sterile woman] (l. 14). The narrator seems never to have been able to make love to her. But the woman in 26 is kissable: at her lips “Je crois boire un vin de Bohême” [I think I’m drinking Bohemian wine] (l. 33). Instead of indifferent, she is merely “indolente” [indolent] (l. 1), showing “mollesse” [lethargy] (l. 23) and “paresse” [laziness] (l. 21). She is neither ancient nor majestic, neither a sphinx nor sterile, but childlike, with a “tête d’enfant” [head of a child] (l. 22).

Her eyes, however, are “deux bijoux froids où se mêle / L’or avec le fer” [two cold jewels where blends / Gold with iron] (ll. 15–16). They thus recall the eyes of the woman before, whose “yeux polis sont faits de minéraux” [polished eyes are made of minerals] (l. 9). And the line “Où tout n’est qu’or, acier, lumière et diamants” [Where all is but gold, steel, light, and diamonds] (l. 12), especially its “or” and “acier,” anticipates the combination in the childlike woman’s eyes of “or” with “fer.” Yet that line refers not to the eyes of the first but to her whole being: “cette nature étrange et symbolique / Où l’ange inviolé mêle au sphinx antique, // Où tout n’est qu’or, acier...” [this strange and symbolic nature / Where the unviolated angel blends with the ancient sphinx, // Where all is but gold, steel... ] (ll. 10–12). It is only the eyes of the woman in “Le Serpent qui danse” that are cold, while the woman in “Avec ses vêtements...” is
completely so, in her “froide majesté.”

“Le Serpent qui danse” / “Une charogne”

Through her eyes as well as her capacity to resemble a serpent on a pole, the woman in “Le Serpent qui danse” resembles the woman in “Avec ses vêtements . . . ,” but in every other respect she differs from her predecessor in the sequence, for she is not ancient but childlike, not indifferent but indolent, not unattainable but embraced. To understand this apparent contradiction we need to take in the larger picture the sequence provides by looking at the next poem, “Une charogne” [A Carcass] (1857: 27), for answers. There, the narrator asks his mistress if she remembers the summer morning they were walking down a path and encountered a rotting carcass covered with flies and worms.

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

[The flies hummed on that putrid belly,
   From which emerged black battalions
Of larvae flowing like a thick liquid
   The length of those living tatters.

All of that was falling, rising like a wave,
   Or shooting forth as it sparkled] (ll. 17–22)

Now consider the description of another rising liquid, in the last two stanzas of “Le Serpent qui danse”:

Comme un flot grossi par la fonte
   Des glaciers grondants,
Quand ta salive exquise monte
   Au bord de tes dents,

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

[Like a stream swollen by the melting
Of rumbling glaciers,
When your exquisite saliva rises
To the edge of your teeth,

I think I am drinking Bohemian wine
Bitter and conquering,
A liquid sky that sprinkles
My heart with stars!] (ll. 29–36)

The “épais liquide” [thick liquid] on the carcass was preceded by the “ciel liquide” [liquid sky] in his lover’s mouth, in the only two appearances of “liquide” in the 1857 Fleurs du mal. The liquid in “Le Serpent qui danse” “monte” [rises] “Comme un flot” [Like a stream]; the liquid in “Une charogne” “montait comme une vague” [was rising like a wave]. The saliva is likened to a stream “grossi” [swollen] by glaciers melting—from the heat, presumably of the sun; the sun causes the carcass to swell: “Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture” [The sun shone on this putrefaction], with the result that the body expanded, “enflé d’un souffle vague” [swollen with a vague breath]. Her saliva is like wine that scatters stars, recalling Dom Pérignon’s exclamation in the seventeenth century when he accidentally invented champagne, “Je bois des étoiles!” [I’m drinking stars!]; the “liquide” on the carcass was effervescent, too: “s’élancait en pétillant” [was shooting forth as it sparkled].

“Une charogne” becomes a carpe diem poem when the speaker tells his mistress, “vous serez semblable à cette ordure” [you will be like this rottenness] (l. 37) after death. Yet the carcass was already like a sexual woman the first moment we saw it: “Les jambes en l’air, comme une femme lubrique” [Its legs in the air, like a lewd woman] (l. 5). This overturned woman parallels the nearly overturned vessel to which the narrator of “Le Serpent qui danse” compares his mistress:

5. I am indebted to Christopher Hensey, proprietor of The Main Street Gourmet in Oxford, Ohio, for reminding me of what Dom Pérignon said. Mallarmé alludes to it in “Aumône”: “l’aurore est un lac de vin d’or / Et tu jures avoir au gosier les étoiles!” [dawn is a lake of golden wine / And you swear you have stars in your throat!] (ll. 17–18).
ton corps se penche et s’allonge
Comme un fin vaisseau
Qui roule bord sur bord, et plonge
Ses vergues dans l’eau

[your body leans and stretches out
Like a fine ship
Pitching from side to side, and plunging
Its spars into the sea] (ll. 25–28)

As we move from “Avec ses vêtements . . . ” to “Le Serpent qui danse” and then to “Une charogne,” we pass from an unattainable woman to an attainable one to one who goes beyond being attainable to lubriciously inviting love, and the passage is gradual in that each of the women (and more than that, each of the poems), despite their differences, has numerous elements in common with the preceding one. And we discover new meaning in passages that seemed strange in themselves, such as the praise of saliva in one poem and the effervescence of putrefaction in another, when we realize that each is the hidden half of the other, in the larger poem that Baudelaire always insisted that the Fleurs du mal was. Finally, we realize that the carpe diem motif (as in “vous serez semblable à cette ordure”) applies to the woman in “Le Serpent qui danse” as much as it does to the speaker’s companion in “Une charogne.” In fact, “vous serez semblable à . . . ” [you will be like . . . ] takes on another meaning in the context of the sequence, for the woman in “Le Serpent qui danse” is not yet but will be like the carcass once we read “Une charogne” and see the resemblances, as each poem will be like the next, once we read it.

“Une Charogne” / “De profundis clamavi”

The encounter in “Une charogne” takes place on a hot summer day, “Ce beau matin d’été si doux” [That beautiful summer morning so sweet] (l. 2) when “Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture, / Comme afin de la cuire à point” [The sun shone down upon that rottenness, / As if to cook it to a turn] (ll. 9–10). In absolute contrast, “De profundis clamavi” [Out of the depths have I cried] (1857: 28) is set in a frigid landscape where for six months there is no sun, and for the other six it is “Un soleil sans chaleur” [A sun without heat] (l. 5), a “soleil de glace” [sun of ice] that instead of heating the earth looks down upon it with “froide cruauté” [cold cruelty] (l. 10). Yet each poem has its own particular horror, the “horrible infec-
tion” (l. 38) that is the rotting carcass and the “horreur” of the six-month night and the frigid sun (ll. 4, 9).

The speaker in “Une charogne” warns his female companion that one day, when she is dead and buried, her fate will be that of the animal they found by the side of the road—a lot that, though inevitable, is repugnant. What the speaker cries out for in the last tercet of “De profundis clamavi,” however, is to become like an animal, to acquire its ability to cast off life’s cares, to plunge into a state resembling death: “Je jalousé le sort des plus vils animaux / Qui peuvent se plonger dans un sommeil stupide, / Tant l’écheveau du temps lentement se dévide!” [I envy the lot of the vilest of animals / Who can fall into a stupid sleep, / So slowly does the skein of time unwind!] (ll. 12–14). The eighth stanza of “Une charogne” is the site of some interesting connections to this tercet in “De profundis clamavi”:

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.

[The forms were disappearing and were no more than a dream,
A sketch slow in coming,
On the forgotten canvas, and that the artist completes
Only from memory.] (ll. 29–32)

The vile animal that is envied because of its ability to sleep was preceded by the “charogne infâme” [vile carcass] (l. 3) of an animal that in its decomposition comes to resemble a dream, that in fact is nothing but a dream. In both passages something is slow in coming: time’s unwinding skein and the sketch. In both, something disappears: time that undoes itself (“se dévide” [unwinds]) and the forms that “s’effaçaient” [were disappearing] until they were nothing but a dream, nothing but what had not yet come. In a self-referential way, it is “Seulement par le souvenir” [Only from memory] that something else comes into existence here: only by reading “De profundis clamavi” and then remembering these lines from “Une charogne” can we see images like that sketch take shape, the images that emerge from the hidden fabric of the Fleurs du mal. And this can happen only by allowing a certain decomposition to occur, the breaking apart of the elements of each poem, and their subsequent rearrangement in new forms. That is how these flowers bloom, as we saw “la carcasse superbe / Comme une fleur s’épanouir” [the superb carcass / Blossom like a flower] (ll. 13–14). “Une charogne” concludes with the narrator telling the woman not that it is her youth and beauty that his poems will
preserve but decomposition itself:

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!

[Then, O my beauty, tell the vermin
Who will devour you with kisses
That I have preserved the form and the divine essence
Of my decomposed loves!] (ll. 45–48)

“De profundis clamavi” / “Le Vampire”

“De profundis clamavi” is a parody of Psalm 130 (“Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord”), in which the role of God is played by the speaker’s mistress: “J’implore ta pitié, Toi, l’unique que j’aime, / Du fond du gouffre obscur où mon cœur est tombé” [I implore your pity, Thou, the only one I love, / From the depth of the dark abyss where my heart has fallen] (ll. 1–2). She is above; he is below. She is obviously not in the abyss with him. Just the opposite takes place in “Le Vampire” [The Vampire] (1857: 29), even though it begins similarly with the narrator addressing his mistress as “Toi”: “toi qui, comme un coup de couteau, / Dans mon cœur plaintif es entrée” [Thou who, like the stab of a dagger, / Hast entered my plaintive heart] (ll. 1–2). For instead of him being alone and her far away, now she is too near and he would rather be alone. With some consistency it is once again “mon cœur” that is the focus of his concern. In “De profundis clamavi” his heart fell into the abyss; in “Le Vampire” his heart has been invaded by “toi.” He is unhappily tied to her like the convict to the chain, the gambler to his game, the drunkard to his bottle, the carcass to its vermin (in a reminiscence of “Une charogne”). He prays again in “Le Vampire” as he had in “De profundis clamavi,” but not to his mistress, and it is in order to bring about just the opposite outcome that he prays: “J’ai prié le glaive rapide / De conquérir ma liberté” [I prayed the swift sword / To conquer my liberty] (ll. 13–14). He wants them to help him kill her so that he can be alone.

“Le Vampire” / “Le Léthé”

In “Le Vampire” he prayed to the sword and poison to help him mur-
der his mistress, from whom he wished to be free, but they told him that
would be pointless, for “Tes baisers ressusciteraient / Le cadavre de ton
vampire” [Your kisses would bring back to life / Your vampire’s corpse]
(ll. 23–24). That is, he was so tied to his vampire that he would continue
kissing her, even when she was dead. And such was his passion that those
kisses would bring her back to life. In “Le Léthé” [Lethe] (1857: 30) he
seeks death, as he had in “Le Vampire,” but this time his own—in the
form of sleep (which he had desired in “De profundis clamavi”): “Je veux
dormir! dormir plutôt que vivre! / Dans un sommeil, douteux comme la
mort” [I want to sleep! To sleep rather than live! / In a slumber, doubtful
like death] (ll. 9–10). In “Le Vampire” he wanted to kill her; now he wants
her to kill him. The poison he had called upon for that purpose is replaced
by the poison she can supply for his death:

Je sucerai, pour noyer ma rancœur,
Le népenthès et la bonne ciguë
Aux bouts charmants de cette gorge aiguë
Qui n’a jamais emprisonné de cœur.

[I will suck, to drown my rancor,
Nepenthes and fine hemlock
From the charming tips of those pointed breasts
That have never imprisoned a heart.] (ll. 21–24)

Ironically, in “Le Vampire” the expression “Tes baisers” [Your kisses],
meaning the speaker’s (since it was the sword and poison speaking), would
bring her back to life (“Tes baisers ressusciteraient / Le cadavre de ton
vampire”) [Your kisses would bring back to life / Your vampire’s corpse]
(ll. 23–24), but the same expression—which appears in only these poems in
the 1857 volume—has the opposite meaning here, for “le Léthé coule dans
tes baisers” [Lethe (oblivion) flows from your kisses] (l. 16), says the speaker
to his mistress. Now they are her kisses, not his.

“Le Léthé” / “Une nuit que j’étais près
d’une affreuse juive . . . ”

“Le Léthé” is about forgetting, but “Une nuit que j’étais près d’une
affreuse juive . . . ” [One night when I was with a frightful Jewess . . . ]
(1857: 31) is about remembering. In “Le Léthé” the narrator sought
“L’oubli puissant” [powerful oblivion] (l. 15) in the arms of his mistress;
but in “Une nuit . . . ” the narrator tries to forget his mistress by sleeping
with another woman. But the attempt is unsuccessful, for “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” [I began to dream, next to this purchased body, / Of the sad beauty of which my desire was depriving itself. // I pictured to myself her innate majesty] (ll. 3–5). He thinks of her hair and its perfume, “dont le souvenir pour l’amour me ravive” [the memory of which brings me back to life for love] (l. 8). This resurrection in the second quatrain looks back to the description he gave of himself in the first: “Comme au long d’un cadavre un cadavre étendu” [Like a corpse stretched out beside another corpse] (l. 2). Thinking of the woman he loves but cannot have permits him to rise from the dead and make love to the prostitute beside him. The prosecutor who condemned “Le Léthé”—because of the nudity in “Je sucerai . . . / Aux bouts charmants de cette gorge aiguë” [I will suck . . . / From the charming tips of those pointed breasts] (ll. 21, 23), as Pichois explains (OC I: 1130n)—evidently did not pick up on the eroticism of “me ravive.” Nor on that of the second quatrain of “Le Léthé”:

Dans tes jupons remplis de ton parfum  
Ensevelir ma tête endolorie,  
Et respirer, comme une fleur flétrie,  
Le doux relent de mon amour défunt.

[In your skirts filled with your perfume  
Bury my aching head,  
And breathe in, as if from a withered flower,  
The sweet stench of my departed love.] (ll. 5–8)

What he is smelling is the odor of his semen. The same sense for “mon amour” is apparent in “Les Bijoux”: “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 from the top of the couch she smiled with pleasure / At my love, deep and gentle as the sea / That toward her ascended as if toward its cliff] (ll. 10–12). His sperm is splashing like sea foam against the shore, reminding us of Aphrodite’s birth from aphros, which means both sea foam and sperm.6 The same meaning emerges in the “amour” in line 8 of “Une nuit . . .”: it is that “amour” that is brought back to life when “le souvenir pour l’amour me ravive” [the memory brings me back to life for love].

Chapter 1

Looked at another way, “Une nuit . . .” performs an ironic reversal on “Le Léthé.” The narrator sought death there (in seeking to “dormir plutôt que vivre” [to sleep rather than live]), in hoping for a “sommeil, douteux comme la mort” [a slumber as doubtful as death] by going to his mistress; he finds death (the death involved in being a corpse beside another corpse) in “Une nuit . . .” by abandoning her for another woman. The irony is enriched when we recall that his mistress, in “Le Vampire,” was herself a corpse (“Tes baisers ressusciteraient / Le cadavre de ton vampire” [Your kisses would bring back to life / Your vampire’s corpse] (ll. 23–24).

Just after his “amour” comes back to life in “Une nuit . . .” he tells his mistress (whom he had spoken of until now in the third person) what he would have liked to do: “j’eusse avec ferveur baisé ton noble corps” [I would have fervently kissed your noble body] (l. 9), creating a parallel to what he said he plans to do in “Le Léthé”: “J’étalerai mes baisers sans remord / Sur ton beau corps” [I will spread out my kisses without remorse / On your beautiful body] (ll. 11–12). The combination of baiser (noun or verb) and ton . . . corps (or even corps alone) is unique to these neighboring poems.

“Une nuit que j’étais près d’une affreuse juive . . .”/ “Remords posthume”

In “Une nuit . . .” he would have covered his mistress with kisses on the condition that with a tear obtained without effort she could darken the splendor of her cold eyes. This appears to be an impossible condition. But then in “Remords posthume” [Posthumous Remorse] (1857: 32) the narrator sets up a situation in which he believes she will be bound to do so. He imagines her a corpse in her grave, and “Durant ces grandes nuits d’où le somme est banni” [During those long nights from which sleep is banned] (l. 11) (echoing the “quelque soir” [some evening] (l. 12) that he wishes the tear would come in (“Une nuit . . .”) her tomb “Te dira « Que vous sert, courtisane imparfaite, / De n’avoir pas connu ce que pleurent les morts? »” [Will say to you “What good does it do you, imperfect courtisan, / Not to have known that for which the dead weep?”] (ll. 12–13). What the dead weep for is the erotic embrace that she, being “imparfaite” as a courtesan, will not give him. Or that he would fervently give her in “Une nuit . . .” if only she would shed a tear.

But instead of being caressed by him “depuis tes pieds frais jusqu’à tes noires tresses” [from your chilly feet to your black tresses] (l. 10), the length of her body is oppressed by the tomb:

. . . la pierre, opprimant ta poitrine peureuse
Et tes flancs . . . ,
Empêchera ton cœur de battre et de vouloir,
Et tes pieds de courir leur course aventureuse

[. . . the stone, pressing down on your fearful breast
And your sides . . . ,
Will forbid your heart to beat and to desire,
And your feet to run their reckless course] (ll. 5–6, 7–8)

Imagining her body as a corpse becomes a substitute for having her body in life, as lying next to another woman’s corpselike body was in its own way a substitute for the same thing.

“Remords posthume” / “Le Chat:
“Viens, mon beau chat . . . ”

As the tomb holds tight her restless body, in “Le Chat” [The Cat] (1857: 33) the speaker holds in his grasp his restless cat, who itself is yet another substitute for the woman he desires but, it seems, cannot have. The narrator’s cat will later show that restlessness in “Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . . ” [Spleen: Pluvius, irritated . . . ] (1857: 59): “Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière / Agite sans repos son corps” [My cat, looking for a place to lie down on the tile, / Stirs his body restlessly] (ll. 5–6). In contemplating and caressing the animal, the narrator of “Le Chat” says, “Je vois ma femme en esprit” [I see my woman in spirit] (l. 9). But by addressing it in the first line as “mon beau chat” [my beautiful cat] he identifies the cat not just with the woman he loves but more specifically with the woman in the tomb in the previous poem, for in that poem’s first line he had addressed her in similar terms: “ma belle ténébreuse” [my beautiful shadowy one] (l. 2). In no other poem in the 1857 volume will Baudelaire write either “mon beau” or “ma belle.” Even when he will write “ma belle visiteuse” in “Un fantôme” [A Phantom] in 1861, it is not in the vocative, as here.

In “Remords posthume” the stone of the tomb presses down on “tes flancs qu’assouplit un charmant nonchaloir” [your flanks, made supple by a charming nonchalance] (l. 6); in “Le Chat” that suppleness is expressed as elasticity: “mes doigts caressent à loisir / . . . ton dos élastique” [my fingers caress at leisure / . . . your elastic back] (ll. 5, 6). That the oppressed tomb and the caressing poet have something in common is suggested in “Remords posthume”: “le tombeau toujours comprendra le poète” [the tomb will always understand the poet] (l. 10), and will thus be able to
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speak for him in asking the woman in its grasp what good it does her not to have enjoyed in her life what it is the dead weep for.

“Le Chat: Viens, mon beau chat...” / “Le Balcon”

In “Le Balcon” [The Balcony] (1857: 34) the narrator embraces the woman he loves for real—not through a substitute woman (as in “Une nuit . . .”), not as a tomb evokes her (as in “Remords posthume”), not through a cat that evokes her presence (as in “Le Chat”). Especially not as he had with the cat. There, the narrator exclaims, “laisse-moi plonger dans tes beaux yeux” [let me plunge into your beautiful eyes] (l. 3); here, “mes yeux dans le noir devinait tes prunelles” [my eyes in the dark sought out your pupils] (l. 17). There, “mes doigts caressent” [my fingers caress] (l. 5); here, “Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses” [You will recall the beauty of the caresses] (l. 3). There, “ma main s’enivre du plaisir / De palper ton corps” [my band is intoxicated with the pleasure / Of touching your body] (ll. 7–8); here, “tes pieds s’endormaient dans mes mains” [your feet fall asleep in my hands] (l. 19). There, in caressing the cat, he was put in mind of the woman’s “dangerous perfume” (l. 13); here, “Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang” [I felt I could breathe the perfume of your blood] (l. 14). As the narrator of “Le Balcon” asks, “à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses / Ailleurs qu’en ton cher corps et qu’en ton cœur si doux?” [why seek your langorous beauties / Elsewhere than in your dear body and than in your heart so sweet?] (ll. 23–24). The question has particular relevance to the three preceding poems, where he was consistently doing that.

“Le Balcon” / “Je te donne ces vers...”

In “Je te donne ces vers...” [I give you these lines... ] (1857: 35) the question asked in “Le Balcon” (“why seek your langorous beauties / Elsewhere than in your dear body?”) is still relevant, for here the poet imagines future generations (her body having long disappeared) discovering her in his poems. Her memory will nag the reader with the insistence of a hammered dulcimer, and hang suspended from his lofty rhymes like a fraternal and mystic link of chain (ll. 6–8). It is appropriate that it should be her memory (“ta mémoire”) that persists, since “Le Balcon” begins by calling her the mother of memories (“Mère des souvenirs”). In fact, all of that poem comes out of what the narrator says to his mistress in line 3 about remembering: “Tu te rappelleras” [You will remember]
all those pleasant evenings we spent on the balcony. “Le Balcon” is completely about memory, including the final stanza, when he asks if all those memories could be reborn after passing into the abyss. Will those recollected promises, perfumes, and kisses be reborn “d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes, / Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis / Après s’être lavés au fond des mers profondes” [from an abyss forbidden to our soundings, / As rejuvenated suns ascend to heaven / After being washed in the depths of deep seas]? The passage itself, if not the promises, perfumes, and kisses, is itself reborn—and remembered—in lines 9 and 10 of “Je te donne ces vers . . . ,” particularly the distance stretching from the depths of the abyss to the heights of heaven: “de l’abîme profond / Jusqu’au plus haut du ciel” [from the deep abyss / To the highest heaven].

Likewise remembered in “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” is the fraternal quality of the poet’s hands when they hold her feet in line 19 of “Le Balcon,” reappearing as a fraternal link in line 7: “tes pieds s’endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles” [your feet fell asleep in my fraternal hands]. In no other 1857 poem does the adjective appear. Although it is the memory of the woman to whom the poem is addressed that he calls a “fraternel et mystique chaînon” attached to his poems, the fraternal link is itself a link therein attached, particularly to these two, in the manner of the “choses . . . concaténées” [concatenated things] that in Baudelaire’s opinion “constituent une poésie bien faite” [constitute well-made poetry] (OC II: 803). Those feet return, too, in lines 12–13, when they trample those who called her bitter. The connection between her feet and fraternity first established in “Le Balcon” was originally recalled here even more closely, for the second hemistich of line 13 in the page proofs had read “qui t’appellent leur frère” [who call you their brother] (OC I: 905): her foot was trampling the stupid mortals who claimed a fraternal connection. Might they have included the poet, who seems to have made such a claim in “Le Balcon”? Here we can see Baudelaire at work forging an even stronger link between “Le Balcon” and “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” and then rejecting it, perhaps because mortals calling her their brother would be inconsistent with her being called “maudit” [cursed], presumably by those same mortals. Better for them to call her “amère” [bitter].

“Je te donne ces vers . . . ” / “Tout entière”

If the poet’s mistress gives rise in “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” to a fatiguing, unpleasant music in line 5, where her memory is as nagging to the reader of his poems as the sound of a hammered dulcimer, the opposite is the case in lines 17–20 of “Tout entière” [Completely Entire] (1857: 36):
Et l’harmonie est trop exquise,
Qui gouverne tout son beau corps,
Pour que l’impuissante analyse
En note les nombreux accords.

[Too exquisite is the harmony
That governs her entire beautiful body,
For impotent analysis
To transcribe its numerous chords.] (ll. 17–20)

The difficult labor this music poses for the task of analysis reminds us of the work the poet hopes his name will make human brains undertake in “Je te donne ces vers . . . ”: “Je te donne ces vers afin que, si mon nom . . . / Fait travailler un soir les cervelles humaines” [I give you these lines so that, if my name . . . / Should some evening set human brains to work] (ll. 1, 4). In the next chapter we will see that in 1861 he would replace “travailler” by “rêver” at the same time that he would break up the connections between these two poems by inserting another poem, “Semper eadem,” between them. But for the moment, “travailler” works, connecting the mental labor his poems will impose in “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” to the mental labor of musical analysis in “Tout entière.”

It would seem that the woman addressed in one poem is not the same as the one addressed in the other, for scholars agree that 35 is the last in the Jeanne Duval cycle, while 36 is the first poem devoted to Madame Sabatier. Baudelaire himself declared in a letter to Sabatier that “Tout entière” was written for her (OC I: 906n). One muse would give rise to fatiguing music, the other to music so complex it defies analysis. But both give rise to music.

In addition, lines 9–10 of “Je te donne ces vers . . . ”—“Etre maudit à qui de l’abîme profond, / Jusqu’au plus haut du ciel rien, hors moi, ne répond” [Cursèd being to whom from the deep abyss / Up to the highest part of heaven nothing, except me, responds]—bear an interesting relation to the framing situation in “Tout entière”: “Le Démon, dans ma chambre haute” [The Demon, in my high room] (l. 1) came to see me, asked me what part of my beloved do I find most sweet, and “mon âme, / Tu répondis” [my soul, / You responded] (ll. 9–10). We had already seen how this passage in “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” paralleled lines 27–29 of “Le Balcon” (“d’un gouffre . . . au ciel . . . mers profondes”). Now the same passage is echoed in “Tout entière.” The abyss is represented by the “Démon” who comes from there, the “haut du ciel” is replaced by the poet’s “chambre haute,” and a new connection appears between the reponse the poet alone makes between the abyss and the height and the response the poet in
his high room makes to the demon from the abyss. In both passages the response concerns the woman the poet loves (even though biographers will remind us it is not the same woman).

The response to the Demon is in a way a nonresponse, since the poet refuses to single out any particular feature of his beloved for praise. But at the same time it is quite a substantial response, in three parts: (1) Because everything in her is ravishing and seductive, there is no one thing better (or worse) than another. (2) The harmony of those parts is too exquisite for all its numerous “accords” to be analyzed. (3) By a kind of mystical metamorphosis all the poet’s senses are melted into one, so that her breath makes music, as her voice makes perfume. In other words, things get mixed up, senses (both sensory perceptions and meanings) are confused, subjects and predicates get rearranged, the impossible happens. For breath cannot really make music, nor voice perfume (except through metonymy: breath and voice being parts of the same whole).

What Baudelaire is describing is not just this idealized woman but the *Fleurs du mal* itself. The same kind of reorganization of elements is what we find to persist as elements of each poem (such as abyss, height, and response) reappear in a different arrangement in the next. The harmony of the collection is so rich, the accords connecting poem to poem so numerous, that analysis is difficult (I refuse to say “impuissante” unless it refuses the task). Baudelaire indeed “Fait travailler . . . les cervelles humaines.” What he strives for in the *Fleurs* is a work of art where “tant toutes choses y sont bien unies, conjointes, réciproquement adaptées, et . . . concaténées” [all things are so well united, conjoined, reciprocally adapted, and . . . concatenated] (OC II: 803), it is so “tout entière,” that there is no one thing that seduces; rather, it is the “tout” [whole] that “ravit” [ravishes].

“Tout entière” / “Que diras-tu ce soir . . . ”

In “Que diras-tu ce soir . . . ” [What will you say tonight . . . ”] (1857: 37) the poet does the very thing that in “Tout entière” he said he would not do: single out for praise a particular quality of his beloved. He enumerates several:

—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.

[—We will set our pride to sing her praises: 55]
Nothing equals the gentleness of her authority;
Her spiritual flesh has the perfume of the angels,
And her eye clothes us in brightness.] (ll. 5–8)

And it happens that the first one he lists, “la douceur de son autorité,” could be read as a reply to the very question the Demon had posed in “Tout entière”: of all her qualities, “Quel est le plus doux” [Which is the sweet-est] (l. 9)? The “Rien ne” with which he begins his enumeration echoes his refusal to enumerate in “Tout entière”: “Rien ne peut être préféré” [Nothing can be preferred over anything else] (l. 12).

“Que diras-tu ce soir . . . ” / “Le Flambeau vivant”

“Le Flambeau vivant” [The Living Flame] (1857: 38) is so continuous with and so similar to “Que diras-tu . . . ” (37) that one poem is almost to the other as the sun is to the candle in the tercets of “Le Flambeau vivant”; rivals with the same goal, each trying to outdo the other in praising the woman in parallel ways, with the same words. In 37 “Son fantôme dans l’air danse comme un flambeau” [Her phantom dances in the air like a torch] (l. 11); in 38 “Tout mon être obéit à ce vivant flambeau” [All my being obeys this living torch] (l. 8). In 37 “son œil nous revêt d’un habit de clarté” [her eye clothes us in brightness] (l. 8); in 38 her “Yeux . . . brille[nt] de . . . clarté mystique” [Eyes . . . shine with mystic brightness] (l. 9). In 37 her “flambeau” tells him, “Je suis belle, et j’ordonne / Que pour l’amour de moi vous n’aimiez que le Beau” [i am beautiful, and i command / That for the love of me you love only the Beautiful] (ll. 12–13); in 38 her eyes “conduisent mes pas dans la route du Beau” [lead my steps along the road of the Beautiful] (l. 6), and he obeys their command: “Tout mon être obéit à ce vivant flambeau” [All my being obeys this living torch] (l. 8).

“Le Flambeau vivant” / “À celle qui est trop gaie”

In “Le Flambeau vivant” the sun engages in a contest of strength with the beloved’s eyes: “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” [Charming Eyes, you shine with the mystic brightness / Of candles burning in full daylight; the sun / reddens, but cannot not extinguish their fantastic flame] (ll. 9–11). The sun returns as a rival in “À celle qui est trop gaie” [To the One Who Is Too Gay] (1857: 39) but as a rival to the poet, instead of the beloved. The sun could not extinguish the
flame of the candles of the mystical “clarté” [brightness] (l. 9) of her eyes, reappearing here as the “clarté / De tes bras et tes épaules” [brightness / Of your arms and shoulders] (ll. 7–8). But it can hurt the poet, tearing at his chest in line 20, making him smart from the irony of the contradiction between its strength and his weakness, between its joy and his melancholy. In the second stanza it becomes apparent that the woman has the same effect on him that the sun does. Any passing “chagrin” that she encounters is “ébloui” [blinded] by her “clarté” [brightness]. The effect she has on his own chagrin is the same, hence his violent reaction. Adam observes: “This happy, beautiful woman makes him think of spring. But Baudelaire cannot bear springtime. He sees irony in his surroundings. They seem to mock his sadness, his state of depression, his lifeless atony. So much so that, exasperated, he stupidly destroys a flower. . . . In the same way, he would like to avenge himself on such health and gaiety, to inject her with his illness, melancholy” (FM Adam, 434–35n). In the earlier version of the poem Baudelaire sent Madame Sabatier in 1852, instead of “ébloui” in line 6 he had written “éclairé” [illumined, enlightened]. The difference is telling. By replacing “éclairé” with “ébloui,” by replacing a positive effect (illumination) with a destructive one (blinding, bedazzlement), Baudelaire adapted the poem to allow it to enter into a richer dialogue with “le Flambeau vivant.” There is both reversal and consistency between the two poems. The woman triumphs in both—triumphs over the sun in 38 by refusing to be extinguished in the face of its greater brightness, triumphs over the poet in 39 by blinding him with hers. Yet the poems are opposed as well, for in “Le Flambeau vivant” she has a beneficent effect on the poet, but here she makes him suffer.

“À celle qui est trop gaie” / “Réversibilité”

From the first words of “Réversibilité” [Reversibility] (1857: 40)—“Ange plein de gaiété” [Angel full of gaiety] (l. 1)—we know the poet is addressing the same woman as he did in “À celle qui est trop gaie” and that he thinks she has the same problem, an excess of gaiety. In both that poem and this he wants to counteract that gaiety, but he goes about it in different ways—there, by injecting her with his venom; here, by confronting her with compelling evocations of anguish, hatred, illness, and aging. In the stanza devoted to illness, the sun that in “À celle qui est trop gaie” was portrayed as an enemy, attacking the suffering poet—“dans un beau jardin, / Où je trainais mon atonie, / J’ai senti comme une ironic / Le soleil déchirer mon sein” [in a beautiful garden, / Where I was dragging my atony, / I felt, like an irony, / The sun tear my breast] (ll. 17–20)—is
transformed into its opposite, something beneficent and eagerly sought: the ill in a hospice “s’en vont d’un pied traînard, / Cherchant le soleil rare” [go along with dragging step, / Seeking the rare sun] (ll. 13–14). The way “traînard” echoes “traînais” points up the irony (already announced in “J’ai senti comme une ironie”). The poet was dragging his step in the garden as the patients are dragging theirs in the hospice. Ironically, the sun cheers the latter but devastates the former. There is one “ironie” within “À celle qui est trop gaie,” and another within the intratext that poem forms with “Réversibilité.” You could say that was ironic.

“Réversibilité” / “Confession”

As if in answer to the questions the poet asked her in “Réversibilité,” in “Confession” (1857: 41) the beloved, despite her “gaîté” (l. 16), surprises him by revealing that yes, she has indeed experienced anguish and doubt. In “Réversibilité” he had asked her, “connaissez-vous les rides, / et la peur de vieillir . . . ?” [are you acquainted with wrinkles, / And the fear of getting old . . . ?] (ll. 16–17); in “Confession” the beloved answers that question: “tout craque, amour et beauté, / Jusqu’à ce que l’Oubli les jette dans sa hotte / Pour les rendre à l’Éternité!” [everything cracks, both love and beauty, / Right up until the time Oblivion throws them in to his basket / To hand them over to Eternity!] (ll. 34–36).

“Confession” / “L’Aube spirituelle”

A striking feature of “Confession” is the way the confession itself is represented as a child hidden away until now, both “horrible, sombre, immonde” [horrible, dark, disgusting] (l. 21) yet at the same time a “pauvre ange” [poor angel] (l. 25). Something similar, yet opposite, happens in “L’Aube spirituelle” [The Spiritual Dawn] (1857: 42): “Dans la brute assoupie un ange se réveille” [In the sleepy brute an angel awakens] (l. 4). The two events are equally surprising. The “poor angel,” though dark and horrible, emerged from a woman who until then had displayed a “radieuse gaîté” [radiant gaiety] (l. 16) and had been “claire et joyeuse” [luminous and joyful] (l. 17). The other angel

7. Richter points out that the titles of both poems refer to Catholic dogma. Reversibility is the interchangeability of merits within the community of saints. That the confession she makes has a religious overtone, he remarks, “is confirmed by the word ‘confessional’ in the last line” (417).
emerged from a “débauché” but distinguished itself from him by yearning for “l’Idéal,” for the inaccessible azure of spiritual skies. Each angel, in other words, is the opposite of the person from whom it emerges; each angel is the other’s opposite as well: one complains; the other aspires. It is the light of dawn that awakens the angel in “L’Aube spirituelle,” as the first stanza makes clear (the dawn working together with the Ideal). It was the light of the moon that made it possible for the other angel to emerge in “Confession.” It was a full moon (l. 6), and the freedom of intimacy that enabled her to make her confession bloomed in its pale light (ll. 13–14).

“L’Aube spirituelle” / “Harmonie du soir”

Although it takes place at evening instead of dawn, part of “Harmonie du soir” [Evening Harmony] (1857: 43) seems to grow out of lines 10–11 of “L’Aube spirituelle”: “Ton souvenir plus clair, plus rose, plus charmant, / A mes yeux agrandis voltige incessamment” [Your memory—brighter, more rosy, more charming—/Incessantly turns (or flutters) before my widened eyes]. I am thinking of lines 3 and 16 in “Harmonie du soir”: “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir” [Sounds and perfumes turn in the evening air] and “Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor” [Your memory shines in me like a monstrance]. The phrase “ton souvenir” appears nowhere else in the Fleurs du mal. The verb voltiger can mean to flutter or to rotate; however, the latter is the original sense, according to Le Petit Robert. It comes from the Italian volteggiare, which means to make a volta (volte in French), a complete turn executed on horseback. The sense of “to flutter” or “to fly about” was later given to voltiger by the influence of the verb voléter.

“Harmonie du soir” / “Le Flacon”

In the 1857 edition the verb voltiger makes its only other appearance in “Le Flacon” [The Perfume Flask] (1857: 44), the poem just after “Harmonie du soir,” where, as in “L’Aube spirituelle,” its subject is “souvenir”: “Voilà le souvenir enivrant qui voltige / Dans l’air troublé;—les yeux se ferment; le vertige / Saisit l’âme . . . ” [Behold the intoxicating memory that turns / In the troubled air;—the eyes close; vertigo / Seizes the soul] (ll. 13–15). Clearly these three poems “turn” around the words souvenir, voltige, and vertige (the latter appearing in lines 4 and 7 of “Harmonie du soir”):
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- “L’Aube spirituelle” (1857: 42): “Ton souvenir . . . À mes yeux . . . voltige”
- “Le Flacon” (1857: 44): “le souvenir . . . voltige / Dans l’air”

The fact that the sounds and perfumes “tournent dans l’air” in “Harmonie du soir” and that memory “voltige / Dans l’air” in “Le Flacon” suggests that voltiger may mean tourner in both “L’Aube spirituelle” and “Le Flacon.” In addition, in lines 10–11 of “L’Aube spirituelle” and lines 3 and 16 of “Harmonie du soir”:

a. “Ton souvenir” corresponds to “Ton souvenir”
b. “plus clair” [brighter] corresponds to “luit” [shines]
c. “À mes yeux” [in my eyes] corresponds to “en moi” [in me]

Having established this common ground, we can better appreciate how the two poems are each other’s opposite in other ways. In “L’Aube spirituelle” the sun is immortal. More surprisingly, in the struggle between candles and the sun, the woman who in “Le Flambeau vivant” had been symbolized by the former has now changed sides: “Le soleil a noirci les flammes des bougies; / —Ainsi, toujours vainqueur, ton fantôme est pareil, / Ame resplendissante, à l’immortel soleil!” [The sun has darkened the candles’ flames; / —Thus, always conquering, your phantom is like, / Resplendent soul, the immortal sun!] (ll. 12–14). But the sun’s immortality is brief, for in “Harmonie du soir” it seems to die: “le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige” [The sun has drowned in its coagulated blood] (ll. 12, 15). And the woman is no longer the sun, glowing in the poet like an “ostensoir” [monstrance] in line 16 after the sun dies in the line before.

The dawn sky (in “L’Aube spirituelle”) and the evening sky (in “Harmonie du soir”), as could be expected, are each other’s opposites, one azure and the other black. Nevertheless, both represent the same thing: nothingness. In “L’Aube spirituelle” the inaccessible azure “S’ouvre et s’enfonce avec l’attirance du gouffre” [Opens and deepens with the attraction of the abyss] (l. 7). In “Harmonie du soir” the tender heart, gazing at the night sky, “hait le néant vaste et noir!” [hates the vast black nothingness!] (ll. 10, 13). The sky’s abyss, attractive in one poem, is detested in the other.

“Il est de forts parfums pour qui toute matière / Est poreuse” [There are strong perfumes for which all matter / Is porous] (ll. 1–2) we are told in “Le Flacon”; “on dirait qu’ils pénètrent le verre” [one would say that they penetrate glass] (l. 2). This statement seems to have an element of metafictional self-reference, for the perfumes of one poem penetrate the barrier
separating that poem from the next, almost literally so, as the perfumes that turn in the evening air in “Harmonie du soir” become the intoxicating memory that “voltige / Dans l’air” [turns / In the air] (ll. 13–14), and the evaporation named in lines 2 and 5 of “Harmonie du soir” becomes the whole premise of “Le Flacon,” where perfumes become resurrected memories. The vertigo that dances in “Valse mélancolique et languoreux vertige” [Melancholy waltz and languorous vertigo] (ll. 4, 7) reappears as “le vertige” [the vertigo] that “Saisit l’âme vaincue et la pousse à deux mains / Vers un gouffre où l’air est plein de parfums humains” [Seizes the conquered soul and pushes it with both hands / Toward an abyss where the air is full of human perfumes] in lines 14–16 of “Le Flacon.”

“Le Flacon” / “Le Poison”

Commentators agree that “Le Poison” [Poison] (1857: 45) begins a new cycle of poems, devoted to Marie Daubrun. The poems in the 1857 edition from “Les Bijoux” (1857: 20) to “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” (1857: 35) were inspired by Jeanne Duval, and those from “Tout entière” (1857: 36) to “Le Flacon” (1857: 44) by Madame Sabatier. Daubrun had green eyes, as indicated in line 12 of “Le Poison.” We saw in reading “Je te donne ces vers . . . ” together with “Tout entière” that the change of mistress has no effect on the continuities linking one poem to the next. Neither does it here. The poison itself of “Le Poison” grows out of the poison of “Le Flacon”: “Cher poison préparé par les anges! liqueur / Qui me ronge, ô la vie et la mort de mon cœur!” [Dear poison prepared by the angels! Liquor / That eats at me, O life and death of my heart!] (ll. 27–28). Adam’s remark is pertinent here: “If we want to know why he calls [his love for Madame Sabatier] a poison” at the end of “Le Flacon,” “we only have to read the poem that immediately follows this one. For the connection between the two is evident, and the second comments on the last lines of the first” (FM Adam, 333). The connection, paradoxically, begins at the very moment the speaker indicates that he has started to write about another woman, one with green eyes: “le poison qui découle / De tes yeux, de tes yeux verts” [the poison that flows / From your eyes, from your green eyes] (ll. 11–12). In other words, in both instances he is writing about a poison that comes from a woman—but from two different women. This is strong evidence in support of the proposition that the connections linking the poems are stronger than the poems’ external referentiality, and it even rivals the strength of their internal self-sufficiency.

In lines 14–16 of “Le Flacon,” “vertige” [vertigo] pushes the vainquished soul towards a “gouffre” [abyss]. We find “gouffres” in line 15 of
“Le Poison,” when her green eyes become “ces gouffres amers” [those bitter abysses], and we find “vertige” once more in line 19. “Vertige” appears nowhere in the 1857 edition but in the three consecutive poems “Harmonie du soir,” “Le Flacon,” and “Le Poison,” which it effectively links.

“Le Poison” / “Ciel brouillé”

In “Ciel brouillé” [Cloudy Sky] (1857: 46) the narrator compares his mistress to a misty horizon lit up by the sun:

Tu ressembles parfois à ces beaux horizons
Qu’allument les soleils des brumeuses saisons;
—Comme tu resplendis, paysage mouillé
Qu’enflammant les rayons tombant d’un ciel brouillé!

Sometimes you resemble those beautiful horizons
Lit up by the sun in seasons of mist.
How resplendent you are, a rain-swept landscape
Enflamed by sunbeams falling from a cloudy sky! (ll. 9–12)

This combination of sun and “ciel brouillé” [cloudy sky] evokes the combination of sun and “ciel nébuleux” [cloudy sky] in “Le Poison”: “Le vin . . . fait surgir plus d’un portique fabuleux / Dans l’or de sa vapeur rouge, / Comme un soleil couchant dans un ciel nébuleux” [Wine . . . makes more than one fabulous portico emerge / In the gold of its red vapor, / Like a sun setting in a cloudy sky] (ll. 1, 3–5). Wine’s “vapeur” in line 4 is answered by the “vapeur” covering her gaze in “Ciel brouillé”: “On dirait ton regard d’une vapeur couvert” [As if your gaze was covered by a vapor] (l. 1). These are the only two poems in which “vapeur” in the singular appears in 1857.

Wine is one of the poisons (the other is opium) that he finds less deadly than the kind that flows from her eyes, said to be green in both poems, though with more uncertainty in the second than the first: “le poison qui découle / De tes yeux, de tes yeux verts” [the poison that flows / From your eyes, from your green eyes] (“Le Poison,” ll. 11–12); “Ton œil mystérieux,—est-il bleu, gris ou vert?” [Your mysterious eye—is it blue, gray, or green?] (“Ciel brouillé,” l. 2). In likening one of the poisons in one poem to the kind of sunlit cloudy sky to which he will compare his mistress in the next, as well as an echoing “vapeur,” Baudelaire makes the two poems
echo each other in a subtle, and not immediately obvious, way. It is more interesting and aesthetically pleasing than the fact that both are about the same woman.

Baudelaire begins “Ciel brouillé” by focusing on the beloved’s eyes:

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

[One would say your gaze was covered with a vapor;
Your mysterious eye—is it blue, gray, or green?—
Alternatively tender, sweet, and cruel,
Reflects the indolence and paleness of the sky.] (ll. 1–4)

“We Ciel brouillé” / “Le Chat: Dans ma cervelle . . .”

We will encounter that ocular paleness again in the “prunelles pâles” [pale pupils] (l. 38) of “Le Chat” [The Cat] (1857: 47). Two of the three adjectives ("tendre, doux et cruel" [tender, sweet and cruel]) that he applies to her eyes in line 3 of “Ciel brouillé” he likewise attributes to the feline: “Un beau chat, fort, doux et charmant; / Quand il miaule, on l’entend à peine, // Tant son timbre est tendre et discret” [A beautiful cat, strong, sweet and charming; / When he meows, one can barely hear it, // Its timbre is so tender and discreet] (ll. 3–5).

Not only do her eyes in “Ciel brouillé” (1857: 46) resemble both the misty sky in the poem before (“Le Poison” [1857: 45]) and the pale eyes in the one that follows (“le Chat” [1857: 47]), but they serve as a mid-point between those poems in another way. In “Le Poison” her eyes are “Lacs où mon âme tremble et se voit à l’envers” [Lakes in which my soul trembles and sees its mirror image] (l. 13); in “Le Chat,” after finding his eyes drawn to the cat as if by a magnet, the narrator says, “je regarde en moi-même” [I look into myself] and “vois avec étonnement / Le feu de ses prunelles pâles, / Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales, / Qui me contemlent fixement” [see with astonishment / The fire of those pale pupils, / Bright beacons, living opals, / Contemplating me with a fixed stare] (ll. 36–40). In “Le Poison” he sees himself in her eyes; in “Le Chat” he sees the cat’s eyes within himself. Appropriately, one situation is the mirror-reversed image of the other.
“Le Chat: Dans ma cervelle . . . ” / “Le Beau Navire”

Although “Le Chat” is in the midst of a series of poems apparently devoted to Marie Daubrun, it actually makes no mention of her at all. Pichois writes, “In this poem, the primary reader to whom it is destined—the contemporary reader [of the Fleurs du mal in 1857]—knows nothing of the relations Baudelaire had with any woman, and certainly not with Marie Daubrun. The reader therefore takes literally the enumeration and description of this cat’s qualities (voice, fur, perfume, eyes)” (OC I: 925). Pichois goes on to say that the poet’s friends may have known that she loved the cat (or, I might add, that it was her cat), but he wasn’t writing for them. “Le Chat” echoes “Ciel brouillé” whether we read the cat as representing the woman or not. Likewise, “Le Beau Navire” [The Beautiful Ship] (1857: 48) shows subtle connections to “Le Chat” for which we do not need to see any connection between Daubrun and the cat in order to appreciate. I will start with a continuity running through all three poems: (a) “Ton œil . . . tendre, doux et cruel” [Your eye . . . tender, gentle and cruel] (“Ciel brouillé,” ll. 2, 3), (b) “Un beau chat, fort, doux et charmant” [A beautiful cat, strong, gentle and charming] (“Le Chat,” l. 3), (c) “un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent” [a rhythm gentle, and lazy, and slow] (“Le Beau Navire,” l. 8). On the page proofs for this line from “Le Chat” in 1857 Baudelaire changed it into its present form from “Un beau chat, doux, fier et charmant” [A beautiful cat, gentle, proud, and charming]. The change has the effect of maintaining the “doux et” in the middle of three adjectives through three consecutive poems. The combination “doux et” or “doux, et” appears only here in the 1857 Fleurs du mal. (In 1861, the line in “Ciel brouillé” would lose its “doux et” when it became “tendre, rêveur, cruel” [tender, dreamy, cruel], but the echo between “Le Chat” and “Le Beau Navire” would remain.)

The first thing the poet tells us in “Le Chat” is that the cat “Dans ma cervelle se promène” [Walks in my brain] (l. 1). In “Le Beau Navire” his mistress works on his brain, too, her breast an “Armoire à doux secrets, pleine de bonnes choses, / De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs / Qui feraient délirer les cerveaux et les cœurs” [A cabinet with sweet secrets, full of good things, / Of wines, perfumes, liqueurs / That would make brains and hearts delirious” (ll. 22–24). The cat, too, has “son secret” [his secret] (l. 8) and exudes his own “parfum si doux” [perfume so sweet] (l. 26). He walks, by contrast to the motionless cat in the earlier poem with the same title, number 33, whom the poet held captive on his chest, the better to create a parallel with his mistress held captive in her tomb in the immediately preceding “Remords posthume.” This cat’s forward motion has a similar role to play with regard to “Le Beau Navire,” paralleling the advance of
the ship, whose beauty emerges from the way it moves, when the sweep of the beloved’s skirt puts the poet in mind of a departing ship under full sail, rolling through the waves at a pace “doux, et paresseux, et lent” [gentle, and lazy, and slow] (l. 8). It is apparent in the way she walks, when “Ta tête se pavane” [Your head struts] (l. 10) and “Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant” [You go your way, majestic child] (l. 12). His mistress walking at the same time gives rise to the extraordinary image of two witches stirring “un philtre noir dans un vase profond” [a black potion in a deep vase] (l. 32), which sends us back to the cat walking in his brain, whose voice “pénètre comme un philtre” [penetrates like a potion] (l. 12).

“Le Beau Navire” / “L’Invitation au voyage”

The first words of “L’Invitation au voyage” [The Invitation to the Voyage] (1857: 49), “mon enfant” [My child] (l. 1), echo the last word of “Le Beau Navire”: “majestueuse enfant” [majestic child] (l. 40). The first stanza of “Le Beau Navire” had already broached this theme, asserting that the essence of the woman’s beauty is that though mature, she is nevertheless childlike: “Je veux te peindre ta beauté, / Où l’enfance s’allie à la maturité” [I want to depict your beauty, / Where childhood (or the quality of being like a child) allies itself with maturity] (ll. 3–4). That union of opposites would be complemented by another union of opposites in “L’Invitation au voyage,” one fundamental to the earthly paradise where he invites the woman addressed to join him: order and beauty, in the repeated refrain “là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, / luxe, calme et volupté” [There, all is but order and beauty, / Luxury, calm, and delight] (ll. 13–14, 27–28, 41–42). The three adjectives of the refrain’s second line are anticipated by the trio of adjectives (each of which are variations on the middle term in the other group of three, “calme”) describing how she advances like a beautiful ship: “doux, et paresseux, et lent” [gentle, and lazy, and slow]. In fact, that line, together with the other two I have just cited for their parallels with the second poem, are each part of a refrain of sorts in their own poem. For the first stanza (where “l’enfance s’allie à la maturité”) repeats as the fourth, the second stanza (where her rhythm is “doux, et paresseux, et lent”) as the seventh, and the third stanza (“... majestueuse enfant”) as the tenth.

The second poem takes the two most important elements of the first, the woman and the “beau navire” she resembles, and combines them in a different way. Having been a means of travel, “un beau vaisseau” [a beautiful vessel] (ll. 6 and 26), the woman becomes a traveling companion; and once at their destination, she and the poet can gaze at vessels related to her
in a different way:

Vois sur ces canaux  
Dormir ces vaisseaux. . . .
C’est pour assouvir  
Ton moindre désir  
Qu’ils viennent du bout du monde

[See on those canals  
Those sleeping vessels. . . .
It is to satisfy  
Your least desire  
That they come from the ends of the earth] (ll. 29–30, 32–34)

The other thing to which he compares her in “Le Beau Navire” is a piece of furniture, an “Armoire à doux secrets, pleine de bonnes choses” [Cabinet with sweet secrets, full of good things], including “parfums” [fragrances] (ll. 22, 23). Furniture, sweet fragrances, and secrecy will reappear in the destination promised in “L’Invitation au voyage”:

Des meubles luisants,  
Polis par les ans,  
Décoreraient notre chambre;  
Les plus rares fleurs  
Mélant leurs odeurs  
Aux vagues senteurs de l’ambre,

A l’âme en secret  
Sa douce langue natale.

[Gleaming furniture,  
Polished by the years,  
Would adorn our bedroom;  
The rarest flowers  
Blending their odors  
With the vague smells of amber,

Everything there would speak  
To the soul in secret  
Its sweet native language] (ll. 15–20, 24–26)
Even the furniture’s gleaming (the “meubles luisants”) looks back to the woman in “Le Beau Navire”: “Tes bras . . . / Sont des boas luisants les solides émules” [Your arms . . . / Are the solid equals of shiny boa constrictors] (ll. 33, 34). These are the only instances of “luisants” (in the masculine plural) in the 1857 edition.

“L’Invitation au voyage” / “L’Irréparable”

Having originally borne the title “À la Belle aux cheveux d’or” when it appeared in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1855, “L’Irréparable” [The Irreparable] (1857: 50) shows every indication of having been inspired by a play titled “La Belle aux cheveux d’or” in which Marie Daubrun was an actress. It is possible to illuminate such mysterious details as the “Auberge” [Inn] (l. 26) whose lights are extinguished, the dying man menaced by wild beasts, and the sorceress by consulting the play (as Adam does at length, FM Adam 343–45). Indeed, in the last two stanzas Baudelaire seems to allude to it. But, just as we could not presume that his first reading public could have known that the cat was Marie Daubrun’s, neither can we presume that they were familiar with the play. As Lawler writes, “the language, if personal, is not private. We do not need to identify ‘l’Être aux ailes de gaze’ with Marie alone” (1997, 89). In fact, as Adam points out, while Marie did play a character wearing gauze, the poem appears to give her another role as well. He writes: “Marie did not play the role of the fairy, as Baudelaire seems to believe, but that of the Princess Rosalinde. It must be admitted that enough time had passed” since Baudelaire saw the play in 1847, “for his memories to become jumbled” (FM Adam, 344). Our concern here, of course, is not to make the poem fit the play but to see how the poem fits into the sequence of the Fleurs du mal.

The play’s relation to the poem, however, actually bears some similarity to the relation of poem to poem in the Fleurs’ sequence. For one way in which a poem relates to the next is as a source of raw material, of elements that the next poem can rearrange in its own constellation, for its own ends. By conflating the fairy and the princess, Baudelaire was taking from each what he needed to construct a counterpart to the woman the poem addresses (who had acted in only one of the roles in the play). It was the princess who was clothed in gold and gauze (l. 46), but it was the fairy who vanquished Satan (l. 47). It was the princess who commanded that there be light, in the scene to which lines 21–25 allude, reassuring the prince with comforting words (FM Adam, 345), as if answering the question Baudelaire poses in those lines. The poet appears to identify himself
with the prince, but the dying man in lines 11–20 who despairs of having a tomb, and for whose sake the poet asks his questions with such urgency that we may presume he is speaking for himself, is not the prince in the play but the villain, a demonic magician persecuting the princess.

But it happens that the poet in “L’Invitation au voyage” was seeking a final resting place, too, a country in which to love and then die: “Aimer et mourir / Au pays qui te ressemble!” [To love and to die / In the land that resembles you] (ll. 5–6). As travelers, the poet and his beloved in “L’Invitation au voyage” would be looking for a place to lodge, and in the poet’s imagination they find one, the luxuriously furnished bedroom described in lines 15–26. Travelers in “L’Irréparable” also search for a place to stay, but in vain:

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

[Hope shining in the windows of the Inn
   Is snuffed out, forever dead!
With neither moon nor rays of light to find where one lodges
   The martyrs of a bad road!
—The Devil has snuffed out all in the windows of the Inn.] (ll. 26–30)

But it was not like that in the play. Adam recounts: “The princess . . . flees [the evil magician]. She notices a habitation with light in the windows. She goes there. Now this is the demons’ manor [but she doesn’t know that]. She lies down to sleep. They put out the candles; thunder is heard. She awakens and cries out: ‘How dark it is! Who put out the lights?’” (FM Adam, 345). In the play there is only one traveler, the princess; in the poem the travelers are plural (the “martyrs” of line 29). In the play, the building is a habitation; in the poem, an inn. In the play, the lights are put out after the traveler has entered and gone to bed; in the poem, the light in the windows is extinguished before the travelers can find their way there; with no light to guide them, the inn itself (“où l’on héberge” [where one lodges] [l. 28]) cannot be found.

Each of these departures from the source brings “L’Irréparable” closer to “L’Invitation au voyage.” The travelers in both poems are, unlike the princess in the play, plural. As “martyrs of a bad road” the travelers in “L’Irréparable” suffer the fatigue of an arduous journey (made all the more so by the absence of any light to guide them), whereas in the play the prin-
cess was on the run from a vile pursuer. While there is no indication that the travelers in “L’Invitation au voyage” suffer an arduous journey, at least both groups are traveling or will travel; they are not fleeing. Making the habitation into an “Auberge” [Inn] places those seeking it in the category of travelers, not damsels in distress. The change made with regard to the moment when the lights are extinguished has the same effect: their extinction in the play makes the princess realize she is not alone (“Who put out the lights?”); their extinction in “L’Irréparable” just adds to the difficulty of finding an inn.

The first line of the last stanza of “L’Irréparable”—“Un être, qui n’était que lumière, or et gaze” [A being who was but light, gold and gauze] (l. 46)—should sound familiar. It should put us in mind of the refrain “là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, / luxe, calme, et volupté” [There, all is but order and beauty, / Luxury, calm, and delight] (ll. 13–14, 27–28, 41–42). In both, something—in “L’Irréparable” the “being” who is the conflation of fairy and princess as well as the woman to whom the poem is addressed, in “L’Invitation au voyage” the land that resembles the woman to whom the poem is addressed—is said to be entirely composed of the elements that follow “ne + être + que.” Each of the three elements “lumière, or et gaze” has its equivalent in the other poem (even apart from the way “or” echoes the “ordre,” and the “lu” of “lumière” echoes the “lu” of “luxe” and “volupté”). In “L’Invitation au voyage” (a) the setting suns clothe everything in a golden light (“D’hyacinthe et d’or” [With hyacinthe and gold] [l. 38]); (b) at the same time all is bathed in “une chaude lumière” [a warm light] (l. 40); (c) gauze finds its counterpart in the blurring veil of haze of that comes from “Les soleils mouillés / De ces ciels brouillés” [The watery suns / Of those cloudy skies] (ll. 7–8).

“L’Irréparable” / “Causerie”

The speaker switches from “tu” to “vous” in a disconcerting way in “Causerie” [Chat] (1857: 51). It is odd, too, that this “causerie” should be so one-sided—unless we take the title in the other sense (as in Sainte-Beuve’s Causeries du lundi) of a brief topical discourse by one person. But that is surely ruled out by the fact that he is not speaking to a public but to a woman who has her hand on his chest. We only hear one voice, presumably the poet’s, but is he speaking to different women? The dashes are no help, for elsewhere in the collection they do not consistently indicate a change of speaker. Pichois resolves the difficulty by suggesting that the speaker slips from distance to familiarity and then, when the woman disapproves...
of the “tu,” back to distance again, and that the “tu” of the final tercet is addressed to Beauty itself, not to the woman (OC I: 933n).

In any event, there are obvious carryovers from “L’Irréparable.” The “dent” [tooth] (“Causerie,” l. 7) that attacked his heart recycles the “dent maudite” [cursèd tooth] (“L’Irréparable,” l. 36) that eats away at his soul. The “monstres” [monsters] (“Causerie,” l. 8) that ate his heart can be traced back to the wild beasts that prepare to devour the wounded soldier (“L’Irréparable,” ll. 16–20). “Mon cœur est un palais flétri par la cohue” [My heart is a palace ravaged by the mob] (“Causerie,” l. 9) closely parallels “mon cœur . . . / Est un théâtre” [my heart . . . / Is a theater] (“L’Irréparable,” ll. 48–49), as Richter notes (526). The words “mon cœur est [. . .] un . . .” appear in no other poem. But as in other poems, although these elements reappear in “Causerie,” they leave the associations they had in “L’Irréparable” and take up new ones. There, it was the tooth of remorse that ate at the poet; here, that of the women in his life.

“Causerie” / “L’Héautontimorouménos”

The first tercet of “Causerie” is particularly rich in material Baudelaire would recycle in “L’Héautontimorouménos” [The Self-Tormentor] (1857: 52) (or vice versa, depending on which poem he wrote first). There is drunkenness is “mon cœur” in both “Mon cœur est un palais flétri par la cohue; / On s’y soûle” [My heart is a palace ravaged by the mob; / They get drunk there] (“Causerie,” ll. 10–11) and “dans mon cœur qu’ils soûleront / Tes chers sanglots retentiront” [in my heart, which they will inebriate, / Your dear sobs will resound] (“L’Héautontimorouménos,” ll. 10–11). But this happens for different reasons: in “Causerie” his heart suffers from the inebriation of others, while in “L’Héautontimorouménos” it is his heart that gets drunk, and enjoys it. “Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue” [A perfume swims around your naked breast” (“Causerie,” l. 11) is reworked (or again, vice versa) as “Mon désir gonflé d’espérance / Sur tes pleurs salés nagera” [My desire, swelled up by hope, / Will swim on your salty tears] (“L’Héautontimorouménos,” ll. 7–8). There is not just swimming in both passages but air as well, the air the perfumes swim in and the air that swells his desire. His desire “nagera // Comme un vaisseau qui prend le large” [will swim // Like a ship putting out to sea] (“L’Héautontimorouménos,” ll. 8–9), so we realize that there is indeed air swelling his desire, wind in its sails. It sails on her tears that amass to make a sea, as in “Causerie” “la tristesse en moi monte comme la mer” [sadness in me mounts like the sea] (l. 2). His sadness in “Causerie” becomes her sadness in “L’Héautontimorouménos,” and both are a rising sea. Not
only does the second poem recycle elements of the first in this instance; it
does so through a reversal. That, of course, is central to the argument of
“L’Héautontimorouménos”: to invert the roles, to inflict on the woman
the suffering she (and all the others) had inflicted on him. “Je suis le sinis-
tre miroir / Où la mégère se regarde” [I am the sinister mirror / Where
the Megera sees herself] (ll. 19–20), the speaker declares, but the poem,
too, is a mirror, reversing the imagery of “Causerie.”

“L’Héautontimorouménos” /
“Franciscae meae laudes”

“I will sing of you on new chords” [Novis te cantabo chordis], the speaker
begins in “Franciscae meae laudes” [Lauds for My Francisca] (1857: 53),
but the chord may not be all that new. In “L’Héautontimorouménos” he
declared himself to be “un faux accord / Dans la divine symphonie” [a
false chord / In the divine symphony] (ll. 13–14). Yet the two situations
are opposite: in “L’Héautontimorouménos,” he makes bad music, striking
a false chord; in “Franciscae meae laudes” he sings his best. Although there
are other “accords” in the Fleurs du mal, these are the only two poems in
which the speaker makes music on them.

The women in both poems display salty associations. The victim of his
assault in “L’Héautontimorouménos” will shed “pleurs salés” [salty tears]
(l. 8); Francisca is “Panis salsus” [Salted bread] (l. 32). There is no other
saltiness in the 1857 Fleurs du mal.

Both are also sources of water. His victim’s tears will spring forth like
water from the rock Moses struck, irrigating his Sahara and becoming a
sea on whose surface his ship will sail (“L’Héautontimorouménos,” ll. 1–
12). Francisca is herself a “Piscina” [pool], a “Fons aeternae juventutis” [A
fountain of eternal youth] (ll. 16–17).

“Franciscae meae laudes” / “À une dame créole”

In “Franciscae meae laudes” Baudelaire clothes a girl of his own century in
the language of a more ancient time, the ecclesiastical Latin of the Middle
Ages; in “À une dame créole” [To a Creole Lady] (1857: 54) he does the
same thing, for if the Creole lady were to come to the “antiques manoirs”
[ancient châteaux] (l. 11) of the Loire, she would be celebrated by son-
etneers such as Ronsard, whose style Pichois (943n), Adam (FM 353n),
and Richter (584) agree that he imitates, particularly in the first tercet. As
Francisca would make lips speak (l. 18), this woman would cause poets to write sonnets (ll. 12–13).

“À une dame créole” / “Moesta et errabunda”

The speaker in “À une dame créole” invites a woman who lives in the tropics to think about coming to France; in “Moesta et errabunda” [Sad and Wandering] (1857: 55) he encourages a woman who lives in France to imagine going to the tropics. In other words, one poem is the inverse of the other. The Creole woman lives in a “pays parfumé” [perfumed land] (l. 1); he entices Agathe, dwelling in an “immonde cité” [filthy city] (l. 2) that could be Paris, to think of going to a “paradis parfumé” [perfumed paradise] (ll. 16, 20). Nowhere else in the Fleurs du mal will a geographical place be “parfumé.” Here, in France, “la boue est faite de nos pleurs” [the mud is made from our tears] (“Moesta et errabunda,” l. 12); but there the luxury of idle ease “pleut sur les yeux” [rains down on the eyes] (“À une dame créole,” l. 3). Eyes in both poems are associated with both the sorrow of “here” and the delights of “there.”

He invites the Creole lady not only to come to France but also to go into the past, in the sixteenth century of the châteaux of the Loire and of Ronsard; in the last two stanzas of “Moesta et errabunda” he invites Agathe to think of going back into another past, her own childhood, “le vert paradis des amours enfantines” [the green paradise of childhood loves] (ll. 21, 25).

“Moesta et errabunda” / “Les Chats”

In “Les Chats” [The Cats] (1857: 56) Baudelaire pursues the theme of the difference between “here” and a southern and warmer “elsewhere” that appeared most recently in “À une dame créole” and continued in “Moesta et errabunda.” Fervent lovers, austere savants, and cats are all “frileux” [sensitive to cold] and “sédentaires” [sedentary] (l. 4), but cats offer the imagination a virtual voyage to a southern land—Egypt—where the “frileux” can get warm (or imagine they do) and the sedentary are not obliged to get up from their chair. Cats become, for the lovers and savants who contemplate them, “[de] grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes” [great sphinxes stretched out in the depths of the wilderness] (l. 10), and by looking into their eyes one can see what seems like sand (l. 13). Cats play in this poem the role the ocean plays in “Moesta et errabunda,” carrying the “Amis . . . de la volupté” [Devotees . . . of sensual pleasure] (l. 5) to a place where they can find “volupté,” where “sous un clair azur . . . / Où dans la
volupté pure le cœur se noie” [under a bright azure sky . . . / Where the heart drowns itself in pure sensual pleasure] (“Moesta et errabunda,” ll. 17, 19). Cats are the means of transportation for this virtual voyage; but they are also considered for the job of transporting in a less virtual way: “L’Èrèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres, / S’ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté” [Erebus would have chosen them for his funeral horses, / If to servitude they could have bent their pride] (ll. 7–8). Cats in “Les Chats” are like the ocean in “Moesta et errabunda” in this way as well, for the ocean is not only the means of transport but is also described in that poem as being, like cats, unsuited for a certain responsibility:

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!

[The sea, the vast sea consoles us for our labors!
What demon endowed the sea, hoarse singer
Accompanied by the immense organ of the groaning winds,
With this sublime function of rocker of cradles?
The sea, the vast sea consoles us for our labors!] (ll. 6–10)

The howling storm-tossed sea seems to the narrator strikingly miscast as a comforter. The demon who gave the sea that sublime function was as mistaken as Erebus (who shares an infernal connection with demons) when he thought cats might make good coursers.

“Les Chats” / “Les Hiboux”

Cats have an attitude—“Ils prennent en songeant les nobles attitudes / Des grands sphinx” [When they dream they assume the noble attitudes / Of the great sphinxes] (ll. 9–10)—and so do “Les Hiboux” [The Owls] (1857: 57): “Leur attitude au sage enseigne” [Their attitude teaches the wise] (l. 9). But it would appear that what the Owls’ attitude teaches is the opposite of what the Cats’ attitude leads to:

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.

[That in this world he must fear
Tumult and movement:

The man intoxicated with a passing shadow
Is always punished
For having wanted a change of place.] (ll. 10–14)

Fervent lovers and austere savants are allowed a change of place by taking a mental voyage south. Yet since they travel only in their imagination to the hot sands where sphinxes lie, are they really guilty of wanting a change of place? Being “frileux” (l. 4), they are attracted to the south (like the poet and Agathe in “Moesta et errabunda”), but being at the same time “sédentaires” (l. 4), they want to remain physically right where they are.

Both cats and owls remain motionless for a long time, the cats turning into statues of sphinxes, the owls not moving until the melancholy hour when shadows fall (ll. 5–8). The owls look like foreign gods (l. 3); the cats look like foreign sphinxes. In their motionlessness, only the eyes of either are alive: the owls are “Dardant leur œil rouge” [Darting out their red eye] (l. 4), the cats’ mystic pupils shine like golden stars (ll. 13–14).

The cats are asleep and dreaming (“songeant” [l. 9]); but the owls are awake: “ils méditent” [they meditate] (l. 4). The relation of the two to shadows is complicated—in one way the opposite, in the other the same. This is because shadows appear twice in “Les Hiboux,” as “ténèbres” in line 8 and as the “ombre qui passe” in line 12. In teaching the wise not to be like the man intoxicated with a passing shadow, owls are the opposite of cats, who, like fervent lovers and austere savants, “cherchent . . . l’horreur des ténèbres” [seek out . . . the horror of shadows] (l. 6). But at dusk when shadows fall, the owls will move. They might have made good coursers for Erebus.

“Les Hiboux” / “La Cloche fêlée”

In a precise reversal, those who want to move suffer the consequences of that desire in “Les Hiboux,” but in “La Cloche fêlée” [The Cracked Bell] (1857: 58) someone suffers from his inability to move, despite “d’immenses efforts” [immense efforts] (l. 14). Had he been able to get out from under the pile of corpses, he might have survived. In this connection, “Sans
remuer” [Without moving] (“Les Hiboux,” l. 5) parallels “sans bouger” [without budging] (“La Cloche fêlée,” l. 14). The other soldier resembles the owls, keeping watch under the tent as they keep watch under the trees: “Sous les ifs noirs qui les abritent . . . / Ainsi que des dieux étrangers, / . . . Ils méditent” [Under the black yew-trees that shelter them . . . / Like foreign gods, / . . . They meditate] (ll. 1–4). “Ainsi qu’un vieux soldat qui veille sous la tente” [Like an old soldier who keeps watch under the tent] (l. 8). Baudelaire fine-tuned the resemblance after the poem’s initial publication, changing the third line from “Comme des idoles de jais” to “Ainsi que . . .” (OC I: 962n).

“La Cloche fêlée” / “Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . . ”

In “Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . . ” [Spleen: Pluviôse, irritated . . . ] (1857: 59) it is winter (“Pluviôse” being the month straddling January and February in the revolutionary calendar); the poet sits by his smoky fire, a “bûche enfumée” [smoky log] (l. 9); the weather outside is foggy (“brumeux,” l. 4), cold and dark: “un froid ténébreux” [a gloomy cold] (l. 2); he hears a church bell in the distance: “Le bourdon se lamente” [The bass bell laments] (l. 9). In “La Cloche fêlée” it is winter: “pendant les nuits d’hiver” [on winter nights] (l. 1); the poet sits by his smoky fire, “près du feu qui palpite et qui fume” [near the fire that crackles and smokes] (l. 2); outside it is foggy: (“dans la brume” [in the fog] [l. 4]), dark, and cold: “l’air froid des nuits” [the cold air of the nights] (l. 10); and he hears bells ring, “des carillons qui chantent” [carillons singing] (l. 4). But the bells in the two poems connote opposite emotions: those in 58 “sing” and are fortunate (“Bienheureuse” [l. 5]) to be in good health, with a “gosier vigoureux” [vigorous throat] (l. 5), but the one in 59 “se lamente” [laments] (l. 9).

The voice of a poet is heard in both poems. In “Spleen” it is “la triste voix” [the sad voice] (l. 8) of the ghost of a poet; in “La Cloche fêlée” it is the “voix affaiblie” [enfeebled voice] (l. 11) of the poet-narrator. But by way of opposition, that “vieux poète” [old poet] (l. 7) with his pitiful voice forms a contrast to the “vieux soldat” [old soldier] (l. 8) to whom the vigorous-throated bell is likened.

The theme of moving versus not moving continues into 59, as the cat “Agite sans repos son corps” [Restlessly agitates his body] (l. 10) in his search for a place to rest. This is a symmetrical opposite to the wounded soldier in 58 who is trying to move but cannot, seeking a way out of his enforced immobility. The weight of the dead piled above is imposing this final resting place on its unwilling tenant. The dead are collected in 59, too, the “pâles habitants du voisin cimetière” [pale inhabitants of the neighbor-
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ing cemetery] (l. 3) on which the rain falls. The pack of cards constitutes another collection of the dead, a pile like the “grand tas de morts” [great pile of dead] (l. 13) from which a voice is heard, the “râle” [death rattle] (l. 12) of the wounded soldier that resembles the narrator’s “voix affaiblie” [weakened voice] (l. 11). Voices emerge from the stack of cards, too, the jack of hearts and queen of spades discussing “leurs amours défunts” [their dead loves] (l. 14).

“Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . .” /
“Spleen: J’ai plus de souvenirs . . .”

Baudelaire takes the theme of the piled-up dead, begun in “La Cloche fêlée” (1857: 58) with the stack of dead soldiers and continued in “Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . .” (1857: 59) with the pack of playing cards, of which two speak from beyond the grave, and builds a whole poem around it in “Spleen: J’ai plus de souvenirs . . .” [Spleen: I have more memories . . .] (1857: 60). There is old perfume in both 59 and 60: the “sales parfums” [dirty perfumes] (l. 11) coming from the deck of cards and “le vieux parfum d’un flacon débouché” [the old perfume of an unstoppered perfume bottle] (l. 14). Like the playing cards, the items in the chest of drawers in 60 to which the poet likens his brain compose a tomb “Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune” [Containing more dead than the paupers’ cemetery] (l. 7). Like the deck of cards in 59, and like the pile of dead soldiers in 58, a sound emerges from this tomb, too, the sphinx that sings when struck by the rays of the sun (ll. 22–24).

In 59 Pluviôse pours down from his urn “la mortalité” [mortality] (l. 4) in the form of cold rain. In 60 time hangs heavy in the form of “les lourds flocons des neigeuses années” [the heavy snowflakes of the snowy years] (l. 16) that give rise to ennui that “Prend les proportions de l’immortalité” [Assumes the proportions of immortality] (l. 18). In other words, both “mortalité” and “immortalité” precipitate from time (from the month called Pluviôse in 59, from the snowy years in 60), in the only appearance of either word in the 1857 or 1861 collection.

“Spleen: J’ai plus de souvenirs . . .” /
“Spleen: Je suis comme le roi . . .”

In 60 “L’ennui, fruit de la morose incuriosité” [Ennui, the fruit of morose incuriosity] (l. 17), assumes the proportions of immortality; in “Spleen: Je
suis comme le roi . . . ” [Spleen: I am like the king . . . ] (1857: 61) boredom and incuriosity instead proves mortal, leading to the imminent death of the king who “S’ennuie avec ses chiens” [Is bored with his dogs] (l. 4) as with everything else, and whom the poet says he resembles. The poet in 60 felt old, having “plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans” [more memories than if I were a thousand years old” (l. 1); the poet in 61 is both “jeune et pourtant très-vieux” [young and yet very old] (l. 2). But though he sees himself as old in both poems, and in both is afflicted by ennui, the two versions of himself are each other’s opposite in several respects. In 60 he is full to overflowing. More packed with memories than if he had lived a thousand years, hiding more secrets than a large chest of drawers, his brain is an “immense caveau” [immense tomb] (l. 6) that contains more dead than a potter’s field. In 61 he is just a “squelette” [skeleton] (l. 12) with no way to contain anything. His bed becomes a tomb (l. 9), but the poet in 60 saw himself as a tomb—a pyramid, a granite monument, a sphinx—and is thus, like his ennui, immortal, or nearly so. The poet’s persona in 61 cannot be “réchauffé” [reheated] (l. 17); but in 60 he is a sphinx in the Sahara who “chante . . . aux rayons de soleil” [sings . . . at the sun’s rays] (l. 24), who is warmed by those rays, for according to the Memnon myth to which Baudelaire is here alluding, it is the warmth of the sun that made the statue sing. Finally, 60’s narrator is above all one who remembers, but 61’s has Lethe in his veins, the river in Hades that makes one forget all.

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“Spleen: Je suis comme le roi . . . ” /
“Spleen: Quand le ciel bas et lourd . . . ”

The poet in 61 is like the king of “d’un pays pluvieux” [of a rainy land] (l. 1), and rain falls as well in “Spleen: Quand le ciel bas et lourd . . . ” [Spleen: When the low and heavy sky . . . ] (1857: 62): “la pluie étalant ses immenses trainées” [the rain spreading its immense trails] (l. 9). The poet as king in 61 “S’ennuie” [Is bored] (l. 4) with everything; likewise, in 62 he complains of “longs ennui” [long fits of boredom] (l. 2). But in other regards the circumstances are opposite. The king’s courtiers in 61 do their best to draw him out, but he refuses to emerge from his self-inflicted imprisonment, with the result that “Son lit . . . se transforme en tombeau” [His bed . . . is transformed into a tomb] (l. 9). The poet in 62, speaking for the whole human race, is imprisoned too, but unwillingly so, through a transformation paralleling that of the bed into a tomb: “la terre est changée en un cachot humide” [the earth is changed into a damp dungeon cell] (l. 5). In 61 ladies-in-waiting give up trying to dress provocatively “Pour tirer un sourire” [To get a smile] (l. 12) from the king; in 62 Hope, “comme une
“Spleen: Quand le ciel bas et lourd . . .” /
“Brumes et pluies”

In “Brumes et pluies” [Mists and Rain] (1857: 63) the same weather conditions obtain as in 62, but the poet’s attitude is just the opposite. It is raining and the sky is overcast, but instead of desperately trying to escape such weather as he did in 62, he now revels in it. He loves and praises the seasons that give rise to mist and rain:

O 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 brumeux tombeau.

. . .
Rien n’est plus doux... .

[O ends of autumn, winters, springs drenched in mud, Sleep-inducing seasons! I love and praise you For enveloping thus my heart and my brain In a vaporous shroud and misty tomb. . . .]

Nothing is sweeter. . . .] (ll. 1–4)

What was imprisoning in 62 is liberating here. He is enveloped (l. 3), as in the poem before he had been encircled (l. 3) and imprisoned (l. 5). To be enveloped by a shroud and a tomb makes him happy now. By contrast, in 62 he sees “la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées / D’une vaste prison imite les barreaux” [the rain displaying its immense trails / Imitates the bars of a vast prison] (ll. 9–10), and as a result “d’anciens corbillards, sans tambours ni musique, / Défilent lentement dans mon âme” [ancient hearses, with neither drums nor music, / Slowly parade in my soul] (ll. 17–18). The image in 62 of the bat beating its prison walls “de son aile timide” [with its timid wing] (l. 7) is transformed in 63 into the image of the poet’s soul spreading “largement ses ailes de corbeau” [wide its crow’s wings] (l. 8). The horror that “nos cerveaux” [our brains] (l. 12) had endured when invaded by spiders weav­ing their webs is replaced by the delight his “cerveau” [brain] (l. 3) and heart derive from their vaporous shroud and misty tomb.

“Brumes et pluies” / “L’Irremédiable”

In “Brumes et pluies” water falls from the sky; in “L’Irremédiable” [The Irremediable] (1857: 64), something else falls from the sky and lands in water, though in the waters of hell, not of earth (and thus not of celestial origin, as were those “Brumes et pluies”):

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

[An Idea, a Form, a Being
Having left the sky and fallen
Into a muddy and leaden Styx
Where no eye from Heaven can penetrate] (ll. 1–4)
There is mud in both poems: seasons “trempés de boue” [drenched with mud] (“Brumes et pluies,” l. 1); “un Styx bourbeux” [a muddy Styx] (“L’Irrémédiable,” l. 3). The angel who fell is just as trapped in his “piège” [trap] (l. 26) and “geôle” [jail] (l. 28) as the poet complained of being in his “cachot” [dungeon cell] (l. 5) and “prison” (l. 10) in “Spleen: Quand le ciel bas . . . ” and rejoiced at being in his shroud and tomb in “Brumes et pluies” (l. 4). He took delight in “l’aspect permanent” [permanent aspect] (l. 12) of those misty and rainy seasons; by contrast, the poet as fallen angel despairs at the eternal descending stairs (l. 20) and his irremediable fate (l. 30).

“L’Irrémédiable” / “À une mendiante rousse”

“L’Irrémédiable” concludes with the poet peering through a kind of hole—a well—at something pale, the “étoile livide” [pale star] (l. 36), reflected from the sky above. “À une mendiante rousse” [To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl] (1857: 65) begins with the poet peering through holes at pale beauty, the holes in the dress of the “blanchette” [white-skinned girl] (l. 1). In “L’Irrémédiable” as he looked into the well he saw his mirror image (l. 34); the “poète chétif” [sickly poet] (l. 5) gazing at the girl’s “corps maladif” [sickly body] (l. 6), given the equivalence of those adjectives, is, Richter suggests, likewise staring at someone who resembles him. The poet, Richter writes, “is himself also reduced to poverty, to illness, to a decline in value” (907). Anne Berger concurs: “the poet is like the beggar girl, with whom he clearly identifies himself in the second stanza: the self-portrait of the speaker as a ‘poète chétif’ is in fact connected by the rhyme to the evocation of her ‘corps maladif.’ The red-haired beggar girl is him, as his words ‘pour moi’ [for me] would already suggest.”

Indeed, what we see the girl doing at the end of the poem is what we saw the poet doing in the final stanzas of “L’Irrémédiable,” looking down—as he looked down into the well—“lorgnant en dessous” [peering down at] (l. 49) some cheap jewelry, a counterpart to the “étoile livide” [pale star] (l. 36), to the “phare ironique” [ironic beacon] (l. 37) he saw in the well. If it was ironic then, it is even more so now. In an earlier version of “À une mendiante rousse” it was “De vieux bonnets” [Some old bonnets] (OC I: 1001n) that she had seen and desired. Changing them to jewels with the potential to shine, despite their cheapness, created a closer equivalent to the shining light (variously “étoile,” “phare,” and “flambeau”

À une mendiante rousse” / “Le Jeu”

“Le Jeu” [Gambling] (1857: 66) is a dream, “un rêve nocturne” [a nocturnal dream] (l. 13). The poem presents a gambling den populated by two distinct groups, aged prostitutes and illustrious poets. The latter have come to “gaspiller leurs sanglantes sueurs” [squander their bleeding perspiration] (l. 12). With drops of blood on their skin, they have one trait in common with the freckled beggar girl, whose body is “Plein de taches de rousseur” [Full of spots of red—i.e., of freckles] (l. 7). In addition, Baudelaire plants a linguistic link between the beggar girl’s “maigre nudité” [skinny beauty] (l. 55) and the courtisans’ “maigres oreilles” [skinny ears] (l. 3). Yet the red splotches linking the poets in “Le Jeu” with the freckled girl replay the identification in the other poem between the poet and the girl evident in the rhyming “chétif” and “maladif.”

The “poètes illustres” [illustrious poets] (l. 11) in the gambling den recall those named in 65, Belleau (l. 30) and Ronsard (l. 38), the difference being that those two were not identified with the girl, while the poet-narrator of that poem was, but in “Le Jeu” the opposite takes place. The “poètes illustres” (in addition to being linked by their blood-beaded sweat to the freckled girl) are lumped together with the prostitutes, trafficking in their honor as the courtesans are in their beauty, whereas the poet-narrator is not. He is off in a corner taking it all in, though wishing in a way he were like the gamblers, envying the poets’ tenacious passion and the whores’ deathly gaiety (ll. 17–18).

“Le Jeu” / “Le Crépuscule du soir”

There is a gambling scene in “Le Crépuscule du soir” [Evening Twilight] (1857: 67), as there was in “Le Jeu” (1857: 66), again populated by two groups of players of whom prostitutes are one. But the other group is composed, not of illustrious poets as in “Le Jeu,” but of their accomplices, cardsharps: “Les tables d’hôte, dont le jeu fait les délices, / S’emplissent de catins et d’escrocs, leurs complices” [The tables d’hôte, where gambling delights, / Fill up with whores and cheats, their accomplices] (ll. 23–24). Yet the “fronts ténébreux de poètes illustres” [gloomy brows of illustrious poets] (l. 11) that we saw in “Le Jeu” are recalled again here: “Le savant obstiné dont le front s’alourdit” [the obstinate scholar whose brow becomes heavy] (l. 9), his obstinacy recalling the obstinacy of the “passion tenace”
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[tenacious passion] (l. 17) attributed to the gloomy-browed poets.

Both poems conclude with the image of mortals going to an abyss. In “Le Jeu” the poet was frightened by how much he envied the poets, the prostitutes, and the poor man “Qui court avec ferveur à l’abîme béant” [Who fervently hastens to the gaping abyss] (l. 22); in “Le Crépuscule du soir” the poet tells his soul to close its ear to the sounds of the dying, who are on their way to “leur gouffre commun” [their common abyss] (l. 33). The envy he felt in “Le Jeu” is here replaced by pity.

“Le Crépuscule du soir” / “Le Crépuscule du matin”

As one might expect from its title, “Le Crépuscule du matin” [Morning Twilight] (1857: 68) bears a number of resemblances to “Le Crépuscule du soir” (1857: 67), one twilight recalling the other. The wind blows on the street lamps in both: “les lueurs que tourmente le vent” [the glimmers tormented by the wind] in 67 (l. 14); “le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes” [the wind of morning was blowing on the lanterns] in 68 (l. 2). People are breathing their last in hospitals: “ils finissent / Leur destinée et vont vers le gouffre commun; / L’hôpital se remplit de leurs soupirs” [they finish / Their destiny and go toward the common abyss; / The hospital is full of their sighs] in 67 (ll. 32–34); “les agonisants dans le fond des hospices / Poussaient leur dernier râle” [the dying in the depth of the hospices / Were sounding their death rattle] in 68 (ll. 22–23). Somewhat contradictorily, each poem claims that its twilight is the hour when pain increases: “C’est l’heure où les douleurs des malades s’aigrissent” [It is the hour when the pains of the sick become worse] in 67 (l. 31); “C’était l’heure où parmi le froid et la lésine / S’aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine” [It was the hour when, amid the cold and want, / The pains of women in childbirth become worse] in 68 (ll. 17–18). These are the only poems in the Fleurs du mal where “l’heure où” appears with “les douleurs.” They are also the only two where “leur travail” and “leurs travaux” can be found: thieves will soon begin “leur travail” [their work] in 67 (l. 26); the debauched return, broken with fatigue, from “leurs travaux” in 68 (l. 24).

Despite their similarities, there is one major difference between the two twilights. It is cold in “Le Crépuscule du matin”: poor women blow on their fingers (l. 16), birthing mothers suffer “parmi le froid” [amid the cold] (l. 17), dawn herself is “grelottante” [shivering] (l. 25). But although the wind blows on the street lanterns in the evening just as it does in the morning, there is no mention of the weather in “Le Crépuscule du soir,” and no reason to believe that what weather there is is cold. The evening is “charmant” [charming] (l. 1) and “aimable” [lovable] (l. 5), and people
are out and about, going to restaurants, theaters, and concerts.

"Le Crépuscule du matin" / "La servante au grand cœur . . ."

The cold that reigns in "Le Crépuscule du matin," however, connects it to the immediately following poem, "La servante au grand cœur dont vous étiez jalouse . . ." [The big-hearted servant of whom you were jealous . . .] (1857: 69), where those fortunate to be alive sleep "chaudement dans leurs draps" [warmly in their sheets] (l. 8) but the dead "sentent s’égoutter les neiges de l’hiver" [feel winter’s snows drip down] (l. 12). It is on a cold December night that the narrator imagines the family servant returning from her grave to gaze upon him with a maternal eye. As morning twilight was the hour when for women giving birth "parmi le froid . . . / S’aggravent les douleurs" [amid the cold . . . / The pains become worse] (ll. 17, 18), here it is when the year turns cold that "Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grandes douleurs" [The dead, the poor dead, endure terrible pains] (l. 4), particularly the servant who has come to "Couver l’enfant grand de son œil maternel" [Watch over the child now grown with her maternal eye] (l. 20). When he sees "tomber des pleurs de sa paupière creuse" [tears fall from her hollow eye] (l. 22), we remember that in the poem before we saw "un visage en pleurs" [a face in tears] (l. 9). It was "L’air . . . plein du frisson des choses qui s’enfuient" [The air . . . full of the shiver of things that fleeing] (l. 10). The dead servant with tears in her eyes was one of the "squelettes gelés" [frozen skeletons] who "sentent . . . l’éternité fuir" [feel . . . eternity fleeing] (ll. 11, 12, 13). We do not know what those "chooses qui s’enfuient" in 68 are, but at least in 69 we know that eternity is one of them.

"La servante au grand cœur . . ." / "Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville . . ."

"La servante au grand cœur . . ." is followed by "Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville . . ." [I have not forgotten, neighboring the city . . ."] (1857: 70), which is likewise about a childhood memory:

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,
Et versait largement ses beaux reflets de cierge
Sur la nappe frugale et les rideaux de serge.

[I have not forgotten, neighboring the city,
Our white house, small but tranquil,
Its plaster Pomona and its old Venus
In a puny grove hiding their naked limbs;
—And the sun, at evening, streaming and superb,
Seemed, a great eye open in the curious sky,
To contemplate our long and silent dinners,
And generously pour its beautiful candlelike reflections
On the frugal tablecloth and serge curtains.]

The two poems are intimately linked, as we learn from a letter Baudelaire
wrote to his mother on January 11, 1858:

Vous n’avez donc pas remarqué qu’il y avait dans Les Fleurs du mal deux
pièces vous concernant, ou du moins allusionnelles à des détails inti-
mes de notre ancienne vie, de cette époque de veuvage qui m’a laissé
de singuliers et tristes souvenirs,—l’une: Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la
ville . . . (Neuilly), et l’autre qui suit: La servante au grand cœur dont vous
étiez jalouse . . . (Mariette)?

[Have you then not noticed that there were in the Fleurs du mal two
poems about you, or at least alluding to some intimate details of our for-
mer life, from that period of widowhood that gave me memories both
singular and sad—one, Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville . . . (Neuilly),
and the other that follows it, La servante au grand cœur dont vous êtes
jalouse . . . (Mariette)?” (OC I: 1036n)

Richter argues, illogically, from the fact that “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ” is
preceded in the 1861 edition by “L’Amour du mensonge” that the other
person implied in the “Notre” [Our] in line 2 of “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ”
(“Notre blanche maison, petite mais tranquille” [Our white house, small but
tranquil]) must be the woman who figures in that preceding poem (Rich-
ter, 1149). He seems to have forgotten the 1857 edition, where “L’Amour
du mensonge” does not appear, and where “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ” is pre-
eced by “La servante au grand cœur . . . ,” Baudelaire having kept them together in 1861 but reversed their order. In his analysis of “La servante au grand cœur . . . ” Richter does identify the other person in the narrator’s first-person plural (“Nous aurions déjà dû lui porter quelques fleurs” [We should have already brought her some flowers] [l. 3]) as the latter’s mother, given that the poet names himself in line 20 as a grown-up child (Richter, 1159). I agree, and would use Richter’s own argument (misapplied to the 1861 edition because he writes as if “La servante au grand cœur . . . ” was always preceded by “L’Amour du mensonge”) to contend that since we know the other part of “Nous” in “La servante . . . ” is the mother, the other part of “Nous” in the immediately following poem, “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ,” may well be her, too. But although like Richter I find clues in contiguity, I do not believe we can blithely assume that a character in one poem is identical to a similar character in the next. Each poem in the *Fleurs du mal* refers to its predecessor, but usually despite a change in the context local to each poem. Each poem rewrites its predecessor yet tells its own story, even while seeming to retell the one we have just read.

Can we tell from “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ” that the other member of “Nous” is the speaker’s mother? Perhaps. Because in no other poem does he describe himself as living in a suburb, as he does in lines 1–2. Rather, we see him living in a city apartment, as for example in “Spleen: Pluviôse, irrité . . . ” How could he have afforded to live with a mistress (the only other likely possibility for “Nous”) in a white house in a suburb with two statues on the lawn? By a process of deduction we might have arrived at the same conclusion—that the narrator is referring to a more distant past, his childhood, when he lived under his mother’s protection.

Brigitte Mahuzier argues that both Pomona and Venus evoke the mother, but in a mocking way.9 The statue of Pomona is in plaster and thus not likely to last the perennial change of seasons of which she is the goddess (she is the goddess as well of the bounty of nature), while Venus is old (l. 3) and thus hardly an icon of beauty. If the narrator’s mother resembles this Pomona and this Venus, she is neither nourishing nor beautiful. As if they had realized their nakedness and were chased out of Paradise, Mahuzier argues, these two try to hide their nakedness behind a bush unequal to the task.

They fear the prying eye, but a prying eye is exactly what we get in lines 5–10, the great open eye of the sun in a curious sky, contemplating the mother and son’s long and silent dinners. The sun, in Baudelaire, is

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often the father: the sun is a “père nourricier” [nourishing father] in “Le Soleil” (l. 9), a liquid fire, “ruisselant” [streaming] (l. 5) in “Je n’ai pas oublié . . . ” and pouring out its light, as in “Élévation” it was “une pure et divine liqueur, / Le feu clair” [a pure and divine liquor, / The bright fire] (ll. 11–12). Knowing what we know (and what the public of 1857 could not) about Baudelaire’s family history, we can identify this particular sun (the one contemplating mother and son at dinner) with François Baudelaire, the father whose death when Baudelaire was six caused the widowhood that generated the sad memories to which he refers in the letter.

This contemplating paternal eye responds—in the way the Fleurs’ contiguous poems answer each other—to the contemplating “œil maternel” [maternal eye] of the servant in the poem before. That eye wanted both to “Couver l’enfant grandi” [Watch over the grown-up child] (l. 20) and to give a silent reproach to the mother for not having brought flowers to her grave (l. 3). For the dead servant did not really return, but the poet asks his mother what could he reply if she did, and tears flowed from her hollow eyes. Both the paternal eye and its maternal counterpart (as the servant regards the poet with a motherly gaze) exude a liquid: the father’s is “ruisselant” [streaming] and “versait” [was pouring out] its light; the maternal one was weeping tears.

Ironically, and as if making up for this sin of omission, the sun brings flowers to the mother and son, “sa gerbe” [its spray of flowers] (l. 6) that breaks against the window (line 6)—as in the expression “déposer une gerbe sur une tombe / to place a spray of flowers on a grave” (Collins-Robert French-English English-French Dictionary). (Although a “gerbe” is commonly a sheaf of wheat, it can also be a bouquet of flowers. Littré cites an instance of “gerbe” in that sense in Graffigny’s Lettres d’une Péruvienne [“Elle vint me présenter une gerbe de fleurs ornée de rubans” (letter 32)], a text that dates from the eighteenth century.) The father does what the mother (and son) should have done, as if reproaching them for not having done it. The living having neglected to bring flowers to the dead, the dead bring flowers to the living. The mother, like the Pomona and Venus seeking to hide their nakedness, has reason to fear an all-seeing eye, her late husband’s. Would he be reproaching her for more than the absent flowers? Perhaps for remarrying so quickly, and to the man who would prove so disastrous a stepfather to her son?

“Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville . . .” / “Le Tonneau de la Haine”

“Le Tonneau de la Haine” [Hatred’s Cask] (1857: 71) is the Danaïdes’ unfillable cask, which they were condemned to try to fill because they had murdered their husbands. That is an extraordinary myth to which to allude in a poem that immediately follows one in which a husband comes back from the dead to stare, possibly with reproach, at his wife (it is through that poem’s parallel with the one before it that we can see that it is her dead husband, and the speaker’s dead father). Is Baudelaire suggesting that his mother killed his father? Note that this is the third poem in a row to feature liquid coming out of a hole: the tears from the maternal “paupières vides” [empty eyelids] in “La servante au grand cœur . . .,” the liquid light pouring out of the streaming hole in the sky that is the paternal sun in “Je n’ai pas oublié . . .,” and now the blood, sweat, and tears leaking out of the secret holes the Demon makes.

The dining room in the poem before, with the liquid emanating from the father-sun falling “sur la nappe frugale” [on the frugal tablecloth] (l. 10) of its table, is here transformed into a tavern with a table under which Hatred can never drink itself to sleep.

“Le Tonneau de la Haine” / “Le Revenant”

The holes that made Hatred’s cask (l. 1) and the abysses (l. 5) impossible to fill in “Le Tonneau de la Haine” are transformed in “Le Revenant” [The Ghost] (1857: 72) into the “place vide” [empty place] (l. 10) the speaker will leave in the bed of the woman after he returns from the grave to visit her. His absence will make it impossible for her to satisfy her longing. Thus this empty place will fulfill the same function as the holes in the cask, to make desire (desire for vengeance in “Le Tonneau de la Haine,” desire for love in “Le Revenant”) insatiable. His mistress thus resembles the “pâles Danaïdes,” whose pallor is here evoked by the “matin livide” [pale morning] (l. 9) in which she will find the “place vide.”

As a body returning from the grave, he puts us in mind of the galvanized bodies in “Le Tonneau de la Haine” (l. 4):

Le Démon fait des trous secrets à ces abîmes,  
Par où fuiraient mille ans de sueurs et d’efforts,  
Quand même elle saurait allonger ses victimes,  
Et pour les resaigner galvaniser leurs corps.
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[The Demon makes secret holes in these abysses,
By which a thousand years of sweats and efforts would escape,
Even if she [Hatred] could lay down her victims,
And galvanize their bodies to bleed them again.] (ll. 5–8)

Those bodies were bled anew in the effort to make up for the blood lost to the “trous secrets” [secret holes] (l. 5), but, by a kind of reversal, it is the poet as “revenant,” the equivalent to those reanimated bodies, who is responsible for the holes’ equivalent, the empty space.

“Le Revenant” / “Le Mort joyeux”

In “Le Revenant” the poet imagined himself coming back from the dead; in “Le Mort joyeux” [The Joyful Corpse] (1857: 73) he imagines himself going in the other direction, lying down in a grave he digs himself, going to sleep, and becoming a corpse on which crows and worms will feed. He is a “mort-vivant,” both dead and alive, in both poems, but in opposite ways. In “Le Revenant” he passes from death to life; in “Le Mort joyeux,” from life to death.

The “fosse profonde” [deep pit] (l. 2) that he digs corresponds to the “place vide” he created in “Le Revenant” (which itself corresponded to the “trous secrets” of “Le Tonneau de la Haine”). But the situation is just the opposite, too, for he created the emptiness in “Le Revenant” by not being there; here he creates it so that he might fill it with his presence. He did this in “Le Revenant” to inflict pain on his mistress; he does it here to bring “torture” (l. 13) upon himself.

“Le Mort joyeux” / “Sépulture”

It is once more a woman who will be tortured after death in “Sépulture” [Burial] (1857: 74), as a woman was two poems before, in “Le Revenant.” The editors of the posthumous 1868 edition changed the title to “Sépulture d’un poète maudit” [Burial of an Accursed Poet], but there is no indication Baudelaire intended such a change. That the person to be buried had a “corps vanté” [vaunted body] (l. 4) makes it much more likely that it was a woman’s body than a man’s, and certainly not the poet’s own. Jacques Crépet quotes a poem of Voltaire (the Épitre dédicatoire to Zaire) lamenting the lack of funeral honors paid the actress Adrienne Lecouvreur, a poem it is likely Baudelaire was not only remembering but quoting:
M. de Laubinière
Porta la _nuit par charité_
_Ce corps, autrefois si vanté,
Dans un vieux fiacre empaqueté
Vers le bord de notre rivière

[...]

Baudelaire echoes these lines in lines 1–4 of “Sépulture”: “nuit” in line 1, “par charité” in line 2, “corps . . . vanté” in line 4. Among the mistresses to whom Baudelaire alludes in the _Fleurs du mal_, one of them—Marie Daubrun—was an actress.

In both poems suffering continues in the grave. The poet looks forward in “Le Mort joyeux” to receiving “encore quelque torture” [some new torture] (l. 13) after the crows have bled his carcass and the worms have had their way; the actress will have to listen all year to the cries of wolves and witches, the lustful frolics of the old and the plotting of criminals. But while the poet, of his own volition, buries himself, the actress is buried by the kindness of another. And while the poet invites his suffering, the same can hardly be said of the woman.

“Sépulture” / “Tristesses de la lune”

In “Tristesses de la lune” [Sorrows of the Moon] (1857: 75) the moon is likened to a woman about to fall asleep: “Ainsi qu’une beauté . . . / Qui . . . caresse, / Avant de s’endormir, le contour de ses seins” [Like a beautiful woman . . . / Who . . . caresses, / Before falling asleep, the contour of her breasts] (ll. 2, 3–4). The stars in “Sépulture,” who “Ferment leurs yeux appesantis” [Close their heavy eyes] (l. 6), were about to fall asleep, too. The woman’s “corps vanté” [vaunted body] (l. 4) in “Sépulture” is transformed here into the “beauté” [beautiful woman] (l. 2) to whom the moon is compared. The “poète pieux” [pious poet] (l. 11) plays here a role paralleling that of the “bon chrétien” [good Christian] in 74

The latter, as a good Christian, took it upon himself to bury the woman; the poet in his piety takes the pale and furtive tear the woman lets fall and hides it in his heart, far from the eyes of the sun—in effect burying it.

“Tristesses de la lune” / “La Musique”

The “larme pâle” [pale tear] (l. 12) that was the focus of the speaker’s attention in “Tristesses de la lune” is transformed into the “pâle étoile” [pale star] (l. 2) toward which he steers in “La Musique” [Music] (1857: 76). The moon floated “Sur le dos satiné des molles avalanches” [On the satiny back of the soft avalanches] (l. 5) of the clouds as here the poet mounts and descends “sur le dos” [on the back] (l. 7) of the waves. The phrase “sur le dos” in 1857 appeared only in these contiguous poems. When Baudelaire changed the order of the poems for the 1861 addition, and these two were no longer contiguous, the phrase disappeared from “La Musique” as well.

In “Tristesses de la lune” the clouds “montent dans l’azur” [mount in the azure] (l. 8), as here the equivalent waves are themselves “monts” [mountains] on which the poet says, “je monte et je descends” [I mount and I descend] (l. 7).

To complete the transformation of the moon-woman into the poet, Baudelaire constructs a parallel between the attention the woman pays to her own breasts, caressing their contour in lines 3–4, and the attention he pays to his own breast: “La poitrine en avant et gonflant mes poumons / De toile pesante” [My breast in front and swelling my lungs / Of heavy sail] (l. 5–6).

“La Musique” / “La Pipe”

Adam, noting that in the 1857 edition “La Musique” preceded “La Pipe” [The Pipe] (1857: 77), remarks of the former that “we should put it back in its former position to fully see its meaning. In the same way that ‘La Pipe’ joyfully expresses tobacco’s power to charm and heal, ‘La Musique’ celebrates music’s liberating power” (FM Adam, 359). To this we could add that in both poems the poet fills his lungs—with sea air (that is, with music) in “La Musique” (ll. 5–6), with tobacco smoke here; that there he “monte” [mounts] the waves (l. 7), while here the smoke “monte” [mounts] (l. 11); and that the waves “bercent” [cradle] (l. 13) the poet, while here the smoke “berce” [cradles] (l. 9) his soul.
“La Pipe” / “La Destruction”

The Demon in “La Destruction” [Destruction] (1857: 78) is presented as something very much like tobacco smoke. Because the smoke is comforting and the Demon is maleficent, the poems are precisely opposed. The smoke from the poet’s pipe “guérit / De ses fatigues son esprit” [heals / His spirit of its fatigue] (ll. 13–14), but the demonic air takes the poet, already “brisé de fatigue” [broken by fatigue] (l. 10), and makes his suffering worse. The noun fatigue appears in only these two poems. The first division in the 1857 Fleurs du mal falls between “La Pipe,” the last poem in the section “Spleen et Idéal,” and “La Destruction,” the first poem in the section “Fleurs du mal.” Nevertheless, the two are about as tightly linked as any in the collection. Like many, they not only display a common ground but are also exactly opposed on that very ground.

The Demon “nage autour de moi comme un air impalpable; / Je l’avale et le sens qui brûle mon poumon” [swims around me like an impalpable air; / I swallow it and feel it burning my lungs] (ll. 2–3). The smoke of the pipe swirls around him as does this demonic air: “J’enlace et je berce son âme / Dans le réseau mobile et bleu / Qui monte de ma bouche en feu” [I enlace and cradle his soul / In the mobile and blue web / That rises from my burning mouth] (ll. 9–11). The poet “avale” [swallows] (l. 3) the demonic air, as he swallows the smoke from his pipe. The demonic air “brûle” [burns] (l. 3) his lungs; the smoke from the pipe comes from its “bouche en feu” [burning mouth] (l. 11).

“La Destruction” / “Une martyre”

At the conclusion of “La Destruction” the Demon “jette dans mes yeux . . . / Des vêtements souillés, des blessures ouvertes, / Et l’appareil sanglant de la Destruction” [casts before my eyes . . . / Soiled clothing, open wounds, / And the bloody apparatus of Destruction] (ll. 12–14). “Une martyre” [A Martyred Woman] (1857: 79) seems to be just the kind of thing the Demon was taking him to see:

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

[A headless corpse spreads, like a river,
On the thirsty pillow]
Blood red and alive; the cloth soaks it up
With the eagerness of a meadow] (ll. 9–12)

To show him this scene, the Demon had led the poet “loin du regard de Dieu, / . . . au milieu / Des plaines de l’Ennui” [far from the gaze of God, / . . . in the midst / Of the plains of Ennui] (ll. 9, 10–11). “Une martyre” begins “Au milieu des” [In the midst of the] (l. 1) decanters, sequined fabrics, and voluptuous furniture, and its scene of horror is “Loin du monde railleur, loin de la foule impure, / Loin des magistrats curieux” [Far from the mocking world, far from the impure crowd, / Far from peering magistrates] (ll. 53–54). To be far from the gaze of such magistrates, in particular, is like being far from where God can see.

The Demon, the narrator tells us, threw “dans mes yeux” [into my eyes] (l. 12) a bloody scene of open wounds, and the scene in “Une martyre” is equally eye-catching: “Semblable aux visions . . . qui nous enchaînent les yeux” [Like the visions . . . that enchain our eyes] (ll. 13, 14).

In “La Destruction” the Demon “nage autour de moi comme un air impalpable” [swims around me like an impalpable air] (l. 2), as in “Une martyre,” where “L’air est dangereux et fatal” [The air is dangerous and fatal] (l. 6) and there is a swarm of bad angels “Nageant dans les plis des rideaux” [Swimming in the folds of the curtains] (l. 37), a connection Pichois notes (OC I: 1060). The Demon’s impalpable air fills the poet with “un désir éternel et coupable” [an eternal and guilty desire] (l. 4), while the dead woman’s eyes and pose reveals “Une coupable joie” [A guilty joy] (l. 33), even though she could not assuage, while alive, “L’immensité [du] désir” [The immensity of the desire] (l. 48) for the lover who murdered her.

It was “au milieu / Des plaines de l’Ennui” [in the midst / Of the plains of Ennui] (ll. 10–11) that the poet in “La Destruction” encountered the bloody scene that so strikingly anticipates the one “Une martyre” recounts, in the course of which he wonders if it was ennui that led the woman to open herself to certain desires:

. . . Son âme exaspérée
Et ses sens par l’ennui mordus
S’étaient-ils entr’ouverts à la meute altérée
Des désirs errants et perdus?

[ . . . Her exasperated soul
And her senses bitten by ennui,
Were they opened to the thirsty horde
Of errant and lost desires?] (ll. 41–44)
“Une martyre” / “Lesbos”

The place name “Lesbos,” the title of the next poem in the sequence (1857: 80), did not in the nineteenth century nor for Baudelaire in particular immediately connote female homosexuality. Jacques Dupont, in his edition of the *Fleurs du mal*, quotes a passage in the article on Lesbos in Pierre Larousse’s *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* that says that the island was the site of a school for courtesans: “This education, conducted by the most literate and able of women, comprised not only all that concerned the body but also all that had to do with the delights of the mind, and the name of Sappho, who was educated in one of those schools in Lesbos, can give an idea of what those singular institutions could be. Nevertheless, the concentration of so many such women in one place could not fail to give rise to shameful morals.”12 He comments that for Baudelaire the name of the island “invokes a sort of ‘counterreligion’ of love and a propensity to excess in debauchery” (*FM* Dupont, 16). Pichois points out that nineteenth-century dictionaries such as Larousse and Littré did not give the modern, homosexual sense to “lesbien.” Yet in Baudelaire’s circle the word could have the modern meaning. He had originally thought of giving the title Les Lesbienes to what became the *Fleurs du mal*. Such a title, Pichois comments, “would not have evoked the word’s modern sense in the mind of contemporary readers. There is thus reason to think that this collection would have offered an ample image of Lesbos in which Sapphic love would have had a place . . . but not the entire place” (*OC* I: 794). Pichois, however, does cite “Lesbos,” along with the two “Femmes damnées” and “perhaps ‘Sed non satiata,’” as “Sapphic poems.” Dupont, on the other hand, notes that in the poem “Lesbos” Baudelaire “follows the heterosexual version of the death of Sappho” as opposed to the homosexual one (*FM* Dupont, 322): that is, that she leaped to her death from Mount Leucate because the young ferryman Phaon, to whom Aphrodite had given the power to make himself loved by the most reticent of women, had disdained her advances: “elle fit son beau corps la pâture suprême / D’un brutal dont l’orgueil punit l’impiété / De Sapho qui mourut le jour de son blasphème” [She offered up her beautiful body as the supreme nourishment / Of a brute whose pride punished the impiety / Of Sappho who died the day of her blasphemy] (ll. 68–70). Phaon’s prideful refusal, along with her resulting death by suicide, was her punishment for the blasphemy of insulting “le rite et le culte inventé” [the rite and the invented cult] (l. 67) of female homosexuality by seeking his love.

Thus, a woman dies both in “Lesbos” (1857: 80) and in “Une martyre” (1857: 79). In 79 there is a “cadavre sans tête” [a corpse without a head] (l. 9); in 80 there is a death without a corpse, the “cadavre adoré de Sapho” [adored corpse of Sappho] (l. 54) having been lost to the waves. The “martyre” of the title returns in “Lesbos” as well, though in a different sense: “l’éternel martyre” [the eternal martyrdom] (l. 26) that Lesbos inflicts on ambitious hearts. The man who killed the woman in “Une martyre” and the man whose refusal brought about Sappho’s death are exact opposites, the former having an immense desire, the latter having none at all.

It appears that Baudelaire engages in some subtle wordplay as he relates these two poems in a way that no one, as far as I can tell, has noticed. The detached head of the martyr in 79 reposes on the night table, “comme un renoncule” [like a buttercup] (l. 17). The flower’s name, ranonculus in Latin, means “little frog.” According to Louis-Nicolas Bescherelle’s Dictionnaire universel de la langue française, “The name ‘renoncule’ given to this genus comes from the fact that many of the species that compose it are ordinarily found in wet and swampy meadows where one frequently encounters the frog, rana; and it is for that reason as well that several of these plants are commonly given the name grenouillette [little frog].” “Lesbos” counters this frog with a toad: “Lesbos où les Phrynés l’une l’autre s’attirent, / Où jamais un soupir ne resta sans écho” [Lesbos, where the Phrynés attract each other, / Where a sigh is never without its echo] (ll. 11–12). Bescherelle’s entry on Phryné informs us that she was “a celebrated Athenian courtesan” and that the name used figuratively denotes “a woman of dissolute morals.” According to Plutarch the original Phryné’s “name was Mnesarete, but she took on that of Phryne [toad] as a nickname because of her yellow skin.”¹³ So in Lesbos, one Phryné attracts another, and in the intratext these two poems form, a Phryné attracts a “renoncule,” a toad or a frog.

“Lesbos” / “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ”

In “Lesbos” (1857: 80) Sappho made the mistake of abandoning the cult of female homosexuality for the love of a man (who in the end turned her down). In “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ”) [“Doomed Women: By the pale light . . . ”] (1857: 81) a woman (Hippolyte) in a homosexual relationship with another woman (Delphine) is berated by the latter for

wanting to make love to a man. The man, says Delphine, would be too violent (ll. 28, 31–34). Besides, one cannot serve two masters (l. 73).

Both poems speak of sterile pleasures, but in different contexts. In “Lesbos” hollow-eyed girls, in love with their bodies, caress the ripe fruits of their nubility in front of mirrors, a “stérile volupté” [sterile pleasure] (l. 17); in “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” the narrator describes lesbian love (in the modern sense) as “L’âpre stérilité de votre jouissance” [The bitter sterility of your pleasure] (l. 97). The mirrors in the “Lesbos” passage reflect, perhaps, the sterility in the other.

In another instance of the same concept (and close synonyms) appearing in differing contexts, the “pâture” [nourishment] (l. 68) that Sappho made her body into for the man she loved in “Lesbos” is reflected in the “terrible repas” [terrible repast] (l. 44) that Hippolyte found her night of lovemaking with Delphine to have been in “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ”

In “Lesbos” Sappho was punished for wanting to make love to a man, “un brutal dont l’orgueil punit l’impiété / De Sapho” [a brute whose pride punished the impiety / Of Sappho] (ll. 69–70); in “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” the narrator says of lesbian lovers that “votre châtiment naîtra de vos plaisirs” [your punishment will be born of your pleasures] (l. 92). In both cases, the punishment consists of not being sexually satisfied. Sappho’s desire is frustrated by his disdain, while of the lesbian lovers the narrator says, “Jamais vous ne pourrez assouvir votre rage” [Never will you be able to assuage your passion] (l. 91), and it is in that way that their punishment will be born of their pleasures.

“Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” / “Femmes damnées: Comme un bétail pensif . . . ”

“Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” (1857: 81) is followed by “Femmes damnées: Comme un bétail pensif . . . ” [Doomed Women: Like a pensive herd . . . ] (1857: 82). Beyond the obvious connections linking two poems about lesbianism bearing the same title, and in both of which desire remains unassuaged (“Jamais vous ne pourrez assouvir votre rage” [Never will you be able to assuage your passion] [81, l. 91], “soifs inassouvies” [unassuaged thirsts] [82, l. 27]), we note that in 82 these women seek out the infinite—that they are “Chercheuses d’infini” (l. 23)—while in 81 they do just the opposite: they flee it. The narrator encourages them to continue what they are doing: “fuyez l’infini que vous portez en vous” [flee the infinite that you carry in you] (81, l. 104).
In both “Femmes damnées” poems there is “hollowing-out” [creusement] going on, but it is heterosexual men who do it in one and homosexual women in the other. Your lover’s kisses, Delphine warns Hippolyte, “creuseront leurs ornières” [will hollow out their ruts] (81, l. 31) on her body like chariots or plowshares. In the other poem, “Les unes . . . / Vont épelant l’amour des craintives enfances / Et creusent le bois vert des jeunes arbrisseaux” [Some women . . . / Spell out the love of timid adolescences / And hollow out the green wood of young shrubs] (82, ll. 5, 7–8). In other words, some of these “femmes damnées” are carving out letters on young trees to declare their love.

“Femmes damnées: Comme un bétail pensif . . . ”
/ “Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs”

Baudelaire provided “Lesbos” (1857: 80), “Femmes damnées: À la pâle clarté . . . ” (1857: 81), and “Femmes damnées: Comme un bétail pensif . . . ” (1857: 82) with a number of connections more subtle than the obvious common topic that they, unusually among neighboring poems in the Fleurs, share. With “Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs” [The Two Good Sisters] (1857: 83) we seem to have left that topic behind, yet the “Sœurs” [Sisters] of the title (and line 10) appear to emerge from the immediately preceding “Femmes damnées,” where the word twice appears: “D’autres, comme des sœurs, marchent lentes et graves” [Others, like sisters, walk, slow and solemn] (l. 9); “Pauvres sœurs, je vous aime autant que je vous plains” [Poor sisters, I love you as much as I pity you] (l. 26). In 82 the word “sœurs” had acquired a nuance of lesbianism, and now suddenly in 83, which is not about Lesbos, the word immediately reappears—and in its plural form, which appears in no other poems than these two in the 1857 edition.

Richter notes this connection, along with the fact that both the two good sisters, Debauchery and Death, and the lesbian lovers are virginal (1342, 1344). Lesbian lovers are so named in line 21 of 82: “Ô vierges” [O virgins]. Debauchery and Death “sont deux aimables filles / Prodigues de baisers” [are two lovable girls / Prodigal with kisses] (83, ll. 1–2)—and at that moment we are reminded of the prodigality of kisses in “Lesbos, où les baisers sont comme les cascades” [Lesbos, where the kisses are like cascades] (80, l. 6)—“Dont le flanc toujours vierge . . . / Sous l’éternel labeur n’a jamais enfanté” [Whose ever virgin loins . . . / Despite eternal labor have never given birth] (83, ll. 3–4). This endless labor never eventuating in childbirth resembles the “soifs inassouvies” [unassuaged thirsts] (82, l. 27) of lesbian love as Baudelaire imagines it, a desire that never reaches fulfillment. It resembles lesbianism as well with regard to the lat-
ter’s “stérilité” (81, l. 97), which never leads to childbirth, either.

The “bonnes sœurs” in the first tercet of 83 who offer us, alternately, “De terribles plaisirs et d’affreuses douceurs” [Terrible pleasures and horrible sweethe...](l. 11) resemble in their tendency to combine pain and pleasure the sisters (in both the monastic and lesbian sense) who “Mêlent / L’écume du plaisir aux larmes des tourments” [Blend / The Froth of pleasure with the tears of torments] (82, ll. 19–20). But the blends are of opposite kinds, for while “terribles” contrasts with “plaisirs” and “affreuses” with “douceurs,” “écume” is as much in harmony with “plaisir” as “larmes” with “tourments.”

Another instance of blending is part of the connective tissue between these poems, in which what happens twice is not the blending but the application of a blade to a young shrub. In 83 Death will graft its cypresses onto Debauchery’s myrtles: “Quand veux-tu m’enterrer, Débauche aux bras immondes? / O Mort, quand viendras-tu, sa rivale en attraits, / Sur ses myrtes infects enter tes noirs cyprès?” [When will you bury me, filthy-armed Debauchery? / O Death, her rival in attractions, when will you come / And graft your black cypresses onto her disgusting myrtles?] (ll. 12–14). According to Bescherelle’s Dictionnaire, the myrtle (“myrte”) “est un arbrisseau” [is a shrub]. Among the “femmes damnées” in 82, some “creusent le bois vert des jeunes arbrisseaux” [hollow out the green wood of the young shrubs] (l. 8). The contexts—young same-sex love in 82, death and debauchery in 83—are entirely different, yet in both a blade is applied to “arbrisseaux” (and not “arbres”).

“The Deux Bonnes Sœurs” / “La Fontaine de sang”

The last tercet of “La Fontaine de sang” [The Fountain of Blood] (1857: 84)—“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!” [I sought in love a forgetful sleep, / But love for me was but a mattress of needles / Designed to provide drink for those cruel girls!] (ll. 12–14)—makes a reference to “ces cruelles filles” [those cruel girls] as if they had been mentioned already in the poem, but they have not been. Adam remarks, “These last two lines are, at first glance, difficult to interpret. They become clear when one observes, in the preceding poem, that Debauchery and Death are ‘deux aimables filles’ [two lovable girls]. Baudelaire intended the rapprochement” (FM Adam, 414n). Pichois agrees: “Who are these . . . cruelles filles? . . . They are not to be found in this sonnet, but in the preceding one: Debauchery and Death” (OC I: 1064n). So here is a poem in the Fleurs du mal that cannot be understood on even the
basic level without our having read another poem, the one that precedes it. Note that it is not just any poem elsewhere in the collection that must be read to understand this one, but the poem that immediately precedes it. Not a poem that had preceded it at some distance (as the liquidity of the sun in “Le Soleil” enables us to appreciate its liquidity in “Je n’ai pas oublié . . .”), but the poem that immediately precedes it. If over the years readers of Baudelaire had paid attention to what he kept claiming about the continuity and sequentiality of the *Fleurs du mal*, this would come as no surprise. We should realize that none of the poems in the volume can be fully understood without an awareness of the one just before, that the poems were not written to be anthologized and read in isolation from each other. “La Fontaine de sang” is incomprehensible when read without “Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs.” No wonder Baudelaire was horrified to contemplate the mutilation of his book.

Debauchery and Death form a pair in “Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs” (1857: 83) and reappear in “La Fontaine de sang” (1857: 84), but the latter introduces another duo, wine and love. Neither provides the repose the poet seeks. He asks wine to put to sleep the terror that undermines him, even if only for a day, but wine makes his senses perceive terror all the more acutely. He seeks in love a forgetful sleep, but love proves a bed of needles. Yet he told us in 83 that Death (as “Tombeaux” [Tombs]) and Debauchery (as “lupanars” [brothels]) offer “Un lit que le remords n’a jamais fréquenté” [a bed that remorse has never frequented] (ll. 7, 8). That is, Death and Debauchery can do what wine and love cannot, offer remorse-free repose. In this way 83 and 84 are alike yet opposite. Each describes its own pair of potential escape routes. Those in one poem are efficacious; those in the other are not.

“La Fontaine de sang” / “Allégorie”

The beautiful woman in “Allégorie” [Allegory] (1857: 85) “rit à la mort et nargue la débauche” [laughs at death and scoffs at debauchery] (l. 5), an explicit reference to the two “filles” who inhabit both 83 and 84. Pichois comments: “It indeed seems that these three poems . . . are organized together in an ensemble. Doubtless it is in this consecutiveness [consécution] that one must look for the meaning of the last line of the ‘Fontaine de sang’ and the general meaning of ‘Allégorie’” (OC I: 1063). For Adam, the three poems likewise “form a series and shed light on each other mutually” (FM Adam, 414n). Neither the woman in “Allégorie” nor the “poète sinistre” [sinister poet] (l. 5) in “Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs” finds death and debauchery threatening. She laughs and scoffs; he finds them both
“aimables” and able to offer a bed untroubled by remorse (ll. 1, 8). With regard to death and remorse, she resembles him even more closely, for she too finds no remorse in death: “Elle regardera la face de la Mort . . . sans remord” [She will look at the face of Death . . . without remorse] (ll. 19, 20).

They are alike in yet another way. Although “inféconde” [infertile] (l. 13), she is “nécessaire à la marche du monde” [necessary to the progress of the world] (l. 14), of universal benefit as is he when his overflowing blood “s’en va . . . / Désaltérant la soif de chaque créature” [goes out . . . / Slaking the thirst of every creature] (“La Fontaine de sang,” ll. 6, 7), as if he were some new Lamb of God. She, perhaps the allegory of prostitution as Adam suggests, is the sinister poet’s uncanny double. Yet they are not entirely alike. He is the “Favori de l’enfer” [Hell’s favorite] (“Les Deux Bonnes Sœurs,” l. 6), and evidently he knows it, whereas she “ignore l’enfer” [is ignorant of hell] (l. 17). He seeks repose in “le vin” and “l’amour” and is disappointed (“La Fontaine de sang,” ll. 9–14); she is familiar with yet indifferent to both: she “laisse dans son vin trainer sa chevelure. / Les griffes de l’amour, les poisons du tripot, / Tout glisse et tout s’émousse au granit de sa peau” [lets her hair trail in her wine. / Love’s claws, the poisons of gambling dens /—All slide off, blunted by the granite of her skin] (ll. 2–4). “Allégorie” in this passage seems at odds with “La Fontaine de sang,” for the latter presents wine and love as distinct from, and having different qualities than, debauchery and death. In “Allégorie” love has “griffes” [claws], and love together with wine (and gambling’s poisons) can harm mortals not endowed with a granite skin. Wine and love are in “Allégorie” to be lumped together in the same list with death and debauchery, “monstres dont la main . . . toujours gratte et fauche” [monsters whose hand . . . always scratches and cuts] (l. 6), as if they too, like love, had claws. The “cruelles filles” in the last line of “La Fontaine de sang” are clearly distinct from love, since love is the needle mattress that is designed to slake their thirst. The poet in both “Les Deux Bonnes Soeurs” and “La Fontaine de sang” responds positively to Debauchery and Death, negatively to love and wine; the woman in “Allégorie” is indifferent to all four.

“Allégorie” / “La Béatrice”

The poet in “La Béatrice” [The Beatrice] (1857: 86) displays two additional features that contribute to his resemblance to the “femme belle” of “Allégorie.” Her skin was made of granite, and thus the claws of love could not harm her, while his heart is made of stone: “J’aiguais lentement
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sur mon cœur le poignard” [I was slowly sharpening the dagger on my heart] (l. 4). As Pichois points out (OC I: 1067n), Baudelaire is thinking of Shakespeare: “Thou hid’st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts, / Whom thou hast whetted on thy stony heart” (Henry IV, Part 2, IV. 5. 106–7).

Sharp objects harm neither his heart nor her skin. Another Shakespeare allusion in “La Béatrice” has him imitating Hamlet’s posture, “Le regard indécis et les cheveux au vent” [With indecisive look and his hair in the wind] (l. 15). But he is at the same time imitating the woman in “Allégorie,” whose long hair was carelessly trailing, too: “une femme belle . . . / Qui laisse dans son vin traîner sa chevelure” [a beautiful woman . . . / Who lets her hair trail in her wine] (ll. 1–2).

But clearly because the woman in “Allégorie” “ignore l’Enfer comme le Purgatoire” [knows neither Hell nor Purgatory] (l. 17), she also resembles the Beatrice to whom the title alludes, Dante’s guide in Heaven but not in Hell or Purgatory (that task was left to Virgil). The woman in “La Béatrice” additionally shares with the woman in “Allégorie” the ability to laugh, and this turns her against the poet. The woman in “Allégorie” “rit à la mort” [laughs at death] (l. 5); Beatrice joined the mocking demons and “riait avec eux de ma sombre détresse” [was laughing with them at my dark distress] (l. 29).

“La Béatrice” / “Les Métamorphoses du vampire”

The laughter continues in “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” [The Metamorphoses of the Vampire] (1857: 87), where the poet’s mistress declares: “Je . . . fais rire les vieux du rire des enfants” [I . . . make the old laugh the laughter of children] (ll. 7, 8). What she means, of course, is that she is such an expert lover that she can make old men young again. The context has changed, but here again the poet’s mistress is in the company of a laughing group (though with but one at a time), as the poet’s mistress in “La Béatrice” was with the laughing demons. In light of the discovery that she can make others laugh, we can wonder if she not merely joined in the demons’ laughter but also incited them to laugh at the poet’s expense.

In both poems the narrator suddenly sees a shocking change in his mistress. In “La Béatrice” she turns against him; in “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” she turns into a sack of pus, and then some bones. Put differently, and in a way that draws out the precision of their opposition, in one poem he is surprised to find her there, and in the other he is surprised to find her gone.

Her skeletal remains make the sound of a weathervane or a sign “Que balance le vent” [that the wind sways about] (l. 28), which makes them
resemble the poet as the demons (and his mistress) see him, a Hamlet with “les cheveux au vent” [windblown hair] (l. 15). This motif undergoes metamorphosis as we pass from “Allégorie,” where it is the woman’s hair trailing in her wine, to “La Béatrice,” where it is the poet’s hair in the wind, and then to “Les Métamorphoses du vampire,” where it becomes the woman again, now blown about, like the poet, by the wind.

“Les Métamorphoses du vampire” / “Un voyage à Cythère”

The verb in the last line of “Les Métamorphoses du vampire”—“Que balance le vent pendant les nuits d’hiver” [That the wind sways about during winter nights]—reappears in the first line of “Un voyage à Cythère” [A Voyage to Cythera] (1857: 88): “Mon cœur se balançait comme un ange joyeux” [My heart was swaying about like a happy angel]. That reappearance eerily anticipates an important part of the argument of “Un voyage à Cythère,” the poet’s realization that the hanged man on the tree is a symbolic image of himself: “un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image” [a symbolic gibbet where my image was hanging] (l. 58). We had just seen, in reading the last two poems, how the bones of his beloved’s skeleton creaking like a windblown sign are a metamorphosis of the image of himself in the poem before as a Hamlet with windblown hair. The wind is still present, and now he is swaying in it as he approaches the island that will prove as much a shocking surprise as the woman who turned into the skeleton. That is, the verb “se balançait” in recalling the “balance” of the immediately preceding line also recalls how the poet (at least through an attentive reader’s eyes) might see himself in the wind-tossed sign that was her bones.

But this beautiful continuity between the end of one poem and the beginning of the next will prove a surprise for readers unfamiliar with the 1857 version, for the “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” was excised from the Fleurs du mal by the public prosecutor, and so Baudelaire was obliged to keep it out of the 1861 edition. Once it was gone, there was no further need for the speaker of the poem to se balancer [sway] in the wind. In place of that line, for the 1861 version Baudelaire wrote “Mon cœur, comme un oiseau, voltigeait tout joyeux” [My heart, like a bird, was joyfully fluttering about]. In doing so, he was restoring the line to something much closer to what it had been in 1851, when he sent “Un voyage à Cythère” with eleven other poems to Théophile Gautier in hopes of seeing them published in the Revue de Paris: “Mon cœur comme un oiseau s’envolait tout joyeux” [My heart like a bird was joyfully flying away] (OC I: 1072n,
806–7n). This would explain why he bothered to change the line again in 1861. He preferred a version of the line in which his heart would be a bird, not an angel, and the verb not be “se balancer.” In 1857 he went against his judgment of what was best for the poem because of his judgment of what was best for the larger poem of the book. It is hard to imagine a more telling piece of evidence for the proposition that the poem that really counted for Baudelaire was the volume as a whole.

Cythera had been vaunted as the Eldorado of all “les vieux garçons” [the old bachelors] (l. 7), as the woman in the poet’s bed in “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” boasted of being able to make “rire les vieux du rire des enfants” [the old laugh the laughter of children] (l. 8)—that is, to make old men into boys again, as Cythera was to have been the paradise of men both old and boyish. Only in these two poems does the phrase “les vieux” appear with reference to men.

But the truth of the matter is that the island “n’était plus qu’un terrain des plus maigres, / Un désert rocailleux troublé par des cris aigres” [was nothing more than the barest of landscapes, / A rocky desert troubled by sharp cries] (ll. 18–19). Similarly, when the poet in “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” turned to look again at the woman, he “ne vis plus / Qui d’eux-mêmes rendaient le cri” [saw nothing more / Than that by themselves made the cry] (ll. 19–20, 26) of some weathervane or sign swung about by the wind. The “outre aux flancs gluants, toute pleine de pus” [wineskin with gluey sides, all full of pus] (l. 20) that she turned into is reconfigured as the hanged man’s “ventre effondré” [burst stomach] (l. 33) from which “Les intestins pesants . . . coulaient” [The heavy intestines . . . flowed down] (l. 34), all the more so for the fact that “outre” comes from the Latin “uter,” “ventre.”

In both poems, the poet, lured on by sex, is surprised by horror.

“Un voyage à Cythère” / “L’Amour et le crâne”

Love and death, combined in “Un voyage à Cythère” when the island of love becomes a scene of death, are combined in a different way in “L’Amour et le crâne” [Love and the Skull] (1857: 89). Love (perhaps in the form of a cupid, which “amour” can mean in French—especially if Baudelaire is thinking of Goltzius’s engraving Quis evadet? reproduced in the Garnier edition) is seated on the skull of Humanity, blowing bubbles in the air. The skull, apparently conscious and suffering, asks, “Ce jeu féroce et ridicule, / Quand doit-il finir?” [This ferocious and ridiculous game, / When will it end?] (ll. 15–16). The cupid perched on the skull playing his ferocious
game recalls the “féroces oiseaux perchés sur leur pâture” [ferocious birds perched on their food] (l. 29) in 88, and that the narrator calls the game ridiculous in addition to ferocious recalls how the narrator in 88 described the man on whom the birds were perched: “Ridicule pendu” [Ridiculous hanged man] (l. 45). In 1857 the word “ridicule” appears only in these two poems.

So too (and not just in the 1857 edition) the phrase “ma chair,” which we find in “Un voyage à Cythère” at the height of the narrator’s self-identification with the ridiculous victim of the ferocious birds. The narrator has also felt the beaks and jaws of piercing crows “Qui jadis aimaient tant à triturer ma chair” [Who used to love so much to attack my flesh] (l. 52), and at the conclusion of “L’Amour et le crâne,” when the skull complains that the contents of the bubbles the cupid is blowing “c’est ma cervelle, / Mon sang et ma chair!” [it is my brain, / My blood and my flesh!] (ll. 19–20). The one speaking at this moment in “L’Amour et le crâne” is the skull, not the narrator, but what he says parallels what the narrator of the other poem has to say. Both are pointing out that something else—the hanged man, the bubbles that so amuse the cupid—are their own flesh. This parallelism continues in the last line of each poem, “Mon sang et ma chair” in “L’Amour et le crâne” recalling “mon cœur et mon corps” [my heart and my body] (l. 60) in “Un voyage à Cythère.”

“L’Amour et le crâne” / “Le Reniement de saint Pierre”

The cupid was seated “sur le crâne / De l’Humanité” [on the skull / Of Humanity] (ll. 1–2); in “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” [Saint Peter’s Denial] (1857: 90) Baudelaire gives those two elements a new combination when the speaker addresses Jesus: “ton crâne où vivait l’immense Humanité” [your skull where resided immense Humanity] (l. 16). The suffering skull in 89 prayed: “J’entends le crâne à chaque bulle / Prier et gémir” [I hear the skull at each bubble / Pray and groan] (ll. 13–14); so too does the suffering Jesus, in the Garden of Olives; “Dans ta simplicité tu priais à genoux / Celui qui dans son ciel riait au bruit des clous” [In your simplicity you prayed on your knees / To him who in his heaven was laughing at the sound of the nails] (ll. 10–11). Like God, the cupid to whom the skull prayed was laughing, too: “le profane, / Au rire effronté // Souffle gaiment des bulles rondes / Qui montent dans l’air” [the impious one, / With an impudent laugh // Gaily blows spherical bubbles / That mount up into the air] (ll. 3–6). “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” begins with a repetition of the bubbles’ upward movement: “Qu’est-ce que Dieu
fait donc de ce flot d’anathèmes / Qui monte tous les jours vers ses chers Séraphins?” [What does God then do with this stream of anathema / That mounts up every day toward his dear Seraphim?] (ll. 1–2). Like the stream of curses from suffering humanity, the bubbles rise to heaven: “montent dans l’air, / Comme pour rejoindre les mondes / Au fond de l’éther” [mount up into the air, / As if to reach the worlds / At the depth of the ether] (ll. 6–8). What mounts up in both poems is liquid: bubbles and a “flot” [stream]. The liquid in both includes blood: “Mon sang” [My blood] (l. 16), says the skull; “le sang” [the blood] (l. 7) of martyrs. In one poem, blood comes out of the skull; in the other, from the head: “ton sang / Et ta sueur coulaient de ton front” [your blood / And your sweat flowed from your head] (ll. 18–19).

Each bubble flies upward in 89, then “Crève et crache son âme grêle / Comme un songe d’or” [Bursts and spits out its flimsy soul / Like a golden dream] (ll. 11–12). The gentle noise of the bubbles bursting together with their association with dreams and therefore sleep, as well as the syllable “d’or,” are hauntingly recalled in 90 when God “s’endort aux doux bruit de nos affreux blasphèmes” [falls asleep to the gentle noise of our horrid blasphemies] (l. 4). In this way Baudelaire continues the parallel between the mounting bubbles and the mounting blasphemies. In pairing these poems he does not simply recombine elements from the first poem in the second (as he often does); he makes the second an allegory of the first, consistently aligning Jesus, whose skull held “l’immense Humanité,” with the skull of Humanity and with humanity itself, and God with the cruel cupid. God is Love, as it were. Humanity suffers to see its essence burst and “crache[r]” [spit] (l. 11); Jesus suffers, the narrator recalls, “Lorsque tu vis cracher sur ta divinité / La crapule du corps-de-garde et cuisines” [When you saw spitting on your divinity / Vile bodyguards and scullions] (ll. 13–14). The verb cracher appears in no other poem.

The three poems “Un voyage à Cythère” (1857: 88), “L’Amour et le crâne” (1857: 89) and “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” (1857: 90) should be read together as meditations on Golgotha, “the place of the skull” (as Richter reminds us [1425]). In the hanged man in whom the narrator recognizes himself, on a gibbet with room for two more victims—“un gibet à trois branches” [a gibbet with three arms] (l. 33)—we can recognize the Jesus (see Richter, 1469) in whom humanity recognizes itself, on a cross surrounded by two others. The man on Cythera was pierced by “ses bourreaux . . . à coups de bec” [his torturers . . . with blows of the beak] (ll. 35, 36); the man on Golgotha was pierced by the nails that “d’ignobles bourreaux plantaient dans tes chairs vives” [ignoble torturers planted in your living flesh] (l. 12). The division Baudelaire made within his 1857 volume by virtue of which “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” begins the new
section “Révolte” has no effect whatsoever on the continuities linking that poem to “L’Amour et le crâne,” the last poem in the section “Fleurs du mal.”

“Le Reniement de saint Pierre” / “Abel et Caïn”

“Abel et Caïn” [Abel and Cain] (1857: 91) is a call to arms in harmony with the sentiment expressed in the last stanza of “Le Reniement de saint Pierre.” Peter, who cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant in the Garden of Olives in an attempt to defend Jesus from the Roman soldiers come to arrest him, did well to use the sword—and to deny Jesus for having told him to put it away. The poet wants to take it up again: “Puissé-je user du glaive et périr par le glaive!” [May I use the sword and perish by the sword!] (l. 31), echoing Jesus’ rebuke to Peter (Matthew 26:52). As Richter reminds us (1476), Jesus himself had used a whip when he chased the merchants from the temple (as he does in line 26 of “Le Reniement de saint Pierre”). It is clear in stanzas 6 and 7 of “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” that the narrator regrets the change that came over Jesus in the Garden of Olives when in his “simplicité” he prayed to an unfeeling God and subsequently submitted meekly to his fate. Jesus should feel remorse (l. 27) for having betrayed the eternal promise he had come to fulfill (ll. 22–23), and that he had been fulfilling when he whipped the merchants. Action should be sister to the dream (l. 30).

It is ironic, as Richter points out (1462), that this praise of the fraternity of action and dream should be followed by a poem about fraternal enmity. God smiled on Abel’s sacrifice but rejected Cain’s. Subsequently, Cain’s descendants, vagabond and poor, become the wretched of the earth; Abel’s live off the fat of the land. Peter’s sword, which the poet would brandish in support of the promise Jesus abandoned, is here replaced by the pike. Rooting for Cain’s descendants, the poet is happy to see that “le fer est vaincu par l’épieu” [iron is vanquished by the pike] (l. 30). Adam writes that because Baudelaire “makes Cain nomadic [un nomade] and Abel sedentary, which is exactly the opposite of the Genesis version, iron is the symbol of Abel the plowman—that is, the iron of the plow. The épieu is the symbol of Cain the hunter. Baudelaire announces the victory of the revolutionary proletariat” (FM Adam, 422n). Pichois concurs (OC I: 1082n).

But Adam is wrong to say that Baudelaire reverses the biblical version. In Genesis 4:2–15, Abel was a shepherd (“pastor ovium,” in the Latin Vulgate) and Cain a farmer (“agricola”). Cain offered as a sacrifice to God the fruits of the earth (“de fructibus terrae”), while Abel sacrificed the
firstborn of his flock and some of their fat (“de primogenitis gregis sui et de adipibus eorum”). God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s. Cain was depressed and angry and killed his brother. God told Cain that from now on the land he had tilled would no longer be fruitful, and he must wander the earth as a vagabond and an exile (“vagus et profugus eris super terram”). The characters in the poem’s drama are not Cain and Abel but their descendants. With Cain’s descendants condemned to be vagabonds, Abel’s are now free to be both farmers and herdsman: “Race d’Abel, vois tes semailles / Et ton bétail venir à bien” [Abel’s race, see your seeds / And your livestock flourish] (ll. 9–10). They continue to raise sheep and cattle, but they expand their domain into what had been Cain’s territory, tilling the soil. Adam’s error is twofold: (1) He conflates the vagabondage to which Cain was condemned with sheep-raising, calling the latter nomadic. It is less sedentary than tilling the earth, but it is far from being as nomadic as the eternal exile to which Cain was condemned, and that for Baudelaire resembles the lifestyle he describes in “Bohémiens en voyage.” We see this spelled out in lines 23–24: “Race de Caïn, sur les routes / Traîne ta famille aux abois” [Cain’s race, on the roads / Drag your fleeing family]. Like the bohemians they are constantly on the road. (2) He forgets that Abel’s descendants continue to raise livestock—“bétail” (l. 10), a category that, according to Bescherelle, includes sheep, lamb, goats, and cattle. If those who raise sheep are nomadic, then Abel’s children would be nomadic, too.

The conflict in line 30 between “le fer” and “l’épieu” can indeed be understood as Adam would have it, as a struggle in which the iron of the plow—the agricultural practice of tilling the soil that Abel and his descendants, like the greedy capitalists Baudelaire portrays them to be, were able to take over from Cain once God told him the soil would no longer respond to his efforts—is conquered by the pike. But it would be wrong to conclude that the “épieu” could only be, as Bescherelle defines it, “the symbol of Cain the hunter [le chasseur],” for it was also a weapon of war: (according to Larousse’s Grand dictionnaire, in the Middle Ages it found a particular use in the infantry.14 The sword the poet wants Cain’s descendants to take up may be more a weapon of war, and thus of revolutionary uprising, than a hunter’s weapon: not a clash of cultures (hunter-gatherer vs. agricultural) but class warfare.

In “Le Reniement de saint Pierre” God, “Comme un tyran gorgé de viande et de vins, / . . . s’endort” [Like a tyrant gorged with meat and wines, / . . . falls asleep] (l. 3–4). Abel’s descendants engage in the same three activities (see Richter, 1467), with God’s blessing: “Race d’Abel, dors,

bois et mange: / Dieu te sourit complaisamment [Abel’s race, sleep, drink and eat: / God smiles on you complacently] (ll. 1–2). The same “Séraphins” [Seraphim] (l. 2) who experience “volupté” [sensual delight] (l. 7) in hearing the curses and sobs of the oppressed whose sound mounts up to heaven take pleasure as well in the smell of the sacrifices Abel’s children send their way: “Race d’Abel, ton sacrifice / Flatte le nez du Séraphin!” [Abel’s race, your sacrifice / Delights the nose of the Seraphim!] (ll. 5–6).

The suffering of Humanity at the hands of the god of Love in “L’Amour et le crâne,” which continued in the suffering of Jesus who represented that Humanity in “Le Reniement de saint Pierre,” continues here in the suffering of Cain’s descendants, the oppressed of the earth. Baudelaire underlines that continuity by formulating the same question for both: The skull asked, “Ce jeu féroce et ridicule, / Quand doit-il finir?” [This ferocious and ridiculous game, / When will it end?] (ll. 15–16); the narrator in “Abel et Caïn” asks, “Race de Caïn, ton supplice / Aura-t-il jamais une fin?” [Cain’s race, your torture / Will it ever have an end?] (ll. 7–8).

“Abel et Caïn” / “Les Litanies de Satan”

While Abel’s race can warm its belly at the “foyer patriarcal” [patriarchal hearth] (l. 14), Cain’s descendants, bereft of that patriarchal hearth, must tremble in the cold of a cave. But in “Les Litanies de Satan” [The Litanies of Satan] (1857: 92) the latter find a new father in Satan, “Père adoptif de ceux qu’en sa noire colère / Du paradis terrestre a chassés Dieu le Père” [Adoptive Father of those whom, in his black ire, / God the Father chased out of the earthly paradise] (ll. 43–44). Like Cain, whom God condemned to wander on the earth, Satan, too, having been chased out of heaven, is an exile: “O Prince de l’exil, à qui l’on a fait tort” [O Prince of exile, who has been done wrong] (l. 4). Satan, “Bâton des exilés” [Staff of the exiled] (l. 40), “aux parias . . . / Enseign[e] par l’amour le goût du Paradis” [inculcates in pariahs, through love, the taste for Paradise] (ll. 10, 11). Satan would like to regain heaven and teaches other pariahs to have the same goal; the poet encouraged Cain’s race to strive for the same end in “Abel et Caïn”: “Race de Caïn, au ciel monte, / Et sur la terre jette Dieu! [Cain’s race, ascend to heaven, / and cast God down to earth!]” (ll. 31–32).

The poet had smiled on the victory of the pike over the plow (“Le fer est vaincu par l’épieu!” [Iron is vainquished by the pike!] (l. 30), as Cain’s race triumphed over Abel’s. He speaks again here of the weapons the oppressed take up in the struggle for domination: “O Satan . . . qui, pour consoler l’homme frêle qui souffre, / Nous appris à mêler le salpêtre et le soufre” [O Satan . . . who, to console frail suffering humankind, / Taught
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us how to mix saltpeter with sulfur] (ll. 30, 31–32) to make gunpowder, the great equalizer in the struggle between the weak and the strong. For Abel’s race, “L’argent fait aussi des petits” [Money also has its progeny] (l. 18). Money begets money for those who charge interest, but on them Satan puts his mark: “Toi qui mets ton paraphe, ô complice subtil, / Sur le front du banquier impitoyable et vil” [You who put your paraph, O wily accomplice, / On the forehead of the pitiless and vile banker] (ll. 34–35). That paraph is the counterpart to the mark of Cain, but it will have the opposite effect. The “signum” (Genesis 4:15) God placed on Cain would save his life from those who would have killed him because he killed his brother, but the mark the devil puts on the banker singles him out, it would seem, for destruction. Just in case the allusion to the mark of Cain might be missed, Baudelaire changed “paraphe” to “marque” in the 1861 edition; in a pre-1857 version the line had read “Toi qui mets un opprobre éternel et sanglant” [You who put an eternal and bloody opprobrium] (OC I: 1085n), which would not have been a mark at all. At some point between “opprobre” and “paraphe” Baudelaire realized that here was an opportunity to invent a counterpart to the mark of Cain.

“Les Litanies de Satan” / “L’Âme du vin”

“Les Litanies de Satan” (1857: 92) glorified Satan: “Gloire et louange à toi, Satan” [Glory and praise to you, Satan] (l. 46); “L’Âme du vin” [The Soul of Wine] (1857: 93) glorifies wine: “Tu me glorifieras et tu seras content” [You will glorify me and be happy] (l. 16). Satan, “Aimable médecin des angoisses humaines” [Amiable physician of human anguish] (l. 8), consoles “l’homme frêle qui souffre” [fragile suffering humankind] (l. 31); wine will be “pour le frêle athlète de la vie / L’huile qui raffermit les muscles des lutteurs” [for the frail athlete of life / The oil that firms up wrestlers’ muscles] (ll. 19–20). Ironically, it was someone who had imbibed too much wine who needed the oil Satan applied: “Toi qui frottes de baume et d’huile les vieux os / De l’ivrogne attardé foulé par les chevaux” [You who rub with balm and oil the old bones / Of the drunkard, late getting home, trampled by horses] (ll. 28–29). When “L’Âme du vin” was moved in 1861 so that it no longer followed “Les Litanies de Satan,” the oil disappeared from Satan’s pharmacopoeia: “Toi qui, magiquement, assouplis les vieux os / De l’ivrogne attardé foulé par les chevaux” [You who, magically, make supple the old bones / Of the drunkard . . . ]. It was no longer needed to connect two poems no longer neighbors.

Another textual change offers additional evidence of Baudelaire’s prac-
tice of adding connections: When “L’Âme du vin” was first published in a magazine in 1850 (and again in 1851), the second line had been: “Homme, je pousserai vers toi, mon bien-aimé” [Man, I will send toward you, my beloved]. On a page proof for the 1857 edition, he had first written “Homme, je pousserai vers toi, pauvre déshérité” [Man, I will send to you, poor disinherit ed one]. As Pichois points out, this is two syllables too many for an alexandrine; Baudelaire then corrected “je pousserai vers toi, pauvre” (eight syllables) to “vers toi je pousse, ô cher” (six syllables) (OC I: 1046n). He was apparently so intent on changing “mon bien-aimé” to “déshérité” that he forgot to count the syllables. Why was he so fixed on that word? Because he wanted to forge another link with the preceding poem, in which Satan comforted the disinherit ed: “Père adoptif de ceux qu’en sa noire colère / Du paradis terrestre a chassés Dieu le Père” [Adoptive Father of those whom, in his black ire, / God the Father chased out of the earthly paradise] (ll. 43–44).

Although Satan and wine both comfort the afflicted, the anti-God stance of “Les Litanies de Satan” and the two poems that precede it is no longer present (and neither is Satan) in “L’Âme du vin.” Wine is praised (actually, praises itself, as the soul of wine speaks throughout the poem) as the gift of God, growing from seed cast by “l’éternel Semeur” [the eternal Sower] (l. 22), and as a means of access to God on high: “Pour que de notre amour naisse la poésie / Qui jaillira vers Dieu comme une rare fleur!” [So that from our love would be born poetry / That would shoot up toward God like a rare flower!] (ll. 23–24). This contrasts with the Satan who teaches pariahs (the equivalent in that poem to the disinherit ed in this one) “par l’amour le goût du Paradis” [by love a taste for Paradise] (l. 11), though it is also by “amour” that the flower of poetry that reaches heavenward is born. The poem that aims for heaven has replaced the taste for Paradise that motivated Satan, in league with those the Father disinherit ed, to storm heaven and overth rew God.

By paying close attention to a word that appears in only these two poems among the Fleurs du mal, we can observe how this change takes place. “Ô Satan . . . toi, qui de la Mort . . . / Engendra l’Espérance” [O Satan . . . you who from Death . . . / Will engender Hope] (ll. 12, 13, 14); “Je sais” [I know],” wine tells humankind, “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” [how much is required, on the hill in flame, / Of pain, sweat, and blistering sun / To engender my life and give me a soul] (ll. 5–7). Satan engenders hope; man engenders wine, which provides hope: “l’espoir qui gazouille en mon sein palpitant” [the hope that gurgles in my throbbing breast] (l. 14).
A connection between poetry and wine is one of several threads uniting “L’Âme du vin” (1857: 93) with “Le Vin des chiffonniers” [The Ragpickers’ Wine] (1857: 94). In 93 wine’s soul claims as its divine purpose that “de notre amour naisse la poésie / Qui jaillira vers Dieu comme une rare fleur!” [from our love would be born poetry / That would shoot up toward God like a rare flower!] (ll. 23–24). In 94 the drunken raggpicker staggers around and bumps into walls “comme un poète” [like a poet] (l. 6). Baudelaire is alluding to his earlier poem “Le Soleil” (1857: 2), where the poet is depicted “Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés, / Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés” [Stumbling on words as on cobblestones, / Bumping up at times against lines long dreamed of] (ll. 7–8). In Du vin et du hachisch, an article published in March 1851 in Le Messager de l’Assemblée, in which can be found a prose version of “L’Âme du vin” immediately followed by one of “Le Vin des chiffonniers,” he draws out the resemblance: the chiffonnier “arrive hochant la tête et butant sur les pavés, comme les jeunes poètes qui passent toutes leurs journées à errer et à chercher des rimes” [arrives nodding his head and stumbling on the cobblestones, like young poets who spend their days wandering about and looking for rhymes] (OC I: 381). In the same passage, he goes into more detail than he does in the poem about what specifically a chiffonnier does:

Voici un homme chargé de ramasser les débris d’une journée de la capitale. Tout ce que la grande cité a rejeté, tout ce qu’elle a perdu, tout ce qu’elle a dédaigné, tout ce qu’elle a brisé, il le catalogue, il le collectionne. . . . Il fait un triage, un choix intelligent; il ramasse, comme un avare un trésor, les ordures qui, remâchées par la divinité de l’industrie, deviendront des objets d’utilité ou de jouissance.

[Behold a man charged with the responsibility of amassing the debris of a day in the capital. All that the great city has rejected, all that it has lost, all that it has disdained, all that it has broken, he catalogs it, he collects it. . . . He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; he amasses, like a miser his treasure, the garbage that, chewed over again by the god of Industry, will become objects of use or enjoyment.] (OC I: 381)

Rosemary Lloyd, commenting on this passage, writes of “Baudelaire’s identification with the old rag and bone man . . . picking over the city’s detritus to refashion it into the work of art.”15 Although this is inexact, since it

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is not the ragpicker but the god of Industry that effects the transformation, still the collection and triage the *chiffonnier* performs is surely, in Baudelaire’s mind, the same work he does as he wanders the city, finding “bric-a-brac that the poet reassembles in his great city poems, part of the dross that his alchemy turns to gold” (Lloyd, 154). But it is also the work his poems do, each poem being for the next in sequence something like the debris of the day that is collected and assembled into the object of use and enjoyment that is the succeeding poem. It is also the work of dream as Freud describes it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where the “day’s residues,” the events of the day immediately preceding the dream, become raw material for the dream. “The psychically significant impression and the indifferent experiences from the previous day are brought together in the dream-material, provided always that it is possible to set up communicating ideas between them.”\(^\text{16}\) The day’s residues are raw material with which the unconscious disguises its repressed wish in the dream.

In “L’Âme du vin” wine sings “Sous ma prison de verre” [Beneath my glass prison] (l. 3) and recalls “la colline en flamme” [the hill in flame] (l. 5)—the flame of the “soleil cuisant” [blistering sun] (l. 6), the hill of the vineyard where it was engendered. In “Le Vin des chiffonniers” glass and flame are recycled and given a new combination: “Souvent, à la clarté rouge d’un réverbère / Dont le vent bat la flamme et tourmente le verre” [Often, in the brightness of a street lamp / Whose flame the wind beats and whose glass it torments] (ll. 1–2). Now, as Freud would ask, is there a communicating idea between them—that is, between the “flamme” + “verre” in one poem and the “flamme” + “verre” in the next (a combination that appears in no other poem in the collection)? Yes, for as Ross Chambers comments, “the staggering gait of the ragpicker, the uncertainty of his progress through the city, reproduces this image”—that is, the image of the vacillating flame. Chambers also points out that the ragpicker’s “zigzagging” is not just “characteristic of drunkards but also, quite independently of alcohol intake, of those whose trade is scavenging.”\(^\text{17}\) For the *chiffonnier* moves from object to object, going toward what looks promising. But if the vacillating flame within the glass of the street lamp is a version of the ragpicker, so too, as Baudelaire himself asserts, is the poet. And since, in the way his poems have of scavenging their predecessors, the flame-begotten wine under glass that strives toward engendering poetry as a *fleur* is recycled (reverberated, one could say) as the zigzagging flame of

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the réverbère, poetry-making is the communicating idea.

The ragpicker who walks and works “comme un poète” talks like the soul of wine. The ragpicker “relève les victimes, . . . / S’enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu” [lifts up the victims, . . . / Becomes intoxicated with the splendors of his own virtue] (94, ll. 10, 12); wine waxed enthusiastic about its power to raise up life’s victims: “À ton fils je rendrai sa force et ses couleurs / Et serai pour ce frêle athlète de la vie / L’huile qui raffermit les muscles des lutteurs” [I will give back to your son his strength and color / And will be for this frail athlete of life / The oil that firms up wrestlers’ muscles] (93, ll. 18–20). Both seek glory: the ragpicker “Épanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets” [Pours out all his heart in glorious projects] (94, l. 8); the soul of wine says to humankind, “Tu me glorifieras” [You will glorify me] (93, l. 16).

In both poems wine sings: “l’âme du vin chantait dans les bouteilles . . . / Un chant plein de lumière et de fraternité” [the soul of wine was singing in the bottles . . . / A song full of light and brotherhood] (93, ll. 1, 4); “Le vin . . . chante ses exploits” [Wine . . . sings of its exploits] (94, ll. 26, 27). Wine is happy to fall “Dans le gosier d’un homme usé par ses travaux” [Into the throat of a man worn down by his labors] (93, l. 10); the ragpicker and his comrades are “Moulus par le travail” [worn out by labor] (94, l. 14), but “Par le gosier de l’homme” [Out of the throat of man]—that is, of the ragpickers—wine sings of its exploits (the combination “gosier” + “homme” appears in no other poem). Wine goes into (Dans) of the throat of man in one poem; wine’s song comes out (Par) of it in the next.

The prose versions of “l’Âme du vin” and “Le vin des chiffonniers” in Du vin et du hachisch are remarkably close to the poems. Take, for example, the following passage, in which we see another version of 94’s lines 9–28:

Maintenant il complimente son armée. La bataille est gagnée, mais la journée a été chaude. Il passe à cheval sous des arcs de triomphe. Son cœur est heureux. Il écoute avec délices les acclamations d’un monde enthousiaste. Tout à l’heure il va dicter un code supérieur à tous les codes connus. Il jure solennellement qu’il rendra ses peuples heureux. La misère et le vice ont disparu de l’humanité.

Et cependant il a le dos et les reins écorchés par le poids de sa hotte. Il est barcelé de chagrins de ménage. Il est moulu par quarante ans de travail et de courses. L’âge le tourmente. Mais le vin, comme un Pactole nouveau, roule à travers l’humanité languissante un or intellectuel. Comme les bons rois, il règne par ses services et chante ses exploits par le gosier de ses sujets.

[Now he compliments his army. The battle is won, but the action had been hot. He rides on horseback under triumphal arches. His heart is happy. ]
He hears with delight the acclamations of an enthusiastic crowd. Soon he is going to dictate a legal code superior to all known codes. He solemnly swears that he will make his people happy. Poverty and vice have disappeared from the human condition.

And yet his back and his loins are tormented by the weight of his basket. He is harassed by household problems. He is worn out by forty years of work and walking. He is tormented by old age. But wine, like a new River Pactolus, rolls an intellectual gold across languishing humanity. Like good kings, it reigns by the services it renders and sings of its exploits through the throats of its subjects.] (OC I: 382)

It is therefore very interesting to see just how much of the last stanza of “Le Vin des chiffonniers”—

Pour noyer la rancœur et bercer l’indolence  
De tous ces vieux maudits qui meurent en silence,  
Dieu, saisi de remords, avait fait le sommeil;  
L’Homme ajoute le Vin, fils sacré du Soleil!

[To drown the rancor and cradle the indolence  
Of all those old condemned ones who die in silence,  
God, seized with remorse, had made sleep;  
Man added Wine, sacred son of the Sun!] (ll. 29–32)

—does not appear in the prose version: “Il y a sur la boule terrestre une foule innombrable, innomée, dont le sommeil n’endormirait pas suffisamment les souffrances. Le vin compose pour eux des chants et des poèmes” [There are on the terrestrial ball a countless, nameless multitude whose sufferings slumber would not sufficiently put to sleep. For them, wine makes up songs and poems] (OC I: 382). There is no God here (nor in the prose version of “L’Âme du vin”), no remorse, and no drowning.

“Le Vin des chiffonniers” / “Le Vin de l’assassin”

Drowning and remorse, however, have their place (remorse by its absence) in “Le Vin de l’assassin” [The Murderer’s Wine] (1857: 95), in which a man drowns his wife and will sleep without remorse, with the help of wine:

Je l’ai jetée au fond d’un puits,  
Et j’ai même poussé sur elle
Chapter 1

Tous les pavés de la margelle.
—Je l’oublierai si je puis!

. . .

Je serai ce soir ivre-mort;
Alors, sans peur et sans remord,
Je me coucherai sur la terre,

Et je dormirai comme un chien!

[I threw her into a well
And I even pushed onto her
All the stones of the rim.
—I will forget her if I can!

Tonight I’ll be dead drunk.
Then, without fear and without remorse,
I will lie down on the ground,

And I’ll sleep like a dog!] (ll. 13–16, 42–45)

Wine will help him forget, and sleep; but he will need a lot of it: “D’autant de vin qu’en peut tenir / Son tombeau;—ce n’est pas peu dire” [As much wine as her tomb can hold—and that’s not a small amount] (ll. 11–12). Thus in both poems wine is the supplement that makes sleep and the relief of suffering possible; and remorse figures in both as well, but in radically different ways: God’s remorse that leads him to create sleep versus a murderer’s remorse for which he seeks oblivion in wine-assisted sleep.

“Autant qu’un roi je suis heureux” [I am as happy as a king] (l. 5), he declares, echoing two moments in “Le Vin des chiffonniers.” One of them is when wine sings of its exploits “Et règne par ses dons aussi que les vrais rois” [And reigns by its gifts like true kings] (l. 28). This passage closely follows the prose version, as we can see in the last sentence of the passage quoted above. The other is when the ragpicker “sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets, / Épanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets” [without worrying about the spies, his subjects, / Pours out all his heart in glorious projects] (ll. 7–8). The “mouchards” [spies] are the police who patrol the city at night, “des patrouilles” [patrols] in an earlier version of the poem (OC I: 1049n). He does not worry about their listening to his speech and reporting it to the authorities because in his delusion he takes them to be “ses sujets” [his subjects] and himself to be their king. The
police spies are not present in the prose version: “Il parle tout seul; il verse son âme dans l’air froid et ténébreux de la nuit” [He speaks in solitude; he pours out his soul in the cold and shadowy night air] (OC I: 381).

Why does Baudelaire add the “mouchards” to the scene? I think it is because to do so sets up a connection with “Le Vin de l’assassin,” in which a murderer confesses to his crime, heedless of the consequences of his confession. He does not care who hears, because he plans to lie down dead drunk in the street, where

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. . . .

[The heavy wheeled cart
Loaded with stones and mud,
The hurtling wagon may well

Crush my guilty head
Or cut me in half,
I don’t care. . . .] (ll. 46–51)

Thus his “Je m’en moque” answers the “sans prendre souci.” In Baudelaire’s sketch for a play to be called “L’Ivrogne,” which recounts a more complicated version of the same murder, the murderer tries to escape detection but ultimately cannot help confessing, and the police take him away (OC I: 634).

In the play the motive for murder is not at all what it is in the poem. In the poem the murderer tells us that he killed his wife so that he could drink as much as he wanted without being torn apart by her tears when he came home with no money because he had spent it all on drink. But in the play that is not a problem, because he is no longer living with her (OC I: 631). A rich young man is in love with the wife, but she resists his advances. The husband is aware of this and is jealous, but he uses “le prétexte de sa jalousie surexcitée pour se cacher à lui-même qu’il en veut surtout à sa femme de sa résignation, de sa douceur, de sa patience, de sa vertu” [the pretext of his overheated jealousy to conceal from himself the fact that he is most of all angry at his wife for her self-denial, her sweetness, her patience, her
virtue] (OC I: 632).


Baudelaire changed the motive for the crime to something much more like the sentiment expressed in “Le Vin du solitaire” [The Solitary Man’s Wine] (1857: 96), that the singular glance from a desirable woman or a libidinous kiss “ne vaut pas” [is not worth] (l. 9) the penetrating balms the wine bottle can furnish the “solitaire.” Indeed, the murderer was happy to declare “Me voilà libre et solitaire!” [Now I am free and solitary!] (l. 41) (see Richter, 1282). That the rejected woman’s glance slides in our direction like a white ray of light that the moon sends to the trembling surface of a lake “Quand elle y veut baigner sa beauté nonchalante” [When she wants to bathe her nonchalant beauty in it] (l. 4) is surely not unconnected to the woman in the well. The speaker in this poem finds wine more attractive; the speaker in the other would forget the woman in the water if he could, and he covers her with stones to blot out her image, so that he is now free to be alone with his wine.

“Le Vin du solitaire” / “Le Vin des amants”

While in “Le Vin du solitaire,” as in “Le Vin de l’assassin,” the narrator turns his back on a woman for the sake of wine, in “Le Vin des amants” [The Lovers’ Wine] (1857: 97) the opposite takes place in that the narrator enjoys both at the same time. Wine does not destroy love; it contributes to amorous ecstasy.

Or at least that is the possibility the narrator holds out in hopes that his mistress will accept his proposal that they drink wine together to flee to the paradise of his dreams. But as Richter points out (1296), it is the paradise of his dreams. And there is something more troubling: the torturing “calenture” (l. 6) that will affect the poet and his lover, angels though they be. Both Adam and Pichois quote the definition Littré’s Dictionnaire (1873) gives the word: “species of furious delirium to which sailors are subject in the torrid zone” (OC I: 1057)—which is too bad, because they miss the essential, which can be found (as Richter notes [1293]) in Bescherelle’s Dictionnaire of 1856, more contemporaneous with the first publication (and possibly the composition) of the poem in 1857: “Espèce de délire furieux auquel les navigateurs sont sujets sous la zone torride . . . caractérisée particulièrement par le désir irrésistible de se jeter à la mer” [species of
furious delirium to which sailors are subject in the torrid zone... characterized in particular by the irresistible desire to throw oneself into the water] (italics added). It is that particular characteristic that is behind its appearance in the poem (in which Baudelaire’s formulation “implacable calen-
ture” seems to echo Bescherelle’s “désir irrésistible”). It explains why even though the narrator and his lover would be flying through the air, he imagines them to be “nageant” [swimming] (l. 12). And it recalls the singular look of an amorous woman transformed in the poem before into a ray of moonlight “Que la lune onduleuse envoie au lac tremblant, / Quand elle y veut baigner sa beauté nonchalante” [That the undulant moon sends to the trembling lake, / When she wants to bathe her nonchalant beauty in it] (ll. 3–4). The moon, in other words, wants to go into the water, a desire that is becoming “implacable” (l. 6)—that is, insistent—in that it has now appeared in two successive poems. In fact, the action of going into the water appears in three successive poems, if we remember the woman thrown into the well in “Le Vin de l’assassin.” Indeed, it is as if the poems (“Le Vin du solitaire” and “Le Vin des amants”) were remembering it.

“Le Vin des amants” / “La Mort des amants”

“La Mort des amants” [The Lovers’ Death] (1857: 98) begins a new section, “La Mort” (after “Le Vin”). But the poem’s title so strongly parallels that of the immediately preceding poem, “Le Vin des amants,” that it is obvious Baudelaire does not want the division into sections to trouble the continuing connections between sequential poems. The motif of two-ness predominates in both: in “Le Vin des amants,” the lovers are “Comme deux anges” [Like two angels] (l. 5), “Dans un délire parallèle” [In a parallel delirium] (l. 11), and “côte à côte” [side by side] (l. 12); in “La Mort des amants,” their “deux cœurs seront deux vastes flambeaux, / Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières / Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux” [two hearts will be two immense torches, / That will reflect their double lights / In our two spirits, those twin mirrors] (ll. 6–8). In this respect the two poems are like the two lovers, each a mirror reflecting the other, and what they reflect is doubling itself.

Yet in other ways they diverge. “Le Vin des amants” (1857: 97) was an invitation to erotic ecstasy, “La Mort des amants” (1857: 98) an invitation to death. The former looked to “le bleu...du matin” [the blue...of morning] (l. 7), the latter to “Un soir plein...de bleu” [An evening full...of blue] (l. 9). Both allude to a better sky, the “ciel féerique et divin” [magical and divine sky] (97, l. 4) where wine would take the lovers,
the “cieux plus beaux” [more beautiful skies] (98, l. 4) under which the flowers bloomed, but the latter is a destination, the former a provenance. One poem describes a departure, the other a final destination.

“La Mort des amants” / “La Mort des pauvres”

At least three items are recycled from “La Mort des amants” into “La Mort des pauvres” [The Death of the Poor] (1857: 99) besides death: beds, an angel who does household chores, and doors that open. The lovers will have “des lits pleins d’odeurs légères, / Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux” [beds full of light scents, / Divans deep as tombs] (98, ll. 1–2), beds that are or will become tombs; an “Ange . . . refait le lit des gens pauvres et nus” [angel . . . remakes the bed of poor and naked folk] (99, ll. 9, 11); that Angel is Death, those beds tombs. This Angel remakes beds; the other Angel will open the doors of the room where the lovers have died, polish the mirrors, and relight the fires.

Yet the lovers are fortunate. Their death seems willed, as if they had made a suicide pact. Their beds are gently scented; exotic flowers have been brought in just for them. They die in luxury. But the poor are so unfortunate in life that death is their only hope. Their assurance of dying is their only wealth, their “grenier mystique” [mystic granary] (l. 12); they know that when it comes they will find rest. Death does, though, have a “mystique” in both poems, as the lovers die on “Un soir plein de rose et de bleu mystique” [An evening full of pink and mystic blue] (l. 9).

In 98 we see an Angel “entr’ouvrant les portes” [opening the doors] (l. 12), complemented in 99 by a “portique ouvert sur les Cieux inconnus” [portico open to unknown Skies] (l. 14). The Angel will pass through the doors to “ranimer” [bring back to life] (l. 13) the lovers, allegorized as flames and mirrors. Thus, the lovers remain where they are, and new life comes to them through the doors. The poor, on the other hand, will leave where they are and exit through the “portique” to unknown skies, possibly to life after death. What the Angel is expected to do at the end of “La Mort des amants,” to “ranimer” the lovers, is ironically echoed by what Death does in the first line of “La Mort des pauvres”: “C’est . . . la Mort qui fait vivre” [It is . . . Death that brings life]—ironically, because what Death in 99 does is merely allow the poor to live with at least the hope that Death will put an end to their suffering. Death is not, at least not at this moment in the poem, bringing life after death.
“La Mort des pauvres” / “La Mort des artistes”

Whereas Death was associated with something mystic in “La Mort des amants”—the “bleu mystique” of the evening when the lovers will die—and in “La Mort des pauvres” with the “grenier mystique” that is one of its names, in “La Mort des artistes” [The Death of Artists] (1857: 100) that adjective is reserved not for Death directly but for “le but” [the goal]: “Pour piquer dans le but, mystique quadrature” [To strike the goal, mystic quadrature] (l. 3). (Baudelaire is alluding to the quadrature of the circle, traditionally an impossible yet dreamed-of goal.) The phrase “le but” appears in only one other poem in 1857, “La Mort des pauvres,” where it is another name for Death: “le but de la vie” [the goal of life] (l. 2). Therefore, among these three poems Death as “mystique” unites the first and second, and “le but” as “mystique” the second and third.

In the same line as it is “le but,” Death for the poor is also “le seul espoir” [the only hope] (99, l. 2); and it is that as well for the artists, who “N’ont qu’un espoir” [Have but one hope] (100, l. 12), which is that Death will make the flowers of their brain blossom. Note that there are three parts to this mirroring effect: (1) that there is only one (“le seul,” “N’ont qu’un”) (2) hope (“espoir”), and (3) that it is Death (“la Mort”). As the Angel will “ranimer” the lovers in “La Mort des amants,” and Death “fait vivre” (l. 1) the poor in “La Mort des pauvres,” Death “Fera s’épanouir” [Will make blossom] (l. 14) the flowers in “La Mort des artistes.”

Thus does the 1857 Fleurs du mal end with an allusion to itself, and to the difference between realization and intent. Baudelaire’s hope that after his death the flowers he envisioned would eventually blossom—and that his intent be realized—comes closer to fulfillment every time a mirroring effect such as this is brought to light.