BAUDELAIRE REPEATEDLY called the Spleen de Paris a “pendant” to the Fleurs du mal (Corr. II: 299, 339, 512, 523, 566, 572, 591). What did he mean by that term? According to Bescherelle, “pendants” can be “Paintings, engravings, groups of sculpture of equal size representing nearly similar objects, and destined to figure together, to correspond to each other” or “The equal or peer, in speaking of persons or things that have many connections, many analogies.” From the reading of the Fleurs du mal pursued in the two preceding chapters, it has become clear that each of the poems in either edition of that volume is a “pendant” to its neighbor in this sense, that they are each other’s counterpart. We found that this was true even when, in fact especially when, as was usually the case, the two poems were not in any obvious way about the same thing. If, then, the Spleen de Paris is the “pendant” to that collection, it is not because the prose poems are about the same things as the Fleurs du mal but because they are similar in another way—in their ordering, in their architecture, in their fabric.

Baudelaire made some oft-cited comments about their fabric, or lack thereof, in a letter to Arsène Houssaye, literary director of La Presse, which published this letter, along with the first nine poems, on August 26, 1862.¹

¹. The remainder of the first twenty poems would appear in La Presse on August 27 and September 24.
Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas
dire, sans injustice, qu’il n’a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y
est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement. Considérez,
je vous prie, quelles admirables commodités cette combinaison nous offre
tous, à vous, à moi et au lecteur. Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons,
moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture; car je ne suspends
pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d’une intrigue superflicue.
Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se
rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez
que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l’espérance que quelques-uns de ces
tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j’ose vous
dédier le serpent tout entier.

[My dear friend, I am sending you a little work of which it cannot be justly
said that it has neither tail nor head, since on the contrary everything is at
the same time head and tail, alternatively and reciprocally. Consider, I ask
you, the admirable advantages this combination offers to everybody—to
you, to me, and to the reader. We can interrupt where we like, I my rev-
erie, you the manuscript, the reader his reading; for I do not hang the
latter’s restive upon the interminable thread of a superfluous plot. Remove
one vertebra, and the two pieces of this tortuous fantasy will reunite effort-
lessly. Cut it up in numerous fragments, and you will see that each can
exist on its own. In the hope that some of these sections will be sufficiently
alive to please and amuse you, I am so bold as to dedicate to you the entire
serpent.] (OC I: 275)

He could have been describing the _Fleurs du mal_. For we have discovered
that the poems that compose that volume are also all heads and tails, every
two poems forming a single body of which one poem could be described
as the head and the other the tail. Every poem except the first and the
last is both a head and a tail, both the tail of the poem to one side of it
and the head of the poem to the other. We recall Baudelaire declaring (in
speaking of Wagner’s music, which he called a poetic work), that in “une
poésie bien faite . . . toutes choses y sont bien unies, conjointes, réciproque-
ment adaptées, et . . . prudemment concaténées” [well-made poetry . . . all
things are well united, conjoined, reciprocally adapted, and . . . prudently
concatenated] (OC II: 803). We found that the poems in the _Fleurs du mal_
were not only conjoined but also reciprocally adapted—that he rewrote
poems that had appeared in print before 1857 so that they would fit into
the sequence in 1857, and that he rewrote poems from 1857 so that they
would fit into the new sequence of 1861, that in those sequences each was
adapted for and with other neighboring poems, and that as a result the
poems are reciprocally related to each other. In characterizing the prose poems as being both heads and tails “alternatively and reciprocally,” he confirms the relevance to his poems of that concept of reciprocity.

Baudelaire goes on to say that the manuscript he is sending Houssaye (which was not the whole book—at that point far from finished—but only the first twenty-six poems) could be cut at any point, and that it is like a serpent from which one could remove a vertebra and the two remaining pieces could then join together without difficulty. He also says that if the serpent were cut up into a number of pieces, each could exist on its own. Some commentators have concluded that this means that the order in which the poems appear has no importance. J. A. Hiddleston, for example, maintains that Baudelaire was giving Houssaye the freedom “to publish the poems in any order and to omit whichever ones he pleases.” He cites in support of this claim the first three sentences of the letter (up to “. . . superflue”), evidently focusing on Baudelaire’s saying that Houssaye could “couper” [cut] the collection of twenty poems anywhere he wanted. But as Steve Murphy points out, at this moment in the letter, before Baudelaire takes up the serpent metaphor, the verb couper means “to interrupt the creation, the publication, or the reading.” It means, in other words, to interrupt: to cut off, not to cut up.

In fact, Houssaye did interrupt their publication, refusing to print the fourth and last installment Baudelaire gave him, a group of six poems (numbers 21–26 of the eventually published volume), even though an announcement in La Presse that they would soon appear had accompanied the third installment. He was angry to discover that some of the poems Baudelaire submitted had already been published elsewhere. In a letter to Houssaye on October 8, 1862, Baudelaire justified his decision to include previously published poems by saying that he wanted the reader to get a sense of the whole: “Je voulais donner au lecteur une idée complète de l’ouvrage dans son ampleur, ouvrage conçu depuis longtemps, et avant d’entremêler quelques morceaux anciens, j’ai consulté deux ou trois de mes amis, qui m’ont dit que mes scrupules seraient puérils” [I wanted to give the reader a complete idea of the work in its fullness, a work conceived long ago, and before including some old pieces, I consulted two or three of my friends, who told me that to have scruples about that would be childish] (Corr. II: 264). Apparently Baudelaire, recognizing how hard it was to get his poems published in the first place, was willing to make the sacrifice of allowing the editor to stop the series at any point (or at least

took the risk of expressing that willingness, no doubt hoping he would not in fact do so), yet he still considered the order important enough that he did not simply send him his most recent, unpublished, poems. In fact, he considered the order so important that he took the risk of angering Housse- saye by including the older poems. As Murphy writes, “Above all, despite the concessions we see him make, Baudelaire wanted to present a small (but no less genuine for that) collection [recueil] and not a fortuitous and heterogeneous assemblage of his most recent poetic productions” (57).

The interruption could take place at any point because, Baudelaire says, he does not make the reader’s restive will hang upon the “fil interminable d’une intrigue superflue” [the interminable thread of a superfluous plot]. Murphy suggests that he may be alluding, though in an ironic way, to the “interminable” thread of narrative characteristic of novels published in serial form in publications such as Housseay’s La Presse—ironically, because in fact readers delighted in following such a thread (55). The upshot of this is that, far from being a way to attract readers, the absence of a fil conducteur, whether of a narrative or something else (that something else is what I intend to show in the pages that follow), would actually be a disadvantage in marketing the work. Therefore, Baudelaire is no more serious here than when he says that the work could be mutiliated and still survive to his satisfaction.

But in writing of this “fil . . . d’une intrigue” Baudelaire may also be alluding to something altogether different. When he says of Wagner that his music is like well-made poetry, where all things are so well united, conjoined, and reciprocally adapted that one could say they were prudently concatenated, he had just been quoting Liszt on Wagner, in particular Liszt’s account of the difference between traditional opera, which is composed of discrete pieces—arias and choruses—separate in themselves, and Wagner’s compositional style, based as it was on recurring motifs weaving in and out of a highly unified work. The passage he quotes from Liszt begins with this sentence (the italics are Baudelaire’s):

Le spectateur, préparé et résigné à ne chercher aucun des morceaux détachés qui, engrenés l’un après l’autre sur le fil de quelque intrigue, composent la substance de nos opéras habituels, pourra trouver un singulier intérêt à suivre durant trois actes la combinaison profondément réfléchie, étonnamment habile et poétiquement intelligente, avec laquelle Wagner, au moyen de plusieurs phrases principales, a serré un nœud mélodique qui constitue tout son drame.

[The spectator, prepared and resigned to look for none of the detached pieces that, engaged one after the other on the thread of some plot, compose the sub-
stance of our normal operas, will be able to find a singular interest in following for the course of three acts the deeply thought-out, astonishingly skilful and poetically intelligent combination by which Wagner, by using several principal phrases, had tightened a melodic knot that constitutes all its drama.] (OC II: 801)

In traditional opera, the detached “morceaux”—arias, duets, trios, choruses, and so on—have nothing in common musically except that they come from the same pen and are therefore written in the same style. The only thing that holds them together is “le fil de quelque intrigue,” the thread of the opera’s plot. With different words, as part of a different plot, they could just as easily have appeared in another opera by the same composer. Handel, in fact, did this often. In Liszt’s text, as Baudelaire quotes it here in his own essay “Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris,” which was first published in the Revue européenne on April 1, 1861, just a year before the letter to Houssaye, the separate pieces connected like beads on a rosary on the “fil de quelque intrigue” belong to a tradition Wagner rejects. Baudelaire aligns himself with Wagner, not just in the passage quoted earlier in which he attributes to his music all the characteristics of well-made poetry, but also in his letter to the composer of February 17, 1860. The first time he heard Wagner’s music, he writes, “il m’a semblé que je connaissais cette musique, et plus tard en y réfléchissant, j’ai compris d’où venait ce mirage; il me semblait que cette musique était la mienne” [it seemed to me that I knew this music, and later upon reflection, I understood where this mirage came from: I was under the impression that this music was mine] (Corr. I: 672–73; italics Baudelaire’s). The Fleurs du mal (and, as we will find, the Spleen de Paris) are Wagnerian in their construction, united by recurring turns of phrase. Baudelaire, like Wagner, demands of his readers, if they wish to fully enjoy his poems, that they remember what they have just read. He quotes Liszt as saying,

Wagner, forçant notre méditation et notre mémoire à un si constant exercice, 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. Par cette méthode qui complique les faciles jouissances procurées par une série de chants rarement apparentés entre eux, il demande une singulière attention du public; mais en même temps il prépare de plus parfaites émotions à ceux qui savent les goûter.

[Wagner, compelling our meditation and memory to such constant exercise, by that alone tears music’s effect away from the realm of vague sentiments and to its charms adds pleasures of the mind. By this method, which
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complicates the facile enjoyments procured by a series of songs rarely related to each other, he demands an extraordinary degree of attentiveness from the public; but at the same time he prepares more perfect emotions for those who know how to taste them.] (OC II: 802; Baudelaire’s italics)

Were we to read the *Fleurs du mal* as a “pur album,” which Baudelaire assured Vigny it was not, as a collection of poems rarely connected to each other, we would never know the higher pleasures he reserves for the reader.

When Baudelaire tells Houssaye in 1862 that readers of his prose poems will not be hanging on the “fil . . . d’une intrigue superflue,” I think he is remembering what he and Liszt were both saying in 1861, that Wagner’s operas do not depend upon “le fil de quelque intrigue” for their power. For it will be, as Baudelaire goes on to say in that same article, when we consider those operas “sans poésie,” which is to say without their words and therefore without their plot, without “le fil de quelque intrigue,” that Wagner’s music would yet be a poetic work, endowed with all the qualities that constitute well-made poetry, all its elements united, conjoined, and reciprocally adapted (OC II: 803). The equivalent for the *Fleurs du mal* would be to consider how the poems fit together into one single poem, to detach our attention momentarily from the plot of each poem as well as from the kind of overarching plot that some commentators have thought they saw (from the birth of the poet in “Bénédiction” to his death in “La Mort des artistes” in 1857 and in “Le Voyage” in 1861), in order to enjoy the greater pleasures dependent on the exercise of memory.

It is only after this point in the letter to Houssaye that Baudelaire introduces the serpent metaphor: “Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine” [Remove one vertebra, and the two pieces of this tortuous fantasy will effortlessly reunite]. It is important to bear in mind that he did not say, as Théophile Gautier’s misreading (or misremembering) would have it, that one could remove several vertebrae and the remaining pieces would join—“On peut enlever quelques-uns des anneaux et les morceaux se rejoignent toujours vivants” [One can remove some of the rings and the pieces, still alive, will reunite] (Gautier, cited in Murphy, 42)—but only one (at a time). This is in fact what we saw happen in the second edition of the *Fleurs du mal* when Baudelaire was obliged to remove poems from the first. “Le Léthé” (1857: 30), one of the offending six, came between “Le Vampire” (1857: 29; 1861: 31) and “Une nuit que j’étais près d’une affreuse Juive . . . ” (1857: 31; 1861: 32) in 1857; we found that the ties connecting the three poems (such as the “baisers” in all three) were strong enough that “Le Vampire” and “Une nuit . . . ” were still attachable. The same was true in the case of “La Béa-
trice” (1857: 86; 1861: 115) and “Un voyage à Cythère” (1857: 88; 1861: 116), between which “Les Métamorphoses du vampire” (1857: 87) was removed, and “Le Flambeau vivant” (1857: 38; 1861: 43) and “Réversibilité” (1857: 40; 1861: 44) after the removal of “À celle qui est trop gaie” (1857: 39); although Baudelaire did change a line in “Le Flambeau vivant” to enhance the new arrangement, there were other strands running through the original three. Far from suggesting that the poems could just as well be assembled in any order the reader pleases, the vertebra metaphor actually testifies to the supreme importance of the order Baudelaire—and not some meddling editor—had given them. It also testifies to the fact that the Fleurs and the Spleen de Paris have the same sequential structure.

When Baudelaire writes “Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part” [Cut it up in numerous fragments, and you will see that each can exist on its own], he does not go on to say, as he did in the preceding sentence about what would happen if one removed one vertebra, that the pieces would then automatically join up, but only that each could exist on its own. Of course they could, for the individual poems are each a work of art, like the verse poems. As Murphy remarks, “‘chacun peut exister à part’: certainly, but one could have said as much about the Fleurs du mal, for the autonomy of the individual poems did not prevent them from taking on a new meaning, larger and more complex, within the collection” (54).

Even though editors have tended to put the letter to Houssaye at the beginning of the book as if it were the author’s preface, this was clearly not Baudelaire’s intent. When he drew up the final table of contents at some point in 1865 or 1866, he did not even include the letter, much less give it pride of place as a preface. It is not even clear that he had meant for Houssaye to print it as he did with the first installment in La Presse. The letter is not addressed to the reader, as is “Au lecteur” in the Fleurs du mal; it is addressed to an editor of only part of the whole, and the reader is spoken of in the third person. Kaplan, in his translation of the prose poems, had the wisdom to put it in an appendix, not at the head of the book. As Murphy concludes, “In other words, despite the letter’s affirmations but in conformity with the intentions therein expressed in a thinly veiled way, the poet did not want his work to be sliced up like a sausage, still less that its integrity as a whole be taken away. Nevertheless, he was obliged to recognize at every moment, in these humiliating negotiations, that he was not dealing from a position of strength” (58).

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“L’Étranger” / “Le Désespoir de la vieille”

What Baudelaire said about the significance of heads and tails is borne out in the first pair of poems, for the head of the first (its first words) is repeated in the tail (the last words) of the second. “L’Étranger” [The Stranger] (1) begins with the question “Qui aimes-tu le mieux . . . ?” [Whom do you love the best . . . ?] (OC I: 277); “Le Désespoir de la vieille” [The Old Woman’s Despair] (2) concludes with “nous faisons horreur aux petits enfants que nous voulons aimer” [we appear horrible to the little children we want to love] (OC I: 278). One poem is the opposite of the other, for the stranger loves no one, while the old woman wants to love someone but cannot, since the child rejects her love. The one thing the stranger loves is clouds: “les nuages qui passent . . . les merveilleux nuages!” [the passing clouds . . . the marvelous clouds!] (OC I: 277)—as if Baudelaire were establishing a connection between this first poem in the Spleen de Paris and the last poem in the Fleurs du mal: “Les plus riches cités, les plus grands paysages, / Jamais ne contenaient l’attrait mystérieux / De ceux que le hasard fait avec les nuages” [The richest cities, the grandest landscapes / Never contained the mysterious attraction / Of those that chance makes with clouds] (“Le Voyage,” ll. 65–67). The old woman, as Henri Lemaître notes, “having retreated into her eternal solitude, becomes . . . the sister of the stranger of the first poem.”

For the stranger lives in solitude, too, having neither father, mother, sister, brother, nor friend. Robert Kopp asks, “Is the old woman the ‘sister’ of the stranger, as H. Lemaître would have it? If the two are connected by their solitude and their isolation, they are nevertheless different. The stranger leaves the world, while the old woman seeks to communicate with it. Besides, there is nothing mysterious about her, nothing that would liken her to the ‘homme énigmatique’ [enigmatic man] of the preceding poem.” What Kopp is describing in his attempt to dismiss the notion that there could be any connection between the poems turns out to have the reverse effect, for he is showing that these two have precisely the kind of “same yet opposite” quality that neighboring poems in the Fleurs du mal also have. Of course they cannot be identical! The point is that they are close enough to be each other’s symmetrical opposite. Kaplan understands this: for him these two poems form a “diptych” in which the old woman’s search for affection “symmetrically contradicts the male outsider’s disclaimer, in the first fable, of companionship.” Lawler does not quite seem to grasp the symmetrical

7. Edward K. Kaplan, Baudelaire’s Prose Poems: The Esthetic, the Ethical, and the Reli-
opposition but does note that the second poem “is an abrasive variation on the same theme” (1997, 177) as the first.

“Le Désespoir de la vieille” / “Le Confiteor de l’artiste”

In “Le Confiteor de l’artiste” [The Artist’s Confession] (3) the narrator, the artist of the title, speaks of the “Grand délice” [Great delight] of gazing out to sea, where he focuses on “une petite voile . . . qui par sa petitesse et son isolement imite mon irrémédiable existence” [a little sail . . . that by its littleness and its isolation imitates my irremediable existence] (OC I: 278). The “petite voile” also imitates, by its littleness, its isolation, and the letters that form it, the “petite vieille”—no other “petite v . . . le” appears in the collection⁸—who withdraws into “sa solitude éternelle” [her eternal solitude] (OC I: 278) after the infant rejects her embrace. The “petite vieille” herself resembles the child whom she at first rejoiced to see (she “sentit toute réjouie en voyant ce joli enfant” [felt completely delighted to see this pretty child] [OC I: 277]), as the artist initially feels a “Grand délice” as he stares at the sea and sky (on whose horizon he spots the little sail). The child is “fragile comme elle . . . et, comme elle aussi, sans dents et sans cheveux” [so fragile like her . . . and, like her, too, toothless and bald]. That initial delight will change, in both poems. The woman will try to embrace the child, who will struggle and cry out, filling the house with his “glapissements” [yelpings] (OC I: 278); she will go weep in a corner. The artist will turn against the sight that so pleased him, when the thoughts it provokes become too intense. His nerves will cry out like the child: “Mes nerfs trop tendus ne donnent plus que des vibrations criardes et douloureuses” [My nerves, too tightly wound, produce only screaming and painful vibrations] (OC I: 278). The natural spectacle now revolt him. His impulse is to flee: “faut-il éternellement souffrir, ou fuir éternellement le beau?” [must one forever suffer, or forever flee the beautiful?]. He says to Nature, “laisse-moi!” [leave me alone!]. The study of the beautiful, he concludes, is a duel in which the artist “crie de frayeur avant d’être vaincu” [cries out in fright before being conquered] (OC I: 279).

The poems together form a complex intertwining of symmetrical opposites. The artist resembles the “petite vieille” in that they both initially delight in what they see but then something happens that makes them suffer; they resemble each other as well in that each bears a resemblance to the

thing they see. But as the plot of the second poem unfolds, the artist comes to resemble the child: the child cries out, and the artist’s nerves cry out; the child is afraid of the woman, and the artist is afraid of the spectacle of nature; the child tries to escape the woman’s embrace, and the artist flees nature’s beauty. It’s a complicated play of mirrors, with the child mirroring the “petite vieille,” the “petite voile” mirroring the artist, the “petite voile” mirroring the “petite vieille,” and the artist mirroring the child.

“Le Confiteor de l’artiste” / “Un plaisant”

The narrator’s nervous system, reduced to “des vibrations criardes et dou- loureuses” [screaming and painful vibrations] by the spectacle of nature, will be made again to suffer in “Un plaisant” [A Joker] (4), this time by the spectacle of streets and sidewalks filled with carriages and pedestrians at New Year’s, when friends greet friends with gifts and salutations: “délire officiel d’une grande ville fait pour troubler le cerveau du solitaire le plus fort” [official delirium of a great city, made for troubling the brain of the most dedicated loner] (OC I: 279). The narrator, lost in “Solitude” and seeing himself in the “isolement” [isolation] of the sail, is a solitary again here. The “insensibilité de la mer, l’immuabilité du spectacle” [the insensitivity of the sea, the immutability of the spectacle] (OC I: 278) revolted the artist-narrator; in “Un plaisant” the narrator is revolted, “pris d’une incommensurable rage” [seized by an incommensurable rage] against the behavior of another man confronting another instance of nature’s refusal to react and its immutability when a joker doffs his hat and wishes a happy new year to a donkey trotting along (the donkey representing nature in this urban scene). “L’âne ne vit pas ce beau plaisant, et continua de courir avec zèle où l’appelait son devoir” [The donkey did not see this fine joker, and continued to run with zeal to where his duty called him]. It may be funny to compare a trotting donkey to the sea and sky, but the whole point of the encounter is that the animal shows no sign of having noticed the joker’s salutation or even his existence.

“Un plaisant” / “La Chambre double”

The narrator becomes that donkey in “La Chambre double” [The Double Room] (5). Time, in the form of deadlines for manuscript submissions

9. As Fritz Nies was perhaps the first to point out; Nies also notes that the men carrying their chimera in the next poem are, like the “âne” in “Un Plaisant” and the narrator as
and the payment of debts, “me pousse . . . avec son double aiguillon.—Et hue donc! bourrique! . . . » ” [pushes me . . . with his double goad. “So giddy-up, donkey!” (OC I: 282). As the joker wished the other donkey a good new year (on the occasion of the “nouvel an” [new year])—”Je vous la souhaitez bonne et heureuse!” [I wish you a good and happy one!]—so too does Time promise to announce to him something “bonne” [good] and “nouvelle” [new]: “Il n’y a qu’une Seconde dans la vie humaine qui ait mission d’annoncer une bonne nouvelle, la bonne nouvelle [Baudelaire’s italics] qui cause à chacun une inexplicable peur” [There is but one Second in human life whose mission is to announce good news, the good news that causes in each an inexplicable fear]. He means the news that one’s final hour has arrived and evidently looks forward to that news, so that he can cease to be a donkey under Time’s “brutale dictature” [brutal dictatorship]—as the other donkey was under the goad of another brute, “harcelé par un malotru armé d’un fouet” [harried by a lout armed with a whip]. The inevitable passage of Time was of the essence in “Un plaisant,” too, since it takes place at Time’s official feast day, the passing of the year.

“La Chambre double” / “Chacun sa chimère”

The narrator of “Chacun sa chimère” [Each His Chimera] (6) sees a long “cortège” (OC I: 283)—recalling Time’s “cortège” (OC I: 281) of Memories, Regrets, Spasms, Fears, Anguish, Nightmares, Angers, and Neuroses—of men passing, each carrying on his back an enormous Chimera, heavier than a sack of wheat or coal. These men, like the narrator in 5 when he saw himself as a donkey under Time’s double goad, have become beasts of burden. As Time “pousse” [pushes] him (OC I: 282) these men are “poussés” [pushed] (OC I: 282) as well, by an unconquerable need to keep on walking. As he is “damné” [damned] to live, these men are “condamnés à espérer toujours” [condemned to always hope] (OC I: 283). The memories, regrets, fears, neuroses, and so on that make up Time’s cortège are the narrator’s own, and it is with regard to his own creations that Time pushes especially hard, for his pleasant reverie outside of Time is brought to an end by a knock at the door that could be from “le saute-ruisseau d’un directeur de journal qui réclame la suite du manuscrit” [the messenger from a magazine editor who is demanding the rest of the manuscript] (OC I: 281), and when he looks around his shabby apartment his gaze falls on “les manuscrits, raturés ou incomplets; l’almanach où le crayon a marqué les dates sinistres!” [the manuscripts, marked out or unfinished; the

“bourrique” in “La Chambre double,” being driven forward [vorwärtsgetrieben] (278).
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calendar with sinister dates marked in pencil!], deadlines he is in danger of missing. Thus Time’s cortège parallels the cortège of chimera-bearing men, for each of the latter considered his burden “comme faisant partie de lui-même” [as if it were a part of himself] (OC I: 283).

“Chacun sa chimère” / “Le Fou et la Vénus”

The Chimera on each man’s back looked like headgear: “sa tête fabuleuse surmontait le front de l’homme, comme un de ces casques horribles par lesquels les anciens guerriers espéraient ajouter à la terreur de l’ennemi” [its fabulous head loomed above the man’s forehead, like one of those horrible helmets by which ancient warriors hoped to add to the enemy’s terror] (OC I: 282). The Fool in “Le Fou et la Vénus” [The Fool and the Venus] (7) has a strange head covering, too. Outfitted in traditional court jester attire, he is “coiffé de cornes et de sonnettes” [capped with horns and bells] (OC I: 284). The great size of the “énorme Chimère” [enormous Chimera], however, is matched by that of the statue the Fool adores, “une colossale Vénus” [a colossal Venus]. The Fool is emotionally attached to his Venus, but she does not return his devotion. His eyes speak for him: he is the loneliest of humans, deprived of love and friendship, yet he was made to understand and feel immortal Beauty, and he appeals for pity to the goddess the statue represents. “Mais l’implacable Vénus regarde au loin je ne sais quoi avec ses yeux de marbre” [But the implacable Venus gazes in the distance at I know not what with her marble eyes] (OC I: 284).

“Chacun sa Chimère” and “Le Fou et la Vénus,” like previous pairs, are both parallel and opposite. In addition to the parallels noted above, in each the narrator observes strange behavior (on the part of the men with chimeras, and the Fool) and learns from those engaging in it (one of the men, whom he interrogates, and the Fool’s eyes, which tell his tale of woe). By way of opposites, (a) the chimera “n’était pas un poids inerte” [was not an dead weight] but enveloped and pressed down on the man with powerful muscles, while the Venus remains “implacable”; (b) the men are constantly on the move, “voyageurs” disappearing over the horizon, but the Fool is staying put, “ramassé contre le piédestal” [heaped against the pedestal] of the statue, which is not going anywhere, either; (c) the narrator is at first intrigued by the men with chimeras but is soon overcome by an irresistible “Indifférence” that weighs him down as much as any of the crushing Chimeras, while the Fool is the result of an equivalent “Ennui” on the part of some king, being “un de ces bouffons volontaires chargés de faire rire les rois quand le Remords ou l’Ennui
les obsède” [one of those willing clowns obliged to bring laughter to kings obsessed by Remorse or Ennui] (OC I: 283–84).

“Le Fou et la Vénus” / “Le Chien et le flaçon”

Whereas the Fool appreciates beauty, even to the detriment of his happiness, the dog in “Le Chien et le flaçon” [The Dog and the Perfume Bottle] (8) does not, at least not in the form of a beautiful scent; he would prefer, the narrator tells us, to sniff at a packet of excrement—and in this he resembles the public. He calls his dog over to smell “un excellent parfum acheté chez le meilleur parfumeur de la ville” [an excellent perfume purchased from the best perfumer in the city] (OC I: 284). But when the animal places his wet nose on the open mouth of the bottle, he recoils in fright and barks reproachfully at his owner. An attentive reader may notice that in the preceding poem, the air surrounding the Fool and the Venus was redolent with perfumes so intense one could see them: “que les fleurs excitées brûlent du désir de rivaliser avec l’azur du ciel par l’énergie de leurs couleurs, et que la chaleur, rendant visibles les parfums, les fait monter vers l’astre comme des fumées” [that the excited flowers burn with desire to rival the blue of the sky by the energy of their colors, and that the heat, making the perfumes visible, causes them to rise up to the sun like steam] (OC I: 283). It cannot be by chance that Baudelaire bathes with perfume that scene about the appreciation of beauty and then in the very next poem sets up precisely the opposite response to beauty in the form of perfume (Fritz Nies noticed this as well [279]). The narrator says of the dog that he is one of “ces pauvres êtres” [those poor beings] for whom wagging the tail is “le signe correspondant du rire et du sourire” [the sign corresponding to laughing and smiling], language that echoes, yet inverts, his description of the Fool as “un être affligé” [an afflicted being] given the responsibility “de faire rire les rois” [of making kings laugh]. Both the dog and the Fool are poor beings, and they are connected with laughter—one by laughing (in his peculiarly canine way), the other by provoking laughter in another.

“Le Chien et le flaçon” / “Le Mauvais Vitrier”

There is a direct connection between the glass of the “flacon” [perfume bottle] and the glass so prominently featured in “Le Mauvais Vitrier” [The Bad Glazier] (9), and much else besides in the complex interlocking of parallels and opposites in play between that poem and “Le Chien et le
flacon.” By way of parallel: the narrator sets a trap for the dog, getting it to come over to him by the promise of something pleasant that turns out to be very unpleasant; the narrator sets a trap for the glazier, inviting him up to his apartment, tempting him with the hope of making a sale, only to insult him and destroy his wares. He calls out to the dog: “Mon beau chien . . . approchez” [My fine dog . . . come here]; he calls out to the glazier: “—‘Hé! hé!’ et je lui criai de monter” [“Hey, hey!” and I called out to him to come up] (OC I: 286). There are two categories of smells, one of which is beautiful (perfume), the other not (excrement); there are two categories of windowpanes, one of which is beautiful (colored glass), the other not (plain glass).

By way of opposition: (a) Glass is being shown in both stories, but it is the trickster who shows it (the glass “flacon”) in one poem; it is the trick’s victim who shows it in the other. (b) The victim reproaches the one who tricked him (“il aboie contre moi, en manière de reproche” [he barks at me, by way of reproach]) while the trickster reproaches his victim (“Impudent que vous êtes! vous osez vous promener dans des quartiers pauvres, et vous n’avez pas même de vitres qui fassent voir la vie en beau!” [You are shameless! You dare to go through poor parts of town yet don’t even have windowpanes that would make one see life as beautiful!] [OC I: 287]). (c) One trickster believes what he has to show the victim is beautiful while the other trickster pretends disappointment at learning that what his victim has to show him is not beautiful.

The conclusion to “le Mauvais Vitrier” recombines elements not only from “le Chien et le flacon” but also from “le Fou et la Vénus” in an interesting way. After the narrator chased the glazier out of his apartment and obliged him to retreat down six flights of stairs, “Je m’approchai du balcon et je me saisis d’un petit pot de fleurs, et quand l’homme reparut au débouché de la porte, je laissai tomber perpendiculairement mon engin de guerre” [I approached the balcony and I grabbed a small pot of flowers, and when the man reappeared at the door opening, I let my war machine fall straight down]. The word “débouché” recalls the moment the dog got his unpleasant surprise, placing his wet nose “sur le flacon débouché” [on the opened bottle]. The repeated débouché, a clue Baudelaire may have planted in the hope someone would begin to put all these pieces together, appears in only these two poems (as far as the Spleen de Paris is concerned). The crash of the flowerpot into the glazier’s glass, a forced combination of glass with flowers (a “floral bombardement,” as Murphy puts it [410]), echoes another combination of glass with flowers brought out by the particular way in which Baudelaire ordered his poems, placing “Le Chien et le flacon,” with its bottle of perfume, immediately after “Le Fou et la Vénus,”
where flowers make perfume. More than that, the possibility of “verres de couleur . . . verres roses, rouges, bleus” [glass in color . . . pink, red, and blue glass], reminds us that the flowers that perfumed the setting for the Fool and his Venus were actually trying to intensify their colors, burning with desire to rival the sky’s azure “par l’énergie de leurs couleurs” [by the force of their colors]. The pot of flowers that crashes into the glass because it was not colored and therefore not beautiful reunites the elements of flowers, beauty, color, and glass from the two preceding poems.

In the “Canevas de la dédicace” found among Baudelaire’s notes that was a draft for the letter to Houssaye, he considered describing what would become the Spleen de Paris as “tenant . . . du kaléidoscope” [having something . . . of the kaleidoscope] (OCI: 365), a toy that takes a finite number of elements and with each turn of the wrist reassembles them into a new symmetrically and aesthetically pleasing combination. It looks like a good description of Baudelaire’s modus operandi. It is particularly evident in this instance, where the elements of three successive poems (perfume, flowers, colors, glass, and beauty) are twice reassembled into new combinations. Lawler picks up on the kaleidoscope idea: “after the fashion of a kaleidoscope, ‘À une heure du matin’ twists the screw of ‘Le Mauvais Vitrier’”—he then cites other pairs (yet sees only twenty-five pairs among the fifty poems: 1 with 2, 3 with 4, etc., but not 2 with 3, or 4 with 5 . . . ). He does not, however, see how the same few elements are recombined from poem to poem; instead, he sees the same theme in all: “The same and the other write the endless subversions of the anticlimactic urban sensibility.”

Margery Evans sees the kaleidoscope as emblematic of the collection’s structure and draws as well upon Lévi-Strauss’s discussion of the toy and its relation to bricolage: “A kaleidoscope involves the compositional principle of bricolage, the a posteriori association of elements. Patterns emerge, rather than being preordained from the start (although materials are selected with a view to favouring these patterns). . . . Le Spleen de Pais resembles a kaleidoscope in that it gains its effects from a sequence of fragments which appears at first sight to be completely random.” But despite what she says about the “sequence of fragments,” the interconnections she finds turn out not to be sequential but drawn from here and there in the collection—of the same sort and in the same way as J. A. Hiddleston in his book Baudelaire and Le Spleen de Paris. I agree with Evans that Spleen is like a kaleidoscope, a true instrument of bricolage that recycles the same preexisting set of elements, but I would point out that it does so by means of mirrors that

11. Evans, Baudelaire and Intertextuality, 3, 8; hereafter cited in text.
create aesthetically pleasing symmetries. Each poem reuses elements from its predecessor, and mirror-reversal symmetries are often thereby formed. We just saw an instance of that in “Le Chien et le flacon” and “Le Mauvais Vitrier”; we will see many more.

“Le Mauvais Vitrier” / “À une heure du matin”

The “verres” the narrator desires that would make it possible to “voir la vie en beau” [see life as beautiful] are transformed in “À une heure du matin” [At One O’Clock in the Morning] (10) into the “beaux vers” he wants to create: “Seigneur mon Dieu! accordez-moi la grâce de produire quelques beaux vers” [My Lord God, grant me the grace to produce some beautiful verses] (OC I: 288). The idea that poetry can do what colored glass can do, to make something beautiful out of the sordid world, is what the title Les Fleurs du mal asserts.

Barbara Johnson draws a different conclusion from the vers / verres homonymy: “the story of the window panes’ destruction in ‘Le Mauvais Vitrier’ can be read as an anagrammatical play on the pun ‘briser les verres [to break the glass] = briser les vers’ [to break the poetic lines]. Moving from poetry to prose corresponds to an amputation of everything in poetry that lays claim to unity, totality, immortality, and power.” But the unity, totality, immortality, and power she finds absent from individual prose poems are nevertheless present in the fabric that unites them, in the larger poem they together form.

At one o’clock in the morning, when the narrator of the tenth prose poem finds the tranquility to go over the events of the day, he reproaches himself for “m’être vanté . . . de plusieurs vilaines actions que je n’ai jamais commises” [having boasted . . . of several wicked acts that I never committed]. As we have already seen, each poem in the Fleurs recycles elements of the immediately preceding poem as the unconscious recycles in dream elements of the immediately preceding day. The poems in prose work the same way, and in this instance the events of the immediately preceding day are also the events of the immediately preceding poem, where in fact the narrator did claim to commit an evil “action”—“une action d’éclat” [a brilliant action] (OC I: 286), and one of those “actions dangereuses ou inconvenantes” [dangerous or inappropriate actions] that may have a satanic origin—that he may not have committed, one that Baudelaire himself was thought to have committed because he wrote about it in “Le Mauvais Vit-

Another of the events of the day he recalls was “[d']être monté pour tuer le temps, pendant une averse, chez une sauteuse qui m’a prié de lui dessiner un costume de Vénustre” [to have gone up to kill time, during a rainstorm, at the apartment of a woman acrobat who asked me to draw her a Vénustre costume] (OC I: 288; Baudelaire’s italics). “Vénustre,” Yves Florenne suggests, may be a slip of the tongue on the acrobat’s part combining “Vénus” with “rustre” [rustic]. The detail of the narrator being asked to sketch such a costume is a puzzle whose answer is available only to those willing to read the poems in pairs. The narrator is here retracing the steps of the glazier, to whom, he says, “je . . . criai de monter” [I called to come up]—as the narrator here had come up [“être monté”] to the acrobat’s apartment. In no other poem does the verb monter appear in the context of climbing the stairs to an apartment. In a symmetrical opposition typical of these poems in their sequential pairings, the narrator in 10 is placed in a situation symmetrically opposite that of the narrator in 9. The narrator in 10 goes up the stairs to pay a visit to someone in her apartment; the narrator in 9 receives the visit of someone who climbs the stairs to his apartment. The visitor in 9 brings panes of glass; the visitor in 10 provides a drawing of a Venus costume. As Murphy suggests, Venus in the kind of performance for which the sauteuse was preparing would hardly be wearing anything at all [“peu habillée”]. This was true of “sauteuses” generally, as Murphy attests in a quotation from Balzac’s Le Cousin Pons, where a character speaks of one particular sauteuse whom “one can see practically naked [“quasi nue”] every evening for forty sous” (Murphy, 186). Thus a Venus costume would have the transparency of . . . glass.

“À une heure du matin” / “La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse”

Another reversal of the narrator’s situation transpires between “À une heure du matin” (10) and “La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse” [The Wild Woman and the Coquette] (11). In “À une heure du matin,” the narrator in his apartment, having at last found a moment to himself at the end of a long day, is happy to be locked away: “D’abord, un double tour à la serrure. il me semble que ce tour de clef augmentera ma solitude et fortifiera les barricades qui me séparent actuellement du monde” [First,
a double turn of the lock. It seems to me that this turn of the key will
increase my solitude and fortify the barricades separating me now from
the world] (OC I: 287). In 11 someone else is under lock and key, and she
is, on the contrary, very unhappy. It is the “femme sauvage” the narrator
takes his mistress to see, locked inside a “solide cage de fer” [solid cage
of iron] where she shakes “les barreaux comme un orang-outang exaspéré
par l’exil” [the bars like an orangutan exasperated by exile] (OC I: 289).
We had just seen how in the intersection of “Le Mauvais Vitrier” (9) and
“À une heure du matin” (10) the narrator in 9 parallels the female circus
performer in 10 in that both play host to a visitor who offers the host
something transparent to look through (the glazier’s glass, the narrator’s
sketch of a costume for Venus). Now, in the intersection of 10 with 11, one
female circus performer is matched by another, and both parallel a narrator:
the one in 10 parallels the narrator in 9, and the one in 11 parallels the
narrator in 10. The female circus performer in 10 will be a Venus, and thus
nearly nude; the one in 11 is unclothed, too, except for her “poil postiche”
[fake hair]; she is more naked still in her display of primal emotions: hunger
(she eats living rabbits and chickens), rage, and pain. Her screams come
“plus naturellement” [more naturally] (OC I: 290) because her husband is
beating her with a real stick, not a stage prop.

“La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse” /
“Les Foules”

The narrator had brought his mistress to see the wild woman’s rage and
suffering because he was fed up with her complaining attitude, expressed
by her constant sighing. “En vérité, il me prend quelquesfois envie de vous
apprendre ce que c’est que le vrai malheur” [Truly, sometimes I’d like to
teach you what true unhappiness is]. The narrator of “Les Foules” [Crowds]
(12) expresses precisely the opposite sentiment: “Il est bon d’apprendre
quelquefois aux heureux de ce monde . . . qu’il est des bonheurs supérieurs
au leur, plus vastes et plus raffinés” [It is good to teach sometimes the
happy ones of this world . . . that there are happinesses superior to theirs,
vaster and more refined] (OC I: 291). Baudelaire adds to this symmetry
of opposites by including among those whose happiness is superior “les
prêtres missionnaires exilés au bout du monde” [missionary priests exiled
to the ends of the earth], recalling the description of the caged woman as an
orangutan “exaspéré par l’exil” [exasperated by exile]. The missionary exiles
resemble her as well in that their happiness is greater than what those who
take pity on them think it is: “ils doivent rire quelquefois de ceux qui les
plaîgnent pour leur fortune si agitée et pour leur vie si chaste” [they must sometimes laugh at those who pity them for their fortunes so troubled and their life so chaste] (OC I: 292)—for the narrator says of her that “après tout, peut-être, les jouissances titillantes de la gloire ne lui soient pas inconnues. Il y a des malheurs plus irremédiables, et sans compensation” [after all, perhaps, the titillating delights of fame are not unknown to her. There are misfortunes more irremediable, without any compensation] (OC I: 290). As a performing artist, despite the pain she endures for her art, she is not deprived of the compensation of glory.

The reason the narrator of “Les Foules” is speaking of the surprisingly greater happiness of exiled missionary priests, shepherds of peoples, and founders of colonies is that it is akin to the delight he finds in immersing himself in crowds. “Celui-là qui épouse facilement la foule connaît des jouissances fiévreuses, dont seront éternellement privés l’égoïste, fermé comme un coffre, et le paresseux, interné comme un mollusque. . . . Ce que les hommes nomment amour est bien petit, bien restreint et bien faible, comparé à cette ineffable orgie” [He who can marry himself to the crowd with ease knows feverish delights from which the selfish, closed like a chest, and the lazy, imprisoned like a mollusk, will be forever deprived. . . . What men call love is very small, limited and weak, compared to that ineffable orgy] (OC I: 291). The poet enjoys the privilege of being both himself and another. Like a wandering soul he can seek out a body and enter it. “Pour lui seul, tout est vacant; et si de certaines places paraissent lui être fermées, c’est qu’à ses yeux elles ne valent pas la peine d’être visitées” [For him alone all is open, and if certain places appear closed to him, it is because in his eyes they aren’t worth the trouble to visit] (OC I: 291).

“Les Foules” / “Les Veuves”

In “Les Veuves” [Widows] (13) the narrator has more to say about those places closed to the poet: “s’il est une place qu’ils dédaignent de visiter, comme je l’insinuais tout à l’heure, c’est surtout la joie des riches. Cette turbulence dans le vide n’a rien qui les attire” [if there is a place that they disdain to visit, as I was just saying, it is especially the joy of the wealthy. That turbulence in a vacuum has nothing to attract them] (OC I: 292). In other words (as Nies also points out [279]), the narrator in 13 is alluding to something he said in 12. Kopp notes that this kind of “renvoi [cross-reference]” from one poem to another “goes against the principle set down in the prefatory letter to Houssaye” (Kopp 1969, 230). Indeed it does, and it shows that Sonya Stephens, for example—who is hardly alone in holding such an opinion—is wrong to claim on the basis of the letter that “We can
enter and leave the text anywhere and the truncations of our individual reading will nevertheless be joined together.” For obviously, if we were to begin such a truncation with “Les Veuves,” we would have no idea what the narrator was talking about when he alludes to what he had just said in the immediately preceding prose poem, which we would not have read. That passage would simply not make sense.

Clearly in “Les Veuves” the narrator is continuing to pursue the topic he took up in “Les Foules.” This is apparent not only when he refers back to the preceding poem but throughout “Les Veuves,” for there he does what he said in “Les Foules” that he liked to do, to pick out a person in a crowd and allow his soul to enter his or her body. He does so with two widows. He follows the first one for hours, until at last she “s’assit à l’écart dans un jardin, pour entendre, loin de la foule, un de ces concerts dont la musique des régiments gratifie le peuple parisien” [sat off to the side in a park, to hear, far from the crowd, one of those concerts that regimental bands provide the people of Paris] (OC I: 293). As it happens, he observes the second widow also listening to an open-air concert. Like the first widow, this one, too, is at some distance from the music. But unlike the first, who placed herself “loin de la foule” [far from the crowd], this one is in the midst of a crowd, and the narrator is at pains to understand why. She has, he thinks, too noble a bearing to be mixed up with “la foule de parias qui se pressent autour de l’enceinte d’un concert public” [the crowd of pariahs who press themselves up against the fence surrounding a public concert] (OC I: 293), people dressed in calico and overalls, without the money to buy a ticket (this concert, unlike the one the first widow heard, charges admission). “Pourquoi donc reste-t-elle volontairement dans un milieu où elle fait une tache si éclatante?” [Why then does she willingly remain in a milieu where she so strikingly sticks out?] (OC I: 294). Upon closer inspection, he discovers why: she is accompanied by a child for whom she had to buy some superfluous thing he demanded with the money that could have paid her ticket to the concert.

Even though there are such striking continuities between these two poems, if we too look more closely we will find that both widows in “Les Veuves” provide a symmetrical opposition to the narrator in “Les Foules.” The narrator in “Les Foules” is attracted by crowds and enjoys mingling with them, but the first widow takes a seat to hear the music “loin de la foule” [far from the crowd] (OC I: 293). The narrator finds certain places closed to him, namely, those the rich inhabit, but he disdains to enter there, finding them of no interest. By contrast, the second widow would like to

enter the place where the rich are, the other side of the fence where the orchestra is playing, where there is “rien que de riche, d’heureux; rien qui ne respire et n’inspire l’insouciance et le plaisir de se laisser vivre” [nothing but the rich, the happy; nothing that does not breathe in and out the insouciance and pleasure of letting life go on] (OC I: 294). The narrator is acutely aware of crowds, of the poor, but the second widow, though in the midst of them, does not even see them, so intent is she on catching what fragments she can see and hear of the delights of the rich on the other side of the fence: “comme la plèbe à laquelle elle s’était mêlée et qu’elle ne voyait pas, elle regardait le monde lumineux avec un œil profond, et elle écoutait en hochant doucement la tête” [like the plebeians with whom she had mixed and whom she did not see, she gazed at the luminous world with deep eyes, and she listened as she gently nodded her head] (OC I: 294). The poet, by contrast, having been denied entry into that luminous world of the idle rich, focuses his gaze on the poor.

“Les Veuves” / “Le Vieux Saltimbanque”

Baudelaire inverts things again with “Le Vieux Saltimbanque” [The Old Saltimbank] (14), for the “insouciance” that in “Les Veuves” (13) characterized the attitude of the idle rich (in the concert audience, where there was “nothing that does not breathe in and out insouciance”) and that was denied the poor is now the property of the poor—“le peuple” [the people] on holiday, enjoying an “atmosphère d’insouciance” (OC I: 295) as they wander through a fair with magicians, clowns, fireworks, comedians, and music. The barrier erected in “Les Veuves” separating the poor from the happy rich, allowing the narrator to gaze with great interest at the “reflet de la joie du riche au fond de l’œil du pauvre” [reflection of the joy of the rich in the depths of the eye of the poor] (OC I: 294), is no more, for now the poor are “les uns et les autres également joyeux” [each and all equally joyful] (OC I: 296). The poor who in “Les Veuves” could only catch glimpses from outside the fence of “l’étincelante fournaise intérieure” [the sparkling furnace within] (OC I: 294) are now on the inside, where dancers leap and caper “sous le feu des lanternes qui remplissaient leurs jupes d’étincelles” [under the fire of lanterns that filled their skirts with sparks] (OC I: 295).

But there is one exception to this general joy, the old saltimbanque who resembles each of the two widows on whom the narrator focused his attention, for different reasons. The first widow was “vieille” [old] (OC I: 293), as he is “vieux”; her solitude was “absolue” [absolute], as is his “misère absolue” [misery absolute] (OC I: 296) (the only appearances
of that feminine singular adjective in the collection). She was “sans ami” [without a friend]; he resembled an old poet “sans amis” [without friends] (OC I: 297). The second widow had the money required for admission to the concert but could not spend it for that purpose; in a symmetrical reversal, it is the narrator who has the money to buy admission to the saltimbanque’s booth but cannot spend it. He wonders what curiosity, what marvel the old performer could have shown him in these stinking shadows, behind his torn curtain, but he doesn’t dare try to find out for fear of humiliating the man. He did decide, however, to leave some money on the plank where the price of admission would go, “espérant qu’il devinerait mon intention, quand un grand reflux de peuple, causé par je ne sais quel trouble, m’entraîna loin de lui” [hoping he would guess my intent, when a great movement in the crowd, caused by i know not what disturbance, dragged me far from him] (OC I: 296). That is, he was about to make an act of charity in the form of paying his admission to a show he didn’t intend to stay around to see.

"Le Vieux Saltimbanque" / "Le Gâteau"

"Le Gâteau" [The Cake] (15) tells in a number of respects the same story. The narrator tries to perform an act of charity, to give a slice of bread to a child, but his intention is frustrated by the sudden movement of others—the tussle between that boy and another for possession of the bread, which effectively destroys the coveted item, turning it into crumbs. The slice of bread corresponds to the money the narrator meant to leave for the saltimbanque, the violent battle between the boys to the sudden movement of the crowd, itself caused by some “trouble” that might well have been a fight like the one in which the would-be possessors of the bread were engaged, and which prevented the narrator from performing that act of charity. It is not by accident that the narrator points out that the old saltimbanque, the would-be object of his charity there, was the only person in that scene who could not obtain bread. Among the milling crowds and the performers alike there was “partout la certitude du pain pour les lendemains” [everywhere the certainty of bread for tomorrow] (OC I: 296), everywhere except “Ici” [Here], in the saltimbanque’s hut, where reigned “la misère absolue” [absolute misery]. In his desperate need for bread, he resembles the boy to whom the narrator’s “pain” [bread] looks so desirable that he calls it “gâteau” [cake], and who gets into a violent fight with “un autre petit sauvage” [another little savage] (OC I: 298) over possession of the slice the narrator gives him. To intensify the parallel, Baudelaire has the narrator call the saltimbanque a savage, too: his hovel was “plus misérable
que celle du *sauvage* le plus abrutí” [more miserable than that of the most brutish *savage*].

Finally, the two stories resemble each other as well in that both begin in joy and end in sadness. Their joys are similar in a surprisingly specific way. In the first, “Partout . . . s’ébaudissait le peuple en vacances” [Everywhere . . . the people on holiday were rejoicing] (*OC* I: 295); in the second, the narrator speaks of the “joie calme où s’ébaudissait mon âme” [calm joy in which my soul was rejoicing] (*OC* I: 299) as he strolled through the countryside before his encounter with the little savages. The verb is rare, appearing in the *Spleen de Paris* in only these two poems and not at all in the *Fleurs du mal*. It is rare enough that the *Petit Robert* calls it “vieux” [archaic], giving as its only example precisely this sentence from “Le Gâteau.” Baudelaire took care, it seems, when he planted it in these neighboring poems as a subtle signpost pointing from one to the other, to put it in the same tense, person, and number. The sadness comes in the last paragraph of “Le Vieux Saltimbanque” when, obsessed by what he had just seen of the man’s poverty and despair, the narrator tells us, “je cherchai à analyser ma soudaine douleur” [I sought to analyze my sudden grief] (*OC* I: 297), and after the battle over the bread “j’en restai triste assez long-temps” [I remained sad for rather a long time] (*OC* I: 299).

**“Le Gâteau” / “L’Horloge”**

That initial joy in “Le Gâteau,” the “parfaite bétitude” [perfect beatitude] he felt after he climbed up a mountain, above the clouds and far from the vulgar passions of life below, allowed his soul to feel “aussi *vaste*” [as vast] (*OC* I: 297) as the sky. When the narrator of “L’Horloge” [The Clock] (16) gazes into his beloved’s eyes, he sees something “*vaste, solennelle, grande comme l’espace*” [vast, solemn, huge like space] (*OC* I: 299). It is the hour of infinity, always the same, by contrast to the different hours he claims one can read in the eyes of a cat. In that initial joy at the beginning of “Le Gâteau” the narrator experienced something similarly solemn, the “sensation *solennelle*” that comes from seeing the shadow of a cloud pass over the surface of a mountain lake “comme le reflet du manteau d’un géant aérien volant à travers le ciel” [like the reflection of the cloak of an airborne giant flying across the sky] (*OC* I: 297). The lake is far beneath him, since he is already above the clouds (“les nuées . . . défilaient au fond des abîmes sous mes pieds” [the clouds . . . were parading in the depths of the abyss beneath my feet]); therefore it is “petit” [small]. It is also “immobile” (“le petit lac *immobile*, noir de son immense profondeur” [the little *immobile* lake, black from its immense depth]), as is, too,
the hour of eternity he can read in his mistress’s eyes (“une heure vaste,
solennelle . . . une heure immobile qui n’est pas marquée sur les horloges”
[a vast, solemn hour . . . an immobile hour that is not marked on clocks]
[OC I: 299–300]). The “heure . . . solennelle” is outside of time, as are
the “époques solennelles” [solemn epochs] that the narrator in “Le Vieux
Saltimbanque” (14) paradoxically calls the vacation days for the working
class that are “une de ces solemnités” [one of the solemnities] (OC I: 295)
(Baudelaire persists in calling our attention to the paradox by stating it
twice) on which saltimbanks and other circus performers count, hoping
then to find paying customers. The paradox is only resolved when we real-
ize what connects this solemn time with those in poems 15 and 16. The
answer to the riddle of why he calls vacation time solemn is that, as we
learn from the two succeeding poems, it is time outside of normal time.

As for telling time from the eyes of a cat, in a note attached to the
first publication of “L’Horloge” in Le Présent in 1857, Baudelaire wrote,
“En supposant une mémoire parfaite ou au moins très exercée, il n’est pas
difficile de comprendre comment on peut deviner l’heure dans l’œil d’un
animal dont la pupille est très sensible à la lumière” [Supposing a perfect
or at least a very practiced memory, it is not difficult to understand how
one can determine the hour from the eye of an animal whose pupil is very
sensitive to light] (OC I: 1320n). The narrator in the poem recounts that
a missionary in China, noticing that he had forgotten his watch, asked a
boy what time it was. The youngster went to get a cat, looked into its eyes,
and reported that it was not quite noon. Baudelaire found this anecdote
in L’Empire chinois by the French missionary Évariste Huc, who explained
that a cat’s pupil narrows as noon approaches, becoming a slit the width
of a hair, and then begins to dilate after noon has passed (quoted in ibid.).
Huc recounts that before fetching the cat, the boy had looked at the sky
to see where the sun was but clouds obscured the view. From the cat’s eyes
one can tell how high the sun is in the sky.

Thus in “L’Horloge” there are two sets of eyes that will give the hour:
the cats’, which give a specific hour in relation to noon, and those of the
narrator’s beloved (appropriately named Féline), which always give the
same hour, the hour that is not an hour, “l’Éternité” [Eternity] (OC I: 300).
We have seen how Baudelaire relates her eyes to the lake by associat-
ing the adjectives vaste, solennelle, and immobile with both, a correlation
supported by the feeling of detachment from the finite world that the nar-
rator felt when he was enjoying the mountain view, before he encountered
the boy whose eyes pleaded for his bread (“un petit être . . . dont les yeux

15. Niesz also calls attention to the echoes between these passages (280).
16. I am indebted to my student Ashley Betz for leading me to this insight.
créux, farouches et comme suppliants, dévoraient le morceau de pain” [a little being . . . whose hollow, shy, and supplicating eyes were devouring the piece of bread] [OC I: 298]), for as an out-of-this-world experience it gave him a glimpse of eternity. But there is also an intriguing parallel between the expanding and contracting pupil of the cat’s eye and the haunting image of a cloud’s shadow passing across the lake like a flying giant’s cloak: in both one deduces the sun’s presence despite (or because of) its absence. The encounter with the boy, and then with his seeming twin, ended the narrator’s reverie, bringing him back down to earth, to the finite from the infinite. But the piece of bread went in the opposite direction, from being a finite unit, a slice of the loaf, to disappearing into a near infinity of particles, crumbling as it passed from hand to hand, “éparpillé en miettes semblables aux grains de sable auxquels il était mêlé” [scattered in bits like the grains of sand into which it was mixed] (OC I: 299). Finally, it is worth noting that “L’Horloge” repeats the encounter of a traveler (the narrator in “Le Gâteau,” who began by saying, “Je voyageais” [I was traveling] [OC I: 297], now matched by the traveling missionary in China) with a boy—except that by a symmetrical reversal in one poem the boy requests something from the traveler (the bread) and in the other the traveler asks for something from the boy (the time).

“L’Horloge” / “Un hémisphère dans une chevelure”

It is well known that “Un hémisphère dans une chevelure” [A Hemisphere in a Head of Hair] (17), first published in 1857, closely parallels the verse poem “La Chevelure,” first published in 1859, and the twenty-ninth poem in the 1861 Fleurs du mal. As the narrator in “L’Horloge” can see eternity (“je vois l’heure; il est l’Éternité!” [I see the hour; it is Eternity!] [OC I: 300]) in his mistress’s eyes, in “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” he sees something infinite: “dans la nuit de ta chevelure, je vois resplendir l’infini de l’azur tropical” [in the night of your hair, I see shine the infinity of the tropical azure] (OC I: 301). The equivalent passage in the verse poem lacks that infinity. The azure there is immense but not infinite: “Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues, / Vous me rendez l’azur du ciel immense et rond” [Blue hair, tent hung with shadows, / You give me back the azure of the sky immense and round] (ll. 26–27). In this regard, at least, the prose poem is closer to its immediate predecessor in the sequence than to its counterpart in verse. Note as well the repeated “je vois”: “je vois . . . l’Éternité”; “je vois . . . l’infini.” These are the only two

17. See, for example, Johnson, Défigurations, 31–55.
poems in the *Spleen de Paris* in which the narrator himself says “je vois.” He is transported not only by seeing her hair but also by smelling its fragrance: “*Mon âme voyage sur le parfum*” [*My soul travels on perfume*] (*OC* I: 300). Although the narrator of “L’Horloge” is focusing on the woman’s eyes, he somehow finds a reason to talk about her perfume, and to do so in relation to “mon esprit,” paralleling its relation to “mon âme”: she is “le parfum de mon esprit” [*the perfume of my mind*] (*OC* I: 299).

“*Un hémisphère dans une chevelure*” /  
“*L’Invitation au voyage*”

Like “*Un hémisphère dans une chevelure*” (17), “*L’Invitation au voyage*” [*The Invitation to the Voyage*] (18) gives the appearance of being a prose version of a poem from the *Fleurs du mal*, in this case one bearing the same title and first appearing in the 1857 edition (1857: 49; 1861: 53). When “*La Chevelure*” (1861: 23) appeared for the first time in the collection in 1861, the two verse poems were nowhere near each other. But their prose counterparts are tightly linked in the *Spleen de Paris*, partly because of passages in them that do not appear in the verse versions. But even apart from those passages, in both prose poems the woman addressed by the narrator resembles a foreign country. In 17 her hair transports him in his mind to a tropical locale because its smell and its resemblance to a black ocean like the one that could take him there; in 18 she resembles the country to which he would like to take her, which gives every indication of being Holland. The woman in 17 evokes the foreign land by metonymy, a part (her hair) for the whole; the woman in 18 by simile (“une contrée qui te ressemble” [*a country that resembles you*] [*OC* I: 302]) and analogy (“Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie . . . ?” [*would you not be enclosed in your analogy . . . ?*] [*OC* I: 303]). As 17’s title suggests, he finds another hemisphere in her hair; in 18 the country to which he invites her itself combines two hemispheres, for it is a country “qu’on pourrait appeler l’Orient de l’Occident, la Chine de l’Europe” [that one could call the Orient of the Occident, the China of Europe] (*OC* I: 301). The woman in 17 resembles the country in 18 that the woman in 18 resembles, but she resembles it in a different way. She resembles it because she too combines two hemispheres in one. That aspect of the country to which he invites the woman in 18 is part of what is attractive about it, but it is not one of the aspects that make her resemble it. The country resembles her with its “trésors, . . . meubles, . . . luxe, . . . ordre, . . . parfums, . . . fleurs miraculeuses . . . grands fleuves et . . . canaux tranquilles” [treasures, . . . furniture, . . . luxury, . . . order, . . . perfums, . . . miraculous
flowers . . . great rivers and . . . tranquil canals]; the ships that arrive from another hemisphere, “Ces énormes navires . . . ce sont mes pensées qui dorment ou qui roulent sur ton sein” [Those enormous ships . . . are my thoughts slumbering or rolling on your breast] (OC I: 303).

The country resembles her in its interiors as well as its exterior, in the furniture, flowers, and perfumes of “l’appartement” [the apartment], in the way the setting sun colors “la salle à manger ou le salon” [the dining room or the salon] (OC I: 302). Here Baudelaire is faithful to the verse version, where “Des meubles luisants, / Polis par les ans, / Décoreraient notre chambre” [Shining furniture, / Polished by the years, / Will decorate our bedroom] (ll. 15–17). But he was not so faithful to the verse version of the other poem, adding an interior scene, a bedroom, to 17 for which “La Chevelure” has no equivalent: “Dans les caresses de ta chevelure, je retrouve les langueurs des longues heures passées sur un divan, dans la chambre d’un beau navire, bercées par le roulis imperceptible du port, entre les pots de fleurs et les gargoulettes rafraîchissantes” [In caressing your hair I find the languor of long hours spent on a couch, in the stateroom of a fine ship, rocked by the imperceptible rolling of the harbor, between flowerpots and cooling water jars] (OC I: 301). The harbor in 17 is “fourmillant de chants mélancoliques, d’hommes vigoureux de toutes nations” [swarming with melancholy songs, with vigorous men of all nations] (OC I: 300–301). The “chants mélancoliques” are answered by the “chants monotones” (OC I: 303) of sailors in 18, but there are no equivalent songs in either verse version. That the men in the harbor come from every nation finds an echo in 18: “Les trésors du monde y affluent, comme dans la maison d’un homme laborieux et qui a bien mérité du monde entier” [The world’s treasures flow there, as into the house of a hardworking man who well deserves the best of the whole world] (OC I: 302). Although the men in “La Chevelure” are equally vigorous (“pleins de sève” [full of energy] [l. 11]), they do not come from every nation, as do those in the two poems in prose.

There is opium in both prose poems, though in neither of the verse versions (nor in any other of the prose poems): in 17, “Dans l’ardent foyer de ta chevelure, je respire l’odeur du tabac mêlé à l’opium et au sucre” [In the burning hearth of your hair, I breathe in the odor of tobacco mixed with opium and sugar] (OC I: 301); in 18, “Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d’opium naturel” [Each man carried in himself his dose of natural opium] (OC I: 303).

The narrator in 17 says that his soul “voyage sur le parfum comme l’âme des autres hommes sur la musique” [travels on perfume as other

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18. I am indebted to my students Brendon Honick and Allison Smith for pointing out this parallel, as well as the opposition between the opium that must be found elsewhere—in the mistress’s hair—and the opium that any man can find within himself.
men’s souls do on music] (OC I: 300) (as it does in the verse version: “Comme d’autres esprits voguent sur la musique, / Le mien . . . nage sur ton parfum” [As other minds sail on music, / Mine . . . swims on your perfume] [ll. 9–10]). There is no explicit reference to music in the verse version of “L’Invitation au voyage,” but there is in the poem in prose: “Un musicien a écrit l’Invitation à la valse; quel est celui qui composera l’Invitation au voyage, qu’on puisse offrir à la femme aimée?” [A musician wrote the “Invitation to the Waltz”; who is the one who will compose the “Invitation to the Voyage” that one could offer one’s beloved?] (OC I: 302). This would appear to be yet another addition made to increase the connections between the two poems in prose.

“L’Invitation au voyage” / “Le Joujou du pauvre”

Nearly all of “Le Joujou du pauvre” [The Pauper’s Toy] (19) had previously appeared in a longer text, “Morale du joujou,” an essay Baudelaire first published in 1853. The narrator tells of seeing a rich boy looking through the bars of the gate to his château at a poor boy and his toy, a live rat in a box. The rich child finds this toy much more interesting than the expensive one lying on the grass beside him. Here is the way it is told in “Morale du joujou”:

À propos du joujou du pauvre, j’ai vu quelque chose de plus simple encore, mais de plus triste que le joujou à un sou,—c’est le joujou vivant. Sur une route, derrière la grille d’un beau jardin, au bout duquel apparaissait un joli château, se tenait un enfant beau et frais, habillé de ces vêtements de compagnie pleins de coquetterie. Le luxe, l’insouciance et le spectacle habituel de la richesse rendent ces enfants-là si jolis qu’on ne les croirait pas faits de la même pâte que les enfants de la médiocrité ou de la pauvreté. À côté de lui gisait sur l’herbe un joujou splendide aussi frais que son maître, verni, doré, avec une belle robe, et couvert de plumets et de verroterie. Mais l’enfant ne s’occupait pas de son joujou, et voici ce qu’il regardait: de l’autre côté de la grille, sur la route, entre les chardons et les orties, il y avait un autre enfant, sale, assez chétif, un de ces marmots sur lesquels la morve se fraye lentement un chemin dans la crasse et la poussière. À travers ces barreaux de fer symboliques, l’enfant pauvre montrait à l’enfant riche son joujou, que celui-ci examinait avidement comme un objet rare et inconnu. Or ce joujou que le petit souillon agaçait, agitait et secouait dans une boîte grillée, était un rat vivant! Les parents, par économie, avaient tiré le joujou de la vie elle-même.
[Concerning the toys of the poor, I have seen something simpler still, though sadder, than the toy for a penny: the living toy. On a road, behind the gate of a beautiful garden, at the end of each appeared a pretty chateau, stood a beautiful, spiffy child, dressed in those country clothes so full of affectation. Luxury, insouciance, and the habitual spectacle of wealth makes those children so pretty that one would not believe they were made from the same clay as middle-class or poor children. Next to him lay on the grass a splendid toy as spiffy as its owner, polished, gilded, with a beautiful dress and covered with feathers and beads. But the child was not concerned with his toy, and here is what he was looking at: on the other side of the gate, on the road, between the thistles and thorns, there was another child, dirty, rather puny, one of those kids on whom snot slowly makes its way in the mud and dust. Across those symbolic iron bars, the poor child was showing his toy to the rich child, who was examining it avidly as if it were some rare and unknown object. Now this toy that the little scum was teasing, disturbing and shaking in a grated box was a living rat! His parents, by thrift, had drawn this toy from life itself.]

Here is the version told in “Le Joujou du pauvre” (with the changes I will discuss italicized):

Sur une route, derrière la grille d’un vaste jardin, au bout duquel apparaissait la blancheur d’un joli château frappé par le soleil, se tenait un enfant beau et frais, habillé de ces vêtements de campagne si pleins de coquetterie.

Le luxe, l’insouciance et le spectacle habituel de la richesse, rendent ces enfants-là si jolis, qu’on les croirait faits d’une autre pâte que les enfants de la médiocrité ou de la pauvreté.

À côté de lui, gisait sur l’herbe un joujou splendide, aussi frais que son maître, verni, doré, vêtu d’une robe pourpre, et couvert de plumets et de verroteries. Mais l’enfant ne s’occupait pas de son joujou préféré, et voici ce qu’il regardait:

De l’autre côté de la grille, sur la route, entre les chardons et les orties, il y avait un autre enfant, sale, chétif, fulgineux, un de ces marmots-parias dont un aïl impartial découvrirait la beauté, si, comme l’aïl du connasseur devine une peinture idéale sous un vernis de carrossier, il le nettoyait de la répugnante patine de la misère.

À travers ces barreaux symboliques séparant deux mondes, la grande route et le château, l’enfant pauvre montrait à l’enfant riche son propre joujou, que celui-ci examinait avidement comme un objet rare et inconnu. Or,
ce joujou, que le petit souillon agaçait, agitait et secouait dans une boîte grillée, c’était un rat vivant! Les parents, par économie sans doute, avaient tiré le joujou de la vie elle-même.

Et les deux enfants se riaient l’un à l’autre fraternellement, avec des dents d’une égale blancheur. [Baudelaire italicizes “égale.”]

[On a road, behind the gate of a vast garden, at the end of which appeared the whiteness of a pretty château struck by the sun, stood a beautiful, spiffy child, dressed in those country clothes so full of affectation.]

Luxury, insouciance, and the habitual spectacle of wealth makes those children so pretty that one would not believe they were made from the same clay as middle-class or poor children.

Next to him lay on the grass a splendid toy as spiffy as its owner, polished, gilded, dressed in purple and covered with feathers and beads. But the child was not concerned with his favorite toy, and here is what he was looking at:

On the other side of the gate, on the road, between the thistles and thorns, there was another child, dirty, puny, sooty, one of those pariah kids whose beauty an impartial eye would discover if, in the same way as the connoisseur’s eye senses an ideal painting beneath the coachmaker’s varnish, he were to cleanse it of the repugnant patina of poverty.

Across those symbolic iron bars separating two worlds, the open road and the château, the poor child was showing his toy to the rich child, who was examining it avidly as if it were some rare and unknown object. Now this toy that the little scum was poking, disturbing and shaking in a grated box was a living rat! His parents, by thrift, no doubt, had taken this toy from life itself.]

And the two children were laughing at each other fraternally, with teeth of equal whiteness.] (OCI: 304–5)

By adding that the bars between the boys separated “deux mondes” [two worlds], the world of the château and that of the open road, wealth and poverty, Baudelaire allows this poem to continue the theme of the confrontation between two worlds begun in “Un hémisphère dans une chevelure” (17) when the narrator is taken to another hemisphere by his mistress’s hair while still physically in this one, and continued in “L’Invitation au voyage” (18) when the proposed destination, “l’Orient de l’Occident” and “une Chine occidentale,” is the place where the two worlds of East and West come together. The bars of the gate now play the role that Holland played.
Holland was not only the place where one world meets another; it was also the place that resembled the woman to whom the poem is addressed. The theme of resemblance is equally strong in “Le Joujou du pauvre,” particularly in several additions that distinguish it from the earlier text. Baudelaire lays particular stress on this by italicizing “égale” in speaking of the whiteness of their teeth. And where the original version maintains a distinction between the boys by characterizing the poor one as snot-nosed and dirty, the prose poem asserts that beneath his grime a connoisseur would see beauty. This change makes him equal in that regard to the “enfant beau” [beautiful child] standing on the other side of the gate.

The addition of the poem’s last sentence (“Et les deux enfants se riaient l’un à l’autre, avec des dents d’une égale blancheur”) does more than make the boys resemble each other. It works together with an addition made at the beginning of this episode, the “blancheur” added to the château, to enable them both to resemble a place—the château. The other addition at that point, that the château was “frappé par le soleil” [struck by the sun], makes its whiteness all the more evident. Thus both boys share with the woman in the preceding poem the quality of resembling a place, a place in both instances of luxury and wealth. The château displays “Le luxe, l’insouciance et le spectacle habituel de la richesse” [Luxury, insouciance, and the habitual spectacle of wealth]; Holland is a land “où tout est riche” [where all is rich] (OC I: 302), a place of “trésors” and “luxe.”

Baudelaire sets up an intriguing analogy between the “grille” separating the boys and the “boîte grillée” enclosing the rat. As Murphy remarks, the bars of the gate “find a miniature reflection, through a patent mise en abyme, in those of the rat’s cage” (284). Each boy is just as much imprisoned by the “grille” of the gate as the rat is by that of his cage. “The rich child, behind the bars, finds himself imprisoned in his closed space as firmly as the poor child sees himself excluded, for the outside could be for him a subject of dreams as suggestive as the inside is for the poor one” (ibid., 288). This leads us to see the essential symmetrical opposition the poems together construct: the “grille” of the gate, as we have already established, resembles Holland as a place where two worlds come together, but while Holland is a place to which one can easily travel, essentially an ideal destination, the gate (like the cage’s bars) makes travel impossible.

“Le Joujou du pauvre” / “Les Dons des fées”

The motif of giving gifts to children, evident in “Le Joujou du pauvre” (19) in the expensive doll the rich parents gave their child, in the rat the
poor parents gave theirs, and in the inexpensive but clever mechanical toys the narrator encourages his readers to hand out for the fun of it, is replayed in “Les Dons des fées” [The Fairies’ Gifts] (20), together with that of rich children versus poor. The fairies award gifts to newborns that will decide, for good or ill, their future lives. Mistakes are made. The power to attract money is given to one who will have no need for it, as he is already rich. The love of beauty and poetic power is given to one from a poor family with no prospects for satisfying that longing. After all the gifts are distributed and none remain, a shopkeeper shows up to demand one for his son. The fairy has nothing to give until she remembers that in such a case she has “la faculté d’en donner encore un, supplémentaire et exceptionnel, pourvu toutefois qu’elle ait l’imagination suffisante pour le créer immédiatement” [the ability to give one more, an extra and exceptional one, provided that she have the imagination to create it on the spot]. She hesitates, still trying to think of a gift, before finally announcing that she will give his son “le Don de plaire” [the Gift of pleasing; emphasis in original]. Being a narrow-minded shopkeeper, the father is perplexed, “incapable de s’élever jusqu’à la logique de l’Absurde” [incapable of rising to the logic of the Absurd] (OC I: 307). Baudelaire here invites us to follow his own logic, by which this improvised gift is the equivalent of the gift the poor child’s parents improvised when there was no way they could give anything else, the rat that turned out to be so pleasing that the rich son abandoned his favorite toy to see it, so enticing that it brought to light the essential equality of those two children from separate worlds.

“Les Dons des fées” / “Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la Gloire”

Supernatural beings also offer gifts in “Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la Gloire” [The Temptations; or, Eros, Plutus, and Fame] (21). Instead of fairies, they are “Deux superbes Satans et une Diablesse” [Two magnificent Satans and a She-Devil] (OC I: 307). They appear to the narrator in a dream, each in turn proposing his specialty to him as a gift, which he refuses (in the dream, though upon waking he wishes he had not). Eros offers the ability “d’attirer les autres âmes” [to attract other souls] (OC I: 308), echoing the power of the gift the fairy gave the rich newborn, “la puissance d’attirer magnétiquement la fortune” [the power to attract wealth magnetically] (OC I: 306). But the closer parallel to that fairy’s gift is what Plutus offers, the power to obtain money. The “Diablesse” offers fame, of which she touts the “puissance” [power] (OC I: 310), a word that recalls the descriptions of two of the fairies’ gifts, “la puissance d’attirer”
wealth and “la Puissance poétique” [poetic Power] (OC I: 306). It is difficult, and probably pointless, to try to match the three gifts in 20 with the three on offer in 21, though it is worth noting that there are three in both, and that the first fairy’s gift is identical to the second diabolical one (and poetic power is related to fame, and the gift of pleasing could be a form of the ability to draw others to oneself). In addition, the words echoing between the two sets of gifts—attirer and puissance—appear in no other poem in the collection.

“Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la Gloire” /
“Le Crépuscule du soir”

“Les Tentations” (21) presented two males and one female; so too does “Le Crépuscule du soir” [Evening Twilight] (22). The two men are acquaintances of the narrator, each of whom begins to behave badly when evening twilight descends; the woman is twilight itself. The sky after sunset displays “une de ces robes étranges de danseuses, où une gaze transparente et sombre laisse entrevoir les splendeurs amorties d’une jupe éclatante, comme sous le noir présent transperce le délicieux passé” [one of those strange dresses dancers wear, in which a transparent and dark gauze affords a glimpse of the muted splendors of a scarlet skirt, as beneath the dark present the delectable past pierces through] (OC I: 312). This description parallels that of the female devil, who offered Fame: she had the “charme . . . des très-belles femmes sur le retour qui cependant ne vieillissent plus, et dont la beauté garde la magie pénétrante des ruines” [charm . . . of very beautiful women past their prime who however no longer age, and whose beauty preserves the penetrating magic of ruins] (OC I: 309). In both, the past penetrates through to the present.

This section of “Le Crépuscule du soir,” where evening twilight is described as a woman resembling Fame in “Les Tentations,” is absent in the prose poem’s earlier appearance in 1855 (reproduced in OC I: 1327n). Absent too—and thus likewise added once Baudelaire began to conceive of his prose poems as a unified work of art—is the assertion that evening twilight is the moment when something hellish emerges: “les infortunés . . . prennent . . . la venue de la nuit pour un signal de sabbat” [unfortunates . . . take . . . the coming of the night as a signal for a witches’ sabbath]. They make a “sinistre ululation” [sinister ululation] that is an “imitation des harmonies de l’enfer” [imitation of the harmonies of hell] (OC I: 311). This appears at the beginning of “Le Crépuscule du soir” (22), paralleling the beginning of “Les Tentations” (21), where something else from hell put in a nocturnal appearance, the trio of temptors who “ont
la nuit dernière monté l’escalier mystérieux par où l’Enfer donne assaut à la faiblesse de l’homme qui dort, et communique en secret avec lui” [last night mounted the mysterious stairs by which Hell conducts its assault on the weakness of the man who sleeps, and communicates with him in secret] (OC I: 307). In the only other appearance of sabbat in the volume, the first of those Satans carried a violin with which to make music “dans les nuits de sabbat” [on witches’ sabbath nights] (OC I: 308).

The narrator of “Le Crépuscule du soir” informs us that his reaction to the onset of night is the opposite of that of others: “La nuit, qui mettait ses ténèbres dans leur esprit, fait la lumière dans le mien” [Night, which brought shadows to their mind, brings light to mine]. Therefore, this is one of those times, he adds, when one can see “la même cause engendrer des effets contraires” [the same cause engender contrary effects] (OC I: 312). The same cause engendered contrary effects in “Les Tentations,” too, for in his dream the narrator resisted the temptations, but when he awoke he regretted his scruples. He tried to call them back to say he had changed his mind. He is just the opposite of the two men of his acquaintance who behaved badly at night, of whom one “maltraitait, comme un sauvage, le premier venu” [mistreated, like a savage, the first person who came] and the other was “Indulgent et sociable encore pendant la journée” [indulgent and sociable still during the day] but “impitoyable le soir” [merciless at evening] (OC I: 311)—for he behaved better at night than in the morning. In his dream he showed a “courageuse abnégation” [courageous abnegation] of which he had “le droit d’être fier” [the right to be proud] (OC I: 310). It was when he woke up that he wanted to misbehave—to succumb to temptation.

“Le Crépuscule du soir” / “La Solitude”

“La Solitude” (23) and “Le Crépuscule du soir” (22) first appeared in 1855 (Fontainebleau. Hommage à C. F. Denecourt). Although they bore the same separate titles then as they would in the Spleen de Paris (and publications in between), in 1855 the first words of the second referred directly back to the first: “Il me disait aussi,—le second,—que la solitude était mauvaise pour l’homme” [He—the second—told me too that solitude was bad for man] (OC I: 1329n). He meant the second of the friends who became irritable at night. In later versions (including the Spleen de Paris) the poem would begin “Un gazetier philanthrope me dit que la solitude . . . ” [A philanthropic journalist told me that solitude . . . ] (OC I: 313). Another passage in the 1855 version that would later disappear also refers specifically to what had just been said in “Le Crépuscule du soir”: “Il en serait donc
de la solitude comme du crépuscule; elle est bonne et elle est mauvaise, criminelle et salutaire, incendiaire et calmante, selon qu’on en use, et selon qu’on a usé de la vie” [It would therefore be the same with solitude as it is with twilight: it is both good and bad, criminal and salutary, incendiary and calming, according to the use one makes of it, and according to how one uses life. This reference to the “crépuscule” was too direct an allusion to the preceding poem for Baudelaire to retain it once he decided to write a whole collection of such poems whose connections, though multifarious and persistent, would not be so obvious (although he did violate that rule, as we have seen, in “Les Veuves” [13] when he referred specifically to “Les Foules” [12] by saying “comme je l’insinuais tout à l’heure” [as I was just saying]).

The two poems would still parallel each other in this way, both twilight and solitude being examples of a single cause engendering contrary effects, but the parallel would no longer be so explicitly made. The narrator would give the impression of speaking of twilight and solitude for their own sake, not because they were two instances of the same phenomenon. But at the same time Baudelaire would add additional connections. For one thing, he would put a reference to solitude in “Le Crépuscule du soir”:

Ô nuit! ô rafraichissantes ténèbres! vous êtes pour moi le signal d’une fête intérieure, vous êtes la délivrance d’une angoisse! Dans la solitude des plaines, dans les labyrinthes pierreux d’une capitale, scintillement des étoiles, explosion de lanternes, vous êtes le feu d’artifice de la déesse Liberté!

[O night! O refreshing shadows! You are for me the signal for an inner celebration; you deliver me from anguish! In the solitude of the plains, in the stony labyrinths of a capital, sparkling of stars, explosion of street lamps, you are the fireworks of the goddess Liberty!] (OC I: 312)

The eighth of ten paragraphs in the final version of the poem, this is a reworking of the first paragraph of the 1855 version:

La tombée de la nuit a toujours été pour moi le signal d’une fête intérieure et comme la délivrance d’une angoisse. Dans les bois comme dans les rues d’une grande ville, l’assombrissement du jour et le pointillement des étoiles ou des lanternes éclairent mon esprit.

[Nightfall has always been for me the signal for an inner celebration and like deliverance from anguish. In the woods as in the streets of a great city, the darkening of the day and the emergence of the stars or of street lamps illumines my mind.] (OC I: 1327n)
“Dans les bois” [In the woods] becomes “Dans la solitude des plaines” [In the solitude of the plains].

In the original version of “La Solitude,” although the narrator disagreed with the proposition that solitude was bad for all (after all, it was good for Robinson Crusoe), he did not explicitly refer to himself as a lover of solitude in the same way that in the original and subsequent versions of “Le Crépuscule du soir” he said that, contrary to its effect on certain others, evening twilight made his soul rejoice. But in the later version he would: “Je désire surtout que mon maudit gazetier me laisse m’amuser à ma guise. ‘Vous n’éprouvez donc jamais,—me dit-il, avec un ton de nez très-apostolique,—le besoin de partager vos jouissances?’” [I desire above all that my cursed journalist let me amuse myself in my own way. “So you never feel,” he said, with a very apostolic nasal tone, “the need to share your enjoyments?”] (OC I: 313). Being one of “les amoureux de la solitude” [the lovers of solitude] against whom he wishes the journalist would not make accusations, he does not feel the need to share his enjoyments with anyone else.

He would certainly not want to share them with a “bavard” [talkative person] like the journalist, “dont le suprême plaisir consiste à parler du haut d’une chaire ou d’une tribune” [whose supreme pleasure consists in speaking from the height of a pulpit or a forum], a member of one of those “races jacassières . . . qui accepteraient avec moins de répugnance le supplice suprême, s’il leur était permis de faire du haut de l’échaufaud une copieuse harangue” [chattering races . . . who would accept with less repugnance the supreme penalty, if they were allowed to make from the height of the scaffold a fulsome harangue] (OC I: 313). The rare expression “du haut de,” appearing nowhere else in the prose poems, subtly links the journalist to other noisemakers, the “fous” [insane] in whom twilight excites and whose sinister ululation “du haut de la montagne arrive à mon balcon . . . un grand hurlement, composée d’une foule de cris discordants, que l’espace transforme en une lugubre harmonie” [from the height of the mountain arrives at my balcony . . . a great howling, composed of a crowd of discordant cries that distance transforms into a lugubrious harmony] (OC I: 311).

“La Solitude” / “Les Projets”

The chattering of “races jacassières” continues into “Les Projets” [The Plans] (24) when a man has a daydream of living with his mistress in a cabin in the tropics from which they would hear, “au delà de la varangue, le tapage des oiseaux ivres de lumière, et le jacassement des petites négresses” [beyond the veranda, the din of birds drunk with light, and the chattering
of little Negresses] (OC I: 315). No form of jacasser appears in any other of Baudelaire’s poems. The plan-making man had first dreamed of living with his mistress in different places—a palace, a tropical island, and a country inn—but then changed his mind: “en rentrant seul chez lui, . . . il se dit: ‘. . . Pourquoi contraindre mon corps à changer de place, puisque mon âme voyage si lestement? Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?’” [returning home alone, . . . he said to himself: “. . . Why force my body to change location, when my soul travels with such agility? And why carry out plans, since the planning is in itself a sufficient enjoyment?”] (OC I: 315). He decided in the end just to make plans and not to carry them out. His soul alone will travel; he will not be traveling with his mistress to some location or other, to share its joys with her there. He thus comes to resemble the narrator of “La Solitude,” whose answer to the question “Vous n’éprouvez donc jamais . . . le besoin de partager vos jouissances?” [“So you never feel . . . the need to share your enjoyments?”] (OC I: 313) is no. Both poems are about solitary jouissances.

That conclusion is missing in the original 1857 version of “Les Projets,” which ended instead with a denunciation of dreaming (that is, dreaming about such things as palaces, tropical islands, and country inns) as a waste of time and a substitute for action. It would appear that when Baudelaire began to think of putting the poems in the order he adopted, he wrote the new conclusion. Likewise, while the “jacassements des petites négesses” were always a feature of “Les Projets,” the mention of “races jacassières” was not present in the original version of “La Solitude” (OC I: 1329).

“Les Projets” / “La Belle Dorothée”

“La Belle Dorothée” [Beautiful Dorothy] (25) takes the second of the three daydreams of “Les Projets” (24), in which the man full of projects imagines taking his mistress to a tropical landscape, and recycles it into a description of a beautiful woman from the tropics, as opposed to one brought there. Dorothy lives in a “petite case . . . coquettement arrangée . . . la mer . . . à cent pas de là” [little cabin . . . charmingly decorated . . . the sea . . . a hundred paces from there] (OC I: 317); the man had imagined for his mistress “Au bord de la mer, une belle case” [At the edge of the sea, a beautiful cabin] (OC I: 314). In the cabin Dorothy takes pleasure “à fumer, à se faire éventer” [in smoking, in having herself fanned] (OC I: 317); the mistress would likewise repose in her cabin, “si bien évêntée, fumant” [so well fanned, smoking] (OC I: 315). No other woman in the Spleen de Paris smokes or is fanned, nor does any other “case” [cabin] appear (Nies notes
the linkage between the seaside cabins and the women smoking and being fanned [280]). The man imagines their cabin bedroom “éclairée d’une lumière rose tamisée par les stores” [lit by a pink light filtered through the blinds]; Dorothy’s “ombrelle rouge, tamisant la lumière, projette sur son visage sombre le fard sanglant de ses reflets” [red umbrella, filtering the light, projects onto her dark face the bloody rouge of its reflections] (OC I: 316). The man with plans had imagined his mistress “descendant . . . les degrés de marbre d’un palais” [descending . . . the marble steps of a palace] (OC I: 314); when Dorothy walks on the sand, her foot is “pareil aux pieds des déesses de marbre que l’Europe enferme dans ses musées” [like the feet of marble goddesses that Europe encloses in its museums] (OC I: 316). It is no wonder that she “s’avance . . . souriant . . . comme si elle apercevait au loin dans l’espace un miroir reflétant sa démarche et sa beauté” [advances . . . smiling . . . as if she saw in the distant space a mirror reflecting her gait and her beauty], for that mirror exists in the preceding poem. It is a beautifully self-referential moment.

“La Belle Dorothée” / “Les Yeux des pauvres”

The first sentence of “La Belle Dorothée” (25)—“Le soleil accable la ville de sa lumière droite et terrible; le sable est éblouissant et la mer miroite” [The sun beats down on the city with its direct and terrible light; the sand is dazzling and the sea shimmers] (OC I: 316)—is itself mirrored in the description of the café in “Les Yeux des pauvres” [The Eyes of the Poor] (26): “Le gaz lui-même y déployait toute l’ardeur d’un début, et éclairait de toutes ses forces les murs aveuglants de blancheur, les nappes éblouissantes des miroirs” [The gaslight itself was deploying all the ardor of an opening, and illumined with all its forces the blindingly white walls, the dazzling surfaces of the mirrors] (OC I: 318). That is, miroite is mirrored in the miroirs, and éblouissant in éblouissantes. What does Baudelaire mean by this mirroring effect, which casts these two scenes—the sandy beach where Dorothy proudly walks, barefoot, to her assignation with a young officer and the new Paris café where the poet and his mistress will hear what the eyes of the poor have to say—in the same dazzling, mirrored light?

I believe he means to set up, as he so often does, a symmetrical opposition between the poems—in particular, between Dorothy and the trio comprising an exhausted father and his two sons, one of whom the father must carry because he is too weak to walk. Both Dorothy and the three are poor and oppressed, though she is a member of the working poor, a prostitute piling up piasters to buy her eleven-year-old sister, already nubile, out of slavery. She will reach this goal because “le maître de l’enfant est si avare,
trop avare pour comprendre une autre beauté que celle des écus!” [the child’s *master* is so greedy, too greedy to understand another beauty than that of money!] (OC I: 317). Part of the network of echoing words in the text these two poems comprise are this *maître* and the one the narrator’s mistress would like to call on to remove the offending sight of the poor: “Ces gens-là me sont insupportables avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le *maître* du café de les éloigner d’ici?” [Those people there are unbearable with their eyes as wide as carriage gates! Couldn’t you ask the *master* of the café to make them go away?] (OC I: 319). Another part of that network is the “*trop* [too] + adjective + *pour* [to] + infinitive + *autre* [other] + noun (infinitive’s direct object) + *que* [than] + noun (object compared)” found in the description of the slave owner, “*trop* avare *pour* comprendre un autre beauté *que* celle des écus,” and in what the narrator says of the younger brother’s expressive eyes, that they were “*trop* fascinés *pour* exprimer autre chose qu’une joie stupide et profonde” [too fascinated *to* express anything *other than* a stupified and deep joy] (OC I: 318). No similarly constructed phrase appears anywhere else in the Spleen de Paris (as can be attested by searching Cargo’s Concordance for “*trop*,” “*pour*,” and “*autre*”). Why would Baudelaire want to suggest a parallel between the slave master and the younger brother? Because what he is really setting up is not so much a parallel as an opposition, though one based on an underlying parallel. The younger brother parallels the younger sister (in that each is the younger of two siblings), but as one of the oppressed he is the opposite of her oppressive master.

That Baudelaire chooses to speak of these two opposites in practically the same turn of phrase is startling, for it suggests that the fact that one is an oppressor and the other one of the oppressed is for him subservient to the play of the text. That play is at work even in the most pathos-filled moment, when the older brother’s eyes seem to say, as he stares at the splendor of the luxurious café, “c’est une maison où peuvent seuls entrer les gens qui ne sont pas comme nous” [it is a house where only the people who are not like us can enter]. For Baudelaire invites us to compare this older brother to the older sister, who displays precisely the opposite attitude toward the Paris Opera, the café’s equivalent as a luxurious place where, one would have thought, the poor cannot enter. Dorothy, by contrast to the boy, seems fully confident that she can. When she has her assignation with the young officier “Infailliblement elle le priera, la simple créature, de lui décrire le bal de l’Opéra, et lui demandera si on peut y aller pieds nus . . . et puis encore si les belles dames de Paris sont toutes plus belles qu’elle” [Infallibly she will ask him, the simple creature, to describe for her the Opera Ball, and will ask him if one can go there barefoot . . . and then again if the beautiful ladies of Paris are all more beautiful than her] (OC
To go barefoot, the narrator had explained, was normally a sign of slavery, but “Dorothée est si prodigieusement coquette, que le plaisir d’être admirée l’emporte chez elle sur l’orgueil de l’affranchie, et, bien qu’elle soit libre, elle marche sans souliers” [Dorothy is so prodigiously flirtatious that the pleasure of being admired is more important to her than the pride of not being a slave, and even though she is free she walks without shoes] (OC I: 316). Her bare feet, the narrator says, resemble those of the marble goddesses in Europe’s museums. By contrast, those of the younger brother are in such poor shape that he must be carried, being “trop faible pour marcher” [too weak to walk] (OC I: 318). The family must keep walking because they are homeless—which is why the café seems a “maison” [house] they cannot enter; doubtless they all have tired feet. Baudelaire symmetrically opposes feet too tired to walk with feet worthy of being sculpted in marble, and a poor child who knows he cannot enter a place of luxury to a poor former slave who imagines she could, were she in Paris—and would like to do so on her own terms, barefoot.

“Les Yeux des pauvres” / “Une mort héroïque”

In “Une mort héroïque” [A Heroic Death] (27) a despotic prince condemns to death his favorite actor, noted for his “rôles muets” [mute roles] (OC I: 321), together with the rest of the conspirators who had tried to overthrow him. But the rumor spreads that a pardon is imminent, for he has arranged for Fancioulle to perform once more. The real reason, the narrator suggests, was that the prince wanted to see how the actor would perform under pressure. Fancioulle’s success that night is so great that the prince, though he joins in the thunderous applause, is jealous of his power to command the crowd. He summones a page to emit a shrill and prolonged mocking whistle that interrupts the actor, who seems to awaken from a dream, shuts his eyes, opens them again very wide, staggers, then drops dead on the stage.

Baudelaire inserts so many parallels between this poem and “Les Yeux des pauvres” (26) that they nearly become two versions of the same story. The father and two sons are mute, though they speak through their eyes; Fancioulle plays the scene as a mute: the narrator tells us that he excelled in “les rôles muets” and that after his death, although several “mimes” (OC I: 323) were recruited in an effort to replace him, none could match his talents. The trio’s eyes, as the narrator’s female companion complains, were “ouverts comme des portes cochères” [as wide as carriage gates] (OC I: 319); when Fancioulle opened his eyes again after the shock of the whistle, they were “démesurément agrandis” [enlarged beyond measure] (OC I: 322).
At Fancioulle’s final performance, “la petite cour déploya toutes ses pompes, et il serait difficile de concevoir, à moins de l’avoir vu, tout ce que la classe privilégiée d’un petit État, à ressources restreintes, peut montrer de splendeurs pour une vraie solennité” [the little court deployed all its pomp, and it would be difficult to imagine, without having seen it, all that the privileged class of a small State with limited resources could show in the way of splendors for a truly solemn occasion] (OC I: 320–21). By planting some telling verbal echoes Baudelaire implies that the court corresponds to the new boulevard and the equally new café, the former “montrant déjà glorieusement ses splendeurs inachevées” [showing already gloriously its unfinished splendors], while in the latter the gaslight “déployait toute l’ardeur d’un début” [deployed all the ardor of an opening] (OC I: 318). These expressions are rare in the volume, “déployer” with “toute[s]” and “montrer” with “splendeur[s]” appearing nowhere else. The court is, as the narrator says, a privileged class; the café is open only to a privileged class, as the older brother’s eyes assert. The privileged classes in both poems are spectators, the audience for Fancioulle’s performance and the audience the narrator and his mistress become to the spectacle of the poor family standing before them in the street. Both Fancioulle and the poor family are endowed with the power to communicate without words. Although originally a friend of the Prince and thus allied with the privileged class, Fancioulle, inspired by freedom and patriotism, had abandoned that status to join in the conspiracy to overthrow the sovereign.

Yet the poor family are spectators themselves to the splendor of the café: “ces six yeux contemplaient fixement le café nouveau avec une admiration égale, mais nuancée diversement par l’âge. . . . Quant aux yeux du plus petit, ils étaient trop fascinés pour exprimer autre chose qu’une joie stupide et profonde” [those six eyes contemplated fixedly the new café with an equal admiration, though with diverse nuances according to their ages. . . . As for the eyes of the littlest, they were too fascinated to express anything other than a stupid and deep joy] (OC I: 318). Admiration and joy—which appear together in no other prose poem—were likewise what the spectators felt at Fancioulle’s performance: “Les explosions de la joie et de l’admiration ébranlèrent à plusieurs reprises les voûtes de l’édifice” [Explosions of joy and admiration repeatedly shook the vaults of the edifice] (OC I: 322).

A detail in the café’s decor, embellishing its walls along with the gilded cornices, nymphs, goddesses, Hébé’s, and Ganymedes, is a sly nod at what will happen in “Une mort héroïque”: “les pages aux joues rebondies traînés par les chiens en laisse” [the pages with puffed-out cheeks dragged by dogs on leashes] (OC I: 318). For the “petit page” [little page] who carried out his master’s errand by emitting the “coup de sifflet aigu, prolongé”
[high-pitched and prolonged whistle] (OC I: 322) may well have puffed out his cheeks to do it. In any case he is the only other page in the Spleen de Paris.

Seeing the expressive eyes of the poor, the narrator felt a bit ashamed “de nos verres et de nos carafes, plus grands que notre soif” [of our glasses and carafes, bigger than our thirst] (OC I: 319). Baudelaire aligns him with the prince by saying that Providence had given him “des facultés plus grandes que ses États” [faculties bigger than his States], for his great misfortune was “il n’eut jamais un théâtre assez vaste pour son génie” [he never had a theater vast enough for his genius] (OC I: 320). (The expression “plus grand que” in this sense of “too big for” appears only in these two poems.) The prince, like many of Baudelaire’s narrators (although not a narrator himself), is an artist confronted with ennui: “véritable artiste lui-même, il ne connaissait d’ennemi dangereux que l’Ennui” [a true artist himself, the only dangerous enemy he knew was Ennui].

“Une mort héroïque” / “La Fausse Monnaie”

Mute eloquence, already visible in the eyes of the poor and in Fancioulle’s last performance, makes a third consecutive appearance in “La Fausse Monnaie” [The Counterfeit Coin] (28) when the narrator and a friend are confronted by a beggar: “Je ne connais rien de plus inquiétant que l’éloquence muette de ces yeux suppliants, qui contiennent à la fois, pour l’homme sensible qui sait y lire, tant d’humilité, tant de reproches” [I know nothing more disturbing than the mute eloquence of those supplicant eyes, containing, for the man who knows how to read it, so much humility, so many reproaches] (OC I: 323). Both men give him money, but the friend gives a much larger amount. The narrator says to his friend, “Vous avez raison; après le plaisir d’être étonné, il n’en est pas de plus grand que celui de causer une surprise” [You were right to do that. Beyond the pleasure of being astonished, there is none greater than causing a surprise]. Here he echoes what the narrator said in “Une mort héroïque” when he remarked that “l’étonnement . . . est une des formes les plus délicates du plaisir [astonishment . . . is one of the most delicate forms of pleasure] (OC I: 320). (The words étonner / étonnement and plaisir appear together only in these two passages.) Indeed, the prince indulged in the pleasure of causing Fancioulle to be surprised in the middle of his performance. He might not have intended for the surprise to be fatal: “avait-il lui-même deviné toute l’homicide efficacité de sa ruse? Il est permis d’en douter” [had he himself anticipated the homicidal power of his ruse? There are grounds for doubt] (OC I: 323).
But then the friend reveals that the coin he gave was counterfeit. The narrator thinks to himself that such an act could only be excused “par le désir de créer un événement dans la vie de ce pauvre diable, peut-être même de connaître les conséquences diverses, funestes ou autres, que peut engendrer une pièce fausse dans la main d’un mendiant” [by the desire to create an event in the life of the poor devil, perhaps even to find out the various consequences, catastrophic or otherwise, that a counterfeit coin in the hand of a beggar can produce] (OC I: 324). A parallel motivation, in the narrator’s opinion, lay behind the prince’s decision to have Fancioulle perform after he had been condemned to death. The prince “voulait juger de la valeur des talents scéniques d’un homme condamné à mort. Il voulait profiter de l’occasion pour faire une expérience physiologique d’un intérêt capital [Baudelaire’s italics], et vérifier jusqu’à quel point les facultés habituelles d’un artiste pouvaient être altérées ou modifiées par la situation extraordinaire où il se trouvait” [wanted to judge the quality of the theatrical talents of a man condemned to death. He wanted to profit from the occasion to conduct a physiological experiment of capital interest, and to see how far a performer’s normal abilities could be altered or modified by the extraordinary situation in which he found himself] (OC I: 320). What would the beggar do with the counterfeit money? Would he multiply it in real money? Would it get him arrested and thrown in prison? What would Fancioulle do on stage, “l’étrange bouffon, qui bouffonnait si bien la mort” [the strange buffoon, who buffooned death so well] (OC I: 322), when fiction became reality?

But just as the whistle “interrompit Fancioulle . . . , réveillé dans son rêve” [interrupted Fancioulle . . ., awakened from his dream] (OC I: 322), so too the friend, says the narrator, “rompit brusquement ma rêverie” [abruptly shattered my reverie] (OC I: 324) to say that he agrees that there is no sweeter pleasure than to surprise a man by giving him more than he hopes for. (These are the only instances in the volume of a rêve or rêverie being suddenly interrupted.) From this reply the narrator sadly concludes that his friend had not intended after all to conduct an experiment but had just wanted to do some charity on the cheap. But, thinking of what could befall the beggar were he caught passing the counterfeit coin, he says, “On n’est jamais excusable d’être méchant, mais il y a quelque mérite à savoir qu’on l’est; et le plus irréparable des vices est de faire le mal par bêtise” [One can never be excused for being wicked, but there is some merit in knowing that one is; and the most irreparable of vices is to do evil out of stupidity]. This judgment should fall on the prince as well, if indeed it is true, as the narrator suspects, that he had not intended for Fancioulle to die from the interruption but only wanted to spoil his success. (Lawler agrees, finding that in this passage from “La Fausse Monnaie” the narra-
“La Fausse Monnaie” / “Le Joueur généreux”

In “Le Joueur généreux” [The Generous Gambler] (29), the narrator passes
the devil on a crowded boulevard, recognizes him immediately, and, since
he has always wanted to make his acquaintance, accepts his unspoken invi-
tation to follow him to his subterranean Parisian lair. They wine and dine in
the lap of luxury. In gambling for pleasure, the narrator loses his soul but
feels no more emotion than if he had misplaced his calling card. As their
evening comes to a close, the devil shows his generosity by announcing
that he is giving him what he would have won had he not lost his soul, the
possibility of overcoming Ennui. His every wish will be granted: power and
adulation, pleasures, travel, women; and “l’argent, l’or, les diamants . . . vi-
endront vous chercher et vous prieront de les accepter, sans que vous ayez
fait un effort pour les gagner” [silver, gold, diamonds . . . will seek you
out and beg you to accept them, without your having made an effort to
earn them] (OC I: 327). On his way home, the narrator begins to doubt
whether he had really received such a gift: “je n’osais plus croire à un si
prodigieux bonheur” [I no longer dared to believe in such a prodigious
good fortune] (OC I: 328). As he fell asleep in his bed, he prayed to God
to make the devil keep his word.

Suzanne Guerlac writes that “the ‘prodigality’ of the flâneur” who gave
the beggar the counterfeit coin in “la Fausse Monnaie” “is thematically
related to the ‘generosity’ of the devil.” Indeed it is, for the surprising
“prodigalité” [prodigality] (OC I: 324) of the former is echoed in the
equally surprising “prodigieux bonheur” [prodigious good fortune] (OC I:
328) in which the narrator begins to find it hard to believe. Baudelaire
here invites us to compare what the narrator’s friend gave to what the devil
gave, the counterfeit coin to the promise of satisfying every wish, including
that of wealth. Both are based in faith and subject to doubt: the coin has
value only if the person to whom the beggar pays it believes in it, without
looking at it too closely; the narrator wants to believe in the sevil’s “munifi-
cence” but calls on a higher power to make it good. As Murphy remarks,
“‘Le Joueur généreux’ ends with an attempt to have God guarantee the
Devil’s promise, a situation that makes one think of the paradox that con-
stitutes ‘La Fausse Monnaie’” (563n). He also points out that the friend who gave the counterfeit coin was behaving as “a gambler” (442), though it is the beggar who would do the winning or losing, acquiring a few days’ wealth or landing in jail.

“Le Joueur généreux” / “La Corde”

In “La Corde” [The Rope] (30) a painter was charmed by a poor boy whom he had pose for him in various costumes. He persuaded the boy’s parents to let him come live with him; he would feed and clothe the child and pay him to clean his brushes and run errands. The painter was convinced he had improved the boy’s material circumstances: “la vie qu’il menait chez moi lui semblait un paradis, comparativement à celle qu’il aurait subie dans le taudis paternel” [the life he led with me seemed to him a paradise, compared to that he would have endured in the paternal hovel] (OC I: 329). Yet the boy surprised him by fits of precocious sadness and showed an immoderate craving for sugar and liqueurs, which the painter caught him stealing. After one such theft, he threatened to send him back to his parents, and then he went out on an errand. When he returned he found that the boy had hanged himself. Because instead of rope the boy had used twine, the painter had difficulty extracting it from his neck. When he tells the parents what happened to their child, the mother remains impassive, not shedding a tear. The painter surmises that her grief is too great to be expressed. When the body is laid out, she comes to view it and asks the painter to show her where he died. The painter then remembers, to his horror, that the nail and the twine trailing down are still there. He tries to remove the items from the mother’s sight, but she pleads with him to let her have them. Later, when neighbors write him to ask for a piece of the twine, he realizes “pourquoi la mère tenait tant à m’arracher la ficelle, et par quel commerce elle entendait se consoler” [why the mother wanted so much to tear the twine from me, and by what commerce she intended to console herself] (OC I: 351).

The painter was Edouard Manet, to whom Baudelaire dedicated “La Corde,” and a boy model who appears in several of his paintings did indeed hang himself in Manet’s studio. Murphy reproduces the three known historical sources (565–66). None of them indicate that the boy lived with Manet, and none make any mention of his parents, nor of the commercialization of the rope (nor that it was so thin Manet had trouble removing it from his neck), nor of his interest in Manet’s liqueurs (though one source suggests he did have a sweet tooth). So we can see what Baudelaire had to
work with and what he added.

Baudelaire's sequencing of events—"je le menacai de le renvoyer à ses parents. Puis je sortis" [I threatened to send him back to his parents. Then I went out] (OC I, 321) and during this absence the boy took his life—suggests that he may have killed himself because the painter had just threatened to send him back home. As the painter remarked, the boy felt his new residence was a "paradise" compared to hovel he had been living in with his parents. The devil's den in "Le Joueur généreux" was likewise a paradise one never wants to leave, an "île enchantée" [enchanted island] whose atmosphere was so exquisite that it "faisait oublier presque instantanément toutes les fastidieuses horreurs de la vie" [made one forget almost immediately all the tedious horrors of life]. Those who visit it become "les mangeurs de lotus" [lotus-eaters] who feel welling up in them "le désir de ne jamais revoir leurs pénates, leurs femmes, leurs enfants" [the desire never to see again their household gods, their wives, their children] (OC I: 325).

The boy displayed "un goût immodéré pour le sucre et les liqueurs" [an immoderate taste for sugar and liqueurs] (OC I: 329). That immoderation echoes the immoderation that characterized the narrator's drinking with the devil: "nous bûmes outre mesure de toutes sortes de vins extraordinaires" [we drank beyond measure from all sorts of extraordinary wines] (OC I: 326). The liqueurs correspond to the wines, and the sweets to the lotus leaves that no visitor wants to give up eating to go home.

The mother's lack of emotion at the loss of her son—"à mon grand étonnement, la mère fut impassible, pas une larme ne suinta du coin de son œil" [to my great astonishment, the mother was impassive; not a tear leaked from the corner of her eye] (OC I: 330)—corresponds to the narrator's lack of emotion at losing his soul: "J'avais joué et perdu mon âme . . . avec une insouciance et une légèreté héroïques . . . je n'éprouvai, quant à cette perte, qu'un peu moins d'émotion que si j'avais égaré, dans une promenade, ma carte de visite" [I had gambled and lost my soul . . . with heroic heedlessness and frivolity . . . I felt, for this loss, only a little less emotion than if I had mislaid, during a walk, my calling card] (OC I: 326). And her commercial compensation for losing her son is analogous to the compensation the devil gives the narrator for losing his soul. In an earlier version of the poem, Baudelaire was more specific about the financial payoff from the rope: "un mètre de corde de pendu, à cent francs le décimètre . . . cela fait mille francs, un réel, un efficace soulagement pour cette pauvre mère" [a meter of rope from the hanged victim, at one hundred francs per decimeter . . . that makes a thousand francs—a real, efficacious solace for that poor mother] (OC I: 1339n).
“La Corde” / “Les Vocations”

The painter was troubled by his memory of the hanged boy, “ce petit cadavre qui hantait les replis de mon cerveau, et dont le fantôme me fatiguait de ses grands yeux fixes” [that little corpse that haunted the folds of my brain, and whose ghost wore me down with its large staring eyes] (OC I: 331). That haunting continues into “Les Vocations” [The Vocations] (31), as if the Spleen de Paris were itself haunted by that ghost. Four boys were conversing among themselves, revealing to the reader that each has already discovered his vocation: the first is enamored with the theater, the second with religion, the third with women, and the fourth with the lifestyle of a trio of traveling musicians. Three of these vocations correspond to the costumes in which the painter dressed the boy model: “je l’ai transformé tantôt en petit bohémien, tantôt en ange, tantôt en Amour mythologique. Je lui ai fait porter le violon du vagabond, la Couronne d’Épines et les Clous de la Passion, et la Torche d’Éros” [I transformed him sometimes into a little gypsy, sometimes into an angel, sometimes in a mythological Cupid. I had him carry a vagabond’s violin, the Crown of Thorns and the Nails of the Passion, and Cupid’s Torch] (OC I: 329). The first costume corresponds to the fourth vocation (indeed, one of three vagabonds plays the violin); the second, to the passion of the second boy for God, whom he claimed to see sitting on a cloud; the third to the third boy, who found an immense pleasure in running his hand over the body of his family’s maid while she was asleep. The first boy’s passion for the theater emerged when his mother took him to see a play, and he found that “cela donne envie d’être habillé de même, de dire et de faire les mêmes choses” [it makes you want to dress the same way, to say and do the same things] (OC I: 332) as the actors on the stage. His desire to dress up in costumes and play different roles corresponds to the whole process of posing in which the painter’s model was obliged to engage; yet it is its opposite as well, for the boy in “Les Vocations” derived joy from the prospect, but the boy in “La Corde” did not, instead suffering “des crises singulières de tristesse précoce” [singular crises of precocious sadness] (OC I: 329).

In addition, each description of the four boys and their vocations features a detail that seems a haunting prolongation of the events of “La Corde.” The “grands yeux fixes” [large staring eyes] of the hanged child return in the “grands yeux creux” [large hollow eyes] (OC I: 332) the first boy notices in the actresses (the expression “grands yeux” appears in no other prose poem, though it will appear again in “Les Vocations,” as we will see). The second boy stared “avec une fixité étonnante” [with an astonishing fixity] (OC I: 332) at God on a cloud, as the hanged boy’s eyes
stared “avec une fixité effrayante” [with a frightening fixity] (OC I: 329) (only in these poems does “fixité” appear).

The third boy, in bed with the sleeping maid, derived great pleasure from running his hand “sur ses bras, sur son cou et sur ses épaules. Elle a les bras et le cou bien plus gros que toutes les autres femmes” [over her arms, her neck, and her shoulders. Her arms and her neck are much bigger than all other women’s] (OC I: 333). This celebration of female fatness is uncharacteristic of Baudelaire; nothing like it appears in the Fleurs du mal. Why should it appear here? The answer to that question sends us back to “La Corde,” where the narrator also focuses on a neck: “le petit monstre s’était servi d’une ficelle fort mince qui était entrée profondément dans les chairs, et il fallait maintenant, avec de minces ciseaux, chercher la corde entre les deux bourrelets de l’enflure, pour lui dégager le cou” [the little monster had used a very thin twine that entered deeply into the flesh, and now, with thin scissors, I had to look for the string between the two swollen rolls of flesh, in order to free his neck] (OC I: 330). The boy’s neck, which was not normally fat, had nearly become so, swollen into two rolls of flesh because of his strange choice of rope—a choice that Baudelaire appears to have made up, for none of the three extant accounts of the death of Manet’s model says anything about its thinness (Murphy, 565–66). The boy who had been in bed with the maid went on to praise her flesh for having the quality of paper: “si douce qu’on dirait du papier à lettre ou du papier de soie” [so soft one would say it was letter-writing paper or tissue paper] (OC I: 333). As Kaplan remarks, “The analogy of female flesh with paper has rich connotations” (1990, 111). He does not say which connotations he has in mind, but the one that suggests itself the most strongly is that the maid herself exists only on paper, that she is essentially textual, her qualities being determined by what appears in another text, the description of the hanged boy’s neck: her neck is fat because his is swollen. The other aspect of her body that the boy enjoys is her hair, into which he plunges his head in typical Baudelairean fashion, recalling “La Chevelure” in the Fleurs du mal and “Un hémisphère dans une chevelure” in the Spleen de Paris. But even here Baudelaire plants a haunting hint of the hanged boy: “Ensuite j’ai fourré ma tête dans ses cheveux qui pendtaient dans son dos” [Then I burrowed my head into her hair that was hanging onto her back] (OC I: 333). The verb pendre appears in no other prose poem than “La Corde”: “mon petit bonhomme, l’espègle companion de ma vie, pendu au panneau de cette armoire!” [my little fellow, the mischievous companion of my life, hanging from the paneling of that wardrobe!] (OC I: 329).

As the first boy was fascinated by the actresses’ “grands yeux creux” [large hollow eyes], the fourth was likewise by the “grands yeux sombres”
[large dark eyes] (OC I: 334) of the three musicians, both of these recalling the “grands yeux fixes” [large staring eyes] of the dead boy (the expression, as I have said, appearing only in these two poems). One played the violin, repeating the image of a vagabond with a violin that was one of the poses the painter made his model adopt; another played “les cordes d’un petit piano suspendu à son cou” [the strings of a little piano hanging from his neck] (OC I, 334). This combination of “cordes,” “suspendu,” and “cou” reassembles elements from the story of the boy suspended by a “corde” attached to his neck. “L’air peu intéressé des trois autres camarades me donna à penser que ce petit était déjà un incompris” [The uninterested attitude the three other friends showed made me think that this little one was already misunderstood] (OC I: 335; Baudelaire’s italics). One might wonder if this remark could be addressed to the reader who fails to understand, for lack of interest, the subleties going on beneath the surface here. He adds that he could see in the boy’s eyes and countenance something “précoce fatal” [preociously fatal], at which point we can see the haunting ghost of the hanged boy appearing again, for the latter displayed moments of “tristesse précoce” [precocious sadness] (OC I: 329) (in no other prose poem does any form of the word appear). Having that precocious quality, the narrator continues, usually discourages sympathy but, “je ne sais pourquoi, excitait la mienne, au point que j’eus un instant l’idée bizarre que je pouvais avoir un frère à moi-même inconnu” [I know not why, excited mine, to the point that for an instant I had the bizarre idea that I could have a brother unknown to myself] (OC I: 335). But the boy has, it appears, yet another unknown brother in the boy in the preceding poem whose precocious sadness was, even more clearly than his, “fatal.”

“Les Vocations” / “Le Thyrse”

“Le Thyrse” [The Thyrus] (32) is dedicated to Franz Liszt, who, like one of the three gypsy musicians by whom the fourth boy was enthused in “Les Vocations,” is an itinerant player of the piano, though one too large to hang from his neck. “Cher Liszt, à travers les brumes, par delà les fleuves, par-dessus les villes où les pianos chantent votre gloire, où l’imprimerie traduit votre sagesse, en quelque lieu que vous soyez, dans les splendeurs de la ville éternelle ou dans les brumes des pays rêveurs que console Cambrinus . . . je vous salue” [Dear Liszt, across the mists, beyond the rivers, above the cities where the pianos sing your glory, where the printing press translates your wisdom, wherever you may be, in the splendors of the Eternal City or in the mists of the dreaming lands Cambrinus consoles . . . I salute you] (OC
Chapter 3

As a performer, Liszt’s travels take him from Rome (the Eternal City) to the Germanic north (consoled by the beer Cambrinus invented). The bohemian musicians in “Les Vocations” are similarly itinerant, if on a less exalted level; the boy overhears them discussing their forthcoming sojourn in Austria, where they would have met a more receptive audience, and then their decision to go to Spain instead, since winter is approaching. Spain is to Austria as Rome is to Germany and south is to north. Kaplan gives the parallel a somewhat different spin: “Liszt might typify the fourth boy of ‘Vocations’ now full grown, inspired by gypsies, many of whom are also Hungarian” (1990, 118).

The narrator praises Liszt as an incarnation of the thyrsus, an ancient symbol comprising a staff entwined by arabesques of flowers and vines. “Le bâton, c’est votre volonté, droite, ferme et inébranlable; les fleurs, c’est la promenade de votre fantaisie autour de votre volonté; c’est l’élément féminin exécutant autour du mâle ses prestigieuses pirotettes. Ligne droite et ligne arabesque, intention et expression, roideur de la volonté, sinuosité du verbe” [The staff is your will: upright, firm, and unshakeable; the flowers are the wandering of your fantasy around your will; they are the feminine element performing its prestigious pirouettes around the male. Straight line and arabesque, intention and expression, inflexibility of the will, sinuosity of the word] (OC I: 336). The thyrsus is all those things, but it is also yet another instance of the haunting memory of the hanged boy, most recently seen in “Les Vocations” in the “cordes” of the piano hanging from the musician’s neck. The difficulty the narrator had in disengaging the twine, a detail Baudelaire added to the original event, resurfaces here, when the narrator argues against trying such a separation between entwiner and entwined: “amalgame tout-puissant et indivisible du génie, quel analyste aura le détestable courage de vous diviser et de vous séparer?” [all-powerful and indivisible amalgam of genius, what analyst will have the detestable courage to divide and separate you?] (OC I: 336).

“Le Thyrse” / “Enivrez-vous”

The narrator in “Enivrez-vous” [Get Drunk] (33) urges us to intoxicate ourselves “De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise” [With wine, poetry,

20. The Lisztian wisdom appearing in print may include, in addition to his musical scores, the essay on Wagner that Baudelaire quotes at length and that resonates so well with his own philosophy of composition. The “nœud mélodique qui constitue tout son drame” [melodic knot that constitutes all its drama] (Liszt, quoted and italicized by Baudelaire, OC II: 801) that Liszt saw in Wagner anticipates the thyrsus Baudelaire sees in Liszt and that we see in Baudelaire’s repeated structures.
or virtue—as you choose] (OC I: 337). The intoxicating power of art (here represented by poetry) was already evident in “Le Thyrse” when the narrator addressed Liszt (whom he also calls a poet) as a devotee of Bacchus, god of wine, “cher Bacchant de la Beauté mystérieuse et passionnée” [dear Bacchant of mysterious and passionate Beauty] and asserted, “Jamais nym- phe exaspérée par l’invincible Bacchus ne secoua son thyrse sur les têtes de ses compagnes affolées avec autant d’énergie et de caprice que vous agitez votre génie sur les cœurs de vos frères” [Never did a nymph exasperated by invincible Bacchus shake her thrysus over the heads of her crazed companions with as much force and caprice as you wield your genius over your brothers’ hearts] (OC I: 336).

“Enivrez-vous” / “Déjà!”

In “Déjà!” [Already!] (34), after a hundred-day voyage, all the ship’s passengers were delighted to make landfall except the narrator, who hated being separated from the sea, “de cette mer si monstrueusement séduisante, . . . si infiniment variée dans son effrayante simplicité” [from that sea so monstrously seductive, . . . so infinitely varied in its frightening simplicity]. When each of the others said “‘Enfin!’ je ne pus crier que: ‘Déjà!’” [“At last!” all I could cry was “Already!”] (OC I: 338). This déjà marks the end of his intoxication with that from which he was forcibly separated (the sea), as another déjà marks the end of intoxication in “Enivrez-vous,” the moment when you wake up and find “l’ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue” [your drunkenness already diminished or gone]. When that happens, the narrator advises us, “demandez au vent, à la vague, à l’étoile, . . . à tout ce qui gémit . . . demandez quelle heure il est; et le vent, la vague, l’étoile . . . vous répondront: ‘Il est l’heure de s’enivrer! Pour n’être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous . . . ’” [ask the wind, the wave, the star, . . . all that groans . . . ask what time it is; and the wind, the wave, the star . . . will tell you: “It is time to get drunk! In order not to be the martyed slaves of Time, get drunk . . . ”] (OC I: 337). The wind, the waves, the stars, and the groans reappear in “Déjà!” in connection with another question: “Depuis nombre de jours, nous pouvions contempler l’autre côté du firmament et déchiffrer l’alphabet céleste des antipodes” [For several days we were able to contemplate the other side of the firmament and decipher the celestial alphabet of the antipodes]—that is, they had been sailing in the Southern Hemisphere and could contemplate the stars of that sky. “Et chacun des passagers gémissait . . . ‘Quand donc,’ disaient-ils, ‘cesserons-nous de dormir un sommeil secoué par la lame, troublé par un vent qui ronfle plus haut que nous?’” [And each of the passengers was groaning . . .
“When, then,” they said, “will we stop sleeping a sleep disturbed by the waves, troubled by a wind that snores louder than us?” (OC I: 337–38). Not being enthused by the sea like the narrator, they are slaves of Time, weighed down by the hundred days of their voyage, impatient to see it end. In “Enivrez-vous” the narrator tells us to ask a question of “tout ce qui gémit” [all that groans]; in “Déjà!” those who groan ask a question. Both questions are about time: “quelle heure il est” (“Enivrez-vous); “Quand donc . . . ?” (“Déjà”).

The listless passengers may be blind to the charm of the sea, but they are intoxicated by the land. In this regard they resemble the enthused Baccantes likened to Liszt and his listeners in “Le Thyrse.” Baudelaire links them all the more tightly by saying of both groups that they are exaspérés and affolés: “Jamais nymphe exaspérée par l’invincible Bacchus ne secoua son thyrse sur les têtes de ses compagnes affolées avec autant d’énergie” [Never did a nymph exasperated by invincible Bacchus shake her thyrsus over the heads of her crazed companions with as much force]; “On eût dit que l’approche de la terre exaspérait leur souffrance. . . . Tous étaient si affolés par l’image de la terre absente, qu’ils auraient, je crois, mangé de l’herbe avec plus d’enthousiasme que les bêtes” [One would have said that the approach of land exasperated their suffering. . . . All were so crazed by the image of the absent land that they would, I believe, have eaten grass with more enthusiasm than animals] (“Le Thyrse,” OC I: 336). It is as if they were following the advice of the narrator of “Enivrez-vous,” despite their difference from the narrator of “Déjà.” They were getting intoxicated with something.

“Déjà!” / “Les Fenêtres”

The narrator of “Les Fenêtres” [Windows] (35) looks out over “des vagues de toits” [waves of roofs], as if he were looking out to sea, and then focuses on a woman glimpsed in a window. “Il n’est pas d’objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu’une fenêtre éclairée d’une chandelle” [There is no object more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more shadowy, more dazzling than a window lit by a candle] (OC I: 339). Two of those adjectives were associated with the land in “Déjà” that obsessed everyone on the ship but the narrator: “c’était une terre magnifique, éblouissante” [it was a magnificent, dazzling land] that emitted “un mystérieux parfum” [a mysterious perfume] (OC I: 338). These two qualities among those that passengers other than the narrator of “Déjà” found in land the narrator of “Les Fenêtres” finds in what he sees over the waves of roofs. Indeed, if we superimpose one poem over the
other, we will find that land in one corresponds to sunlight in the other, of
which he says, “Ce qu’on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant
que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre” [What one can see in the sunlight
is always less interesting than what takes place behind a window] (OC I:
339). Land in “Déjà” and what can be seen in sunlight in “Les Fenêtres”
are what everyone but the narrator pays attention to; the sea and what is
behind a window are what he finds more interesting. “Dans le trou noir
ou lumineux” [in the black or luminous hole] of a window “vit la vie, rêve
la vie, souffre la vie” [life lives, life dreams, life suffers]; similarly, the sea
seems to contain and to represent by its games, its allures, its angers, and
and its smiles “les humeurs, les agonies et les extases de toutes les âmes qui ont vécu, qui vivent et qui vivront!” [the moods, the agonies, and the ecsta-
sies of all the souls who have lived, who are living, and who will live!].

By staring at and listening to the sea he can experience the same pleasure
he finds in looking into a distant window, for in both he can discover
the lives of other people. The sea is “infiniment variée dans son effrayante
simplicité” [infinitely varied in its frightening simplicity] (OC I: 338) but
nevertheless seems to contain and represent all those lives; similarly, what
the window contains for the narrator is “presque rien” [almost nothing]
(OC I: 339), nothing more than the face, the clothing, and the gestures
of the woman he sees there. But from that almost nothing, reminiscent of
the extreme simplicity of the sea, he has reconstructed her life story: “j’ai
refait l’histoire de cette femme, ou plutôt sa légende, et quelquefois je me
la raconte à moi-même en pleurant” [I have reconstructed that woman’s
history, or rather her legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself in weeping]
(OC I: 339).

Yet he makes no guarantee that it is accurate. It is more fiction than
history, as his correction of “histoire” by “légende” indicates, and as he
reveals in his reply to an imagined question: “’Es-tu sûr que cette légende
soit la vraie?’ Qu’importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi,
si elle m’a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?” [“Are you
sure that this legend is the true one?” What does it matter what the reality
located outside of me is, if it helps me to live, to feel that I am and what
I am?]. In other words, the focus here is not on his discovery of the truth
but on his composing a legend. As Kaplan remarks, “His ‘empathy’ for
the old woman is, in fact, projection exploited in the service of fiction. . . .
After all, his fabricated tale, not the woman’s domestic toil, provoked his
tears” (1990, 124). Kaplan goes on to point out that when the narrator
says that the legend helps him know not only that he is but also what he
is [“ce que je suis”], he means that he is a writer (ibid., 125). And as Sima


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Godfrey reminds us, “légende” means not just “legend” but “text”: one of its meanings in French is “caption,” a written text to accompany a picture, and it comes from the Latin future passive participle of the verb legere, “to read,” meaning “that which must be read.”

“Les Fenêtres” / “Le Désir de peindre”

Since by depicting her he makes a work of art, it is appropriate, as Godfrey suggests (95), that this poem be followed by one about depicting another woman in another kind of work of art. In “Le Désir de peindre” [The Desire to Paint] (36) the narrator tells us, “Je brûle de peindre celle qui m’est apparue si rarement et qui a fui si vite” [I burn to paint the one who appeared to me so rarely and who fled so quickly] (OC I: 340). This “celle” corresponds to the woman in the window, and his desire to paint her corresponds to the other narrator’s desire to write that other woman’s legend. The particular woman he wants to paint, by contrast to the “femme mûre, ridée déjà” [mature woman, already wrinkled] (OC I: 339) in the window, is beautiful. Nevertheless, she has certain qualities that were also seen in that window: “Elle est belle. . . . En elle le noir abonde: et tout ce qu’elle inspire est nocturne et profond. Ses yeux sont deux antres où scintille vaguement le mystère. . . . Je la comparerais à un soleil noir, si l’on pouvait concevoir un astre noir versant la lumière” [She is beautiful. . . . Black abounds in her, and everything she inspires is nocturnal and profound. Her eyes are two caves where mystery dimly shines. . . . I would compare her to a black sun, if one could imagine a black star that poured forth light] (36, OC I: 340). Compare this to what the window makes visible: “Il n’est pas d’objet plus profond, plus mystérieux . . . qu’une fenêtre éclairée d’une chandelle. Ce qu’on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre . . . ce trou noir ou lumineux” [There is no object more profound, more mysterious . . . than a window lit by a candle. What one can see in the sunshine is always less interesting that what happens behind a window . . . that black or luminous hole] (35, OC I: 339). In comparing her to a black sun in 36, he is uniting what had been two opposites in 35, the sun and the window. Though by calling the window a hole that is alternately black and luminous, he makes it the same and yet the opposite of the black sun, which is at the same time black and luminous.

“Le Désir de peindre” / “Les Bienfaits de la lune”

Having said that he would compare the woman he wishes to paint to a black sun, he adds: “Mais elle fait plus volontiers penser à la lune, qui sans doute l’a marquée de sa redoutable influence” [But she makes one think more willingly of the moon, which has doubtless marked her with its fearful influence] (OC I: 340). This is about the midpoint of the poem, in most of the rest of which he continues the lunar comparison. The next poem, “Les Bienfaits de la lune” [The Moon’s Benefits] (37), is all about the moon, with the result that “Le Désir de peindre” (36) is a clear instance of the heads-and-tails phenomenon Baudelaire spoke of in the letter to Houssaye: its “head” (its first half) is connected to the poem that precedes it, its “tail” (its second half) to the next. The women in both 36 and 37 are under the moon’s fearful influence. The one in 36, as we have just seen, is “marquée de sa redoutable influence” in 36. In 37 the moon tells her, “Tu subiras éternellement l’influence de mon baiser” [You will undergo eternally the influence of my kiss] (OC I: 341); later, the narrator tells her he is “cherchant dans toute ta personne le reflet de la redoutable Divinité” [seeking in your entire person the reflection of the fearful Divinité] (OC I: 342), meaning the moon. (The word redoutable appears in no other prose poem.)

“Les Bienfaits de la lune” / “Laquelle est la vraie?”

“Laquelle est la vraie?” [Which Is the True One?] (38) begins like a story by Edgar Allan Poe (which seems to have led Kaplan [1990, 128] to conclude, erroneously, that Poe wrote a poem with the same title as the name of the woman in the poem):

J’ai connu une certaine Bénédicta, qui remplissait l’atmosphère d’idéal. . . . Mais cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps; aussi est-elle morte quelques jours après que j’eus fait sa connaissance, et c’est moi-même qui l’ai enterrée, un jour que le printemps agitait son encensoir jusque dans les cimetières.

[I knew a certain Bénédicta, who filled the atmosphere with the ideal. . . . But this miraculous girl was too beautiful to live long, and thus she died a few days after I met her, and it was I myself who buried her, on a day when springtime was shaking its censers even in the cemeteries.] (OC I, 342)

The only other prose poem where encensoirs appear is “Les Bienfaits de la
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lune” (37), where as here they are associated with flowers (in 38 by metaphor, in 37 by simile): “les fleurs sinistres qui ressemblent aux encensoirs d’une religion inconnue” [the sinister flowers that resemble censers of an unknown religion] (OC I: 341). In addition, that Bénédicta “remplissait l’atmosphère” [filled the atmosphere] reminds us of how “la Lune remplissait toute la chambre comme une atmosphere phosphorique, comme un poison lumineux” [the Moon filled the whole bedroom like a phosphorescent atmosphere, like a luminous poison] (OC I: 341).

The story becomes even more Poe-like when the narrator, standing by Bénédicta’s grave, suddenly saw “une petite personne qui ressemblait singulièrement à la défunte, et qui, piétinant sur la terre fraîche avec une violence hystérique et bizarre, disait en éclatant de rire: ‘C’est moi, la vraie Bénédicta!’” [a little person who bore a singular resemblance to the departed, and who, stamping on the fresh earth with hysterical and bizarre violence, said as she burst out in a laugh: “It is I, the true Bénédicta!”] and demanded that he love her “telle que je suis” [just as I am] (OC I: 342). Hence the title: which Bénédicta is the real one? The second’s singular resemblance to the first itself parallels another resemblance, the extensive and detailed one whose elaborate description takes up most of “Les Bienfaits de la lune” (37). It is the resemblance between the narrator’s beloved, once she will have been transformed by the moon’s redoubtable influence, and her lovers (which include the narrator; in fact, especially the narrator).

To draw out the resemblances I will list them singly:

- “Tu aimeras ce que j’aime et ce qui m’aime” [You will love what I love and what loves me]; “tu seras aimée de mes amants” [you will be loved by my lovers] (OC I: 341).
- (You will love) “la mer immense et verte; l’eau informe et multiforme” [the immense green sea, the formless and multiform water]; (your lovers will be men who love) “la mer, la mer immense, tumultueuse et verte, l’eau informe et multiforme” [the sea, immense, tumultuous and green sea, the formless and multiform water]
- (You will love) “le lieu où tu ne seras pas” [the place where you will not be]; (they will love) “le lieu où ils ne sont pas” [the place where they are not]
- (You will love) “l’amant que tu ne connaîtras pas” [the lover whom you will not know]; (they will love) “la femme qu’ils ne connaissent pas” [the woman they do not know]
- (You will love) “les fleurs monstrueuses; les parfums qui font délirer” [monstrous flowers; perfumes that cause delirium] (OC I: 341); (they will love) “les fleurs sinistres, qui ressemblent aux encensoirs d’une religion inconnue, les parfums qui troublent la volonté” [sinister flow-
ers that resemble the censers of an unknown religion, perfumes that trouble the will] (OC I: 341–42)

- (You will love) “les chats qui se pâment sur les pianos, et qui gémissent comme les femmes, d’une voix rauque et douce” [cats that faint on pianos, moaning like women, in a hoarse and gentle voice] (OC I: 341); (they will love) “les animaux sauvages et voluptueux qui sont les emblèmes de leur folie” [wild and voluptuous animals that are the emblems of their madness] (OC I: 342).

In “Laquelle est la vraie?” (38) a resemblance is simply asserted (“une petite personne qui ressemblait singulièrement à la défunte”); in “Les Bienfaits de la lune” (37) a resemblance is spelled out in almost excruciating detail (there are at least eleven parallels between the moon-influenced beloved and her lovers). The resemblance in 37 is between a beloved woman and her lover(s); in 38 it is between two versions of the beloved woman, in her lover’s eyes. Actually, it is between two competing versions, the second of which denies the first, while the lover (the narrator) rejects the second: “Mais moi, furieux, j’ai répondu : ‘Non! non! non!’” [But I, furious, replied: “No! No! No!”] (OC I: 342).

“Laquelle est la vraie?” / “Un cheval de race”

“Un cheval de race” [A Thoroughbred] (39) follows the case of two Bénédictas of whom the second contradicts the first, in yet another mirror reversal, with one woman having two contradictory qualities: “Elle est bien laide. Elle est délicieuse pourtant! . . . Elle est vraiment laide . . . mais . . . elle est exquise” [She is quite ugly. Yet she is delectable! . . . She is truly ugly . . . but . . . she is exquisite] (OC I: 343). Kaplan tries to relate 38 and 39 on a different basis, oddly asserting that the second Bénédicta is an “ugly little monster” (1990, 129). Thus in his estimation the ugly yet exquisite woman in 39 resembles the combination of beautiful and ugly Bénédictas in 38. But while the second Bénédicta is little (“une petite personne”), nothing in the poem gives us any reason to conclude she is ugly.

“Un cheval de race” / “Le Miroir”

The play of mirrors and the theme of ugliness continue (as Nies remarks [281–82]) with “Le Miroir” [The Mirror] (40), in which an ugly man looks at his reflection: “Un homme épouvantable entre et se regarde dans la glace” [A frightful man enters and looks at himself in the mirror]. The
narrator asks him, “Pourquoi vous regardez-vous au miroir, puisque vous ne pouvez vous y voir qu’avec déplaisir?” [Why do you look at yourself in the mirror, since it is only with displeasure that you can see yourself there?]. He replies that “d’après les immortels principes de 89, tous les hommes sont égaux en droits; donc je possède le droit de me mirer; avec plaisir ou déplaisir, cela ne regarde que ma conscience” [according to the immortal principles of 1789, all men are equal in rights; therefore I possess the right to look at my reflection. Whether it is with pleasure or displeasure is my business] (OC I: 344).

“Le Miroir” / “Le Port”

The egalitarian pleasure, or displeasure, of looking at an image in a piece of glass is followed in “Le Port” [The Port] (41) by a combination of the same and the opposite, the aristocratic pleasure of looking at another kind of glass: “il y a une sorte de plaisir mystérieux et aristocratique” [there is a sort of mysterious or aristocratic pleasure] in looking at the “prisme” [prism] comprising the “ampleur du ciel, l’architecture mobile des nuages, les colorations changeantes de la mer, le scintillement des phares” [vastness of the sky, the mobile architecture of the clouds, the changing colors of the sea, the twinkling of the lighthouses] (OC I: 344) in a maritime port. The prism corresponds to the mirror (although, by way of opposition, in 40 the image is seen through the mirror but in 41 the image is the prism); the ugliness seen in 40 is countered by “la beauté” [the beauty] seen in 41; the egalitarian pleasure is followed by the aristocratic pleasure; the pleasure of contemplating oneself is answered by that of seeing others, “tous ses mouvements de ceux qui partent et de ceux qui reviennent, de ceux qui ont encore la force de vouloir, le désir de voyager ou de s’enrichir” [all those movements of those leaving and those returning, of those who still have the strength to will, the desire to travel or get rich] (OC I: 344–45).

“Le Port” / “Portraits de maîtresses”

The narrator who observes this ambitious coming and going in the prism of the port himself “n’a plus ni curiosité ni ambition” [no longer has neither curiosity nor ambition] (OC I: 344). The first of the four depictions in “Portraits de maîtresses” [Portraits of Mistresses] (42) is likewise an instance of ambition perceived through glass: the woman had “une ambition malséante et difforme . . . entre ma bouche et la sienne je trouvai . . . un masque de verre” [an unseemly and misshapen ambition . . . between my mouth
and hers I found . . . a mask of glass] (OC I: 346). The last of the four mistresses made her lover suffer the most of all because being with her was like living with a mirror always before him:

L’histoire de mon amour ressemble à un interminable voyage sur une surface pure et polie comme un miroir, vertigineusement monotone, qui aurait réfléchi tous mes sentiments et mes gestes avec l’exactitude ironique de ma propre conscience, de sorte que je ne pouvais pas me permettre un geste ou un sentiment déraisonnable sans apercevoir immédiatement le reproche muet de mon inséparable spectre.

[The history of my love affair resembles an endless voyage on a surface pure and polished like a mirror, vertiginously monotonous, that reflected all my feelings and gestures with the ironic precision of my own conscience, so that I could not allow myself an unreasonable gesture or feeling without immediately seeing the silent reproach of my inseparable specter.] (OC I: 348)

This, the culmination of the seeing-through-glass motif of the past several poems (the prism of 41, the mirror of 40, itself related to the mirroring taking place without benefit of glass in 39, 38, and 37), climaxes in murder.

“Portraits de maîtresses” / “Le Galant Tireur”

The fourth man’s murder of his mistress is paralleled, or parodied, by a husband’s symbolic murder of his wife in “Le Galant Tireur” [The Galant Marksman] (43). Irked by her laughter when he misses the target at a shooting range, he tells her to look at a doll to the right of the target that, he informs her, he is pretending is her. With eyes shut he fires and neatly decapitates the doll, then thanks her for inspiring his aim. The murder in the preceding poem took place in a wood: “Un soir, dans un bois . . . ” [One evening, in a wood . . . ] (OC I: 348; the ellipsis is Baudelaire’s). Likewise did the symbolic murder in this one, as we learn in the poem’s first sentence: “Comme la voiture traversait le bois, il la fit arrêter dans le voisinage d’un tir, disant qu’il lui serait agréable de tirer quelques balles pour tuer le Temps” [As the carriage was traveling through the woods, he had it stop near a shooting range, saying that it would be pleasant to shoot some bullets to kill Time] (OC I: 349). This first sentence, the “head” of 43, repeats in a quite literal way (as Nies notes [282]) the “tail,” the last sentence, of 42: “Ensuite on fit apporter de nouvelles bouteilles, pour tuer
“Le Galant Tireur” / “La Soupe et les nuages”

The tables are turned in “La Soupe et les nuages” [The Soup and the Clouds] (44), where a wife directs her violence against her husband. She is serving him dinner; he is looking out the dining room window at clouds in the sky, “les mouvantes architectures que Dieu fait avec les vapeurs, les merveilleuses constructions de l’impalpable” [the mobile architectures God makes with vapor, the marvelous constructions of the impalpable], saying to himself that “Toutes ces fantasmagories sont presque aussi belles que les yeux de ma belle bien-aimée” [All these phantasmagorias are almost as beautiful as the eyes of my beautiful beloved] (OC I: 350), when suddenly she gives him a violent punch in the back and tells him to eat his soup instead of staring at clouds. Not only is the violence directed here from wife to husband instead of from husband to wife, as it was in 43, but in both poems the husband speaks of seeing a resemblance between something else—the doll, the clouds—and her.

“La Soupe et les nuages” / “Le Tir et le cimetière”

As the clouds visible from the dining room offered a distraction from the soup, a cemetery visible from the tavern in “Le Tir et le cimetière” [The Shooting Range and the Cemetery] (45) offers a distraction to a customer in a tavern who, when he approached it, had been puzzled by the strange sign it bore: “À la vue du cimetière, Estaminet” [Cemetery View, Tavern] (OC I: 351). He “but une verre de bière en face des tombes” [drank a glass of beer facing the tombs] and then “la fantaisie le prit de descendre dans ce cimetière, dont l’herbe était si haute et si invitante” [the whim took him to go down into the cemetery, whose grass was so high and inviting]. He contemplated the intense sunlight, the carpet of flowers fertilized by the decomposing corpses, and the “immense bruissement” [immense buzzing] of life in the air that was interrupted at regular intervals by “des coups de feu d’un tir voisin” [gunshots from a neighboring shooting range]. These “coups” parallel the “violent coup de poing dans le dos” [violent blow of a fist in the back] (OC I: 350) the wife gave the cloud-distracted husband in the poem before. In other words, the dining room is to the clouds as the tavern is to the cemetery; the clouds are to the “coup de poing” as the...
cemetery is the “coups de feu.” Murphy, noting some of the same recurrences, finds the sequence “Portraits de maîtresses” / “Le Galant Tireur” / “Le Tir et le cimetière” “obviously meaningful” [de toute évidence significative] (472n).

“The Tir et le Cimetière” / “Perte d’auréole”

“À la vue du cimetière, Estaminet” in 45 is an “enseigne” [sign] (OC I: 351); the halo lost in “Perte d’auréole” [Loss of Halo] (46) had been the narrator’s “insignes” [insignia] (OC I: 352) (neither word appears in any other prose poem). The protagonist of 45 was so intrigued by the sign, which struck him as “Curieux” [Curious] (OC I: 351), that after visiting the tavern he was drawn to the cemetery from which it derived its name. The relationship of 46’s narrator to his insignia is just the opposite: he was already intimately acquainted with his “insignes,” and the halo holds so little interest for him that when it falls from his head in the rush of Paris traffic, he does not pick it up from the mud. “J’ai jugé moins désagréable de perdre mes insignes que de me faire rompre les os” [I judged it less distressing to lose my insignia that to get my bones broken] in the “chaos mouvant où la mort arrive au galop de tous les côtés à la fois” [moving chaos where death arrives at a gallop from all sides at once] (OC I: 352). A friend suggests, “Vous devriez au moins faire afficher cette auréole” [You should at least post a notice about that halo], which would transform the halo into something even more resembling the sign on the tavern.

The tavern’s sign was an invitation to drink: “bien faite pour donner soif!” [well chosen to induce thirst] (OC I: 351), the traveler exclaims; the narrator’s insignia designated him as a particular sort of a drinker, “le buveur de quintessences” [the imbiber of quintessences] (OC I: 352), as his friend remarks. As Richard Klein points out, the prose poem reminds us of the poet of “Bénédiction,” who in all that he drinks finds “le nectar vermeil” [the vermillion nectar] (l. 24) and for whom heaven reserves a “couronne mystique” [mystic crown] (l. 67).23

As he sits on a tomb in the cemetery, the traveler in 45 hears a voice from beneath him complaining of the racket coming from the shooting range nearby: “Maudites soient vos ambitions, maudits soient vos calculs, mortels impatients, qui venez étudier l’art de tuer auprès du sanctuaire de la Mort!” [Cursed be your ambitions, cursed be your calculations, impatient mortals, who come to study the art of killing near the sanctuary of Death!]

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(OC I: 351). Having abandoned his insignia, the narrator can become like other mortals: “Je puis maintenant me promener incognito, faire des actions basses, et me livrer à la crapule, comme les simples mortels” [Now I can walk incognito, carry out foul deeds, and give myself over to debauchery, like ordinary mortals] (OC I: 352). Thus the protagonist of 45, in apparent sympathy with the suffering voice from the tomb, distinguishes himself from other mortals, but the protagonist of 46 does the opposite, now able to blend in with other mortals, having relinquished his distinguishing sign.

“Perte d’auréole” / “Mademoiselle Bistouri”

While in “Perte d’auréole” (46) the narrator wants to conceal or lose his identity, in “Mademoiselle Bistouri” [Miss Scalpel] (47) the narrator acquires, in the eyes of the title character, an identity that is not his. Mademoiselle Bistouri takes him for a doctor and try as he might, he cannot dissuade her. She collects pictures of doctors, and she invites him to look at them with her.

“Tiens! le reconnais-tu celui-ci?
—Oui! c’est X. Le nom est au bas d’ailleurs; mais je le connais personnellement.
—Je savais bien! Tiens! voilà Z. . . .”

[“Look! Do you recognize this one?”
“Yes! It’s X. The name is on the bottom besides, but I know him personally.”
“I knew it! Look! There is Z. . . .”] (OC I: 354)

At the end of “Perte d’auréole” the narrator spoke of the poets who might now pick up the abandoned halo and wear it, and he referred to them in precisely the same way, by the capital letters X and Z: “je pense avec joie que quelque mauvais poète la ramassera et s’en coiffera impudemment. Faire un heureux, quelle jouissance! et surtout un heureux qui me fera rire! Prensez à X, ou à Z!” [I think with joy that some bad poet will pick it up and shamelessly put it on his head. To make someone happy, what joy! And especially a happy man who will make me laugh! Think of X, or of Z!] (OC I: 352). Baudelaire could hardly have been more obvious than this in encouraging his readers to take up the poems two by two. The stain on the halo, which fell into “la fange du macadam” [the mire of the street], is paralleled by that on the physician’s insignia according to Mademoiselle

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Bistourí’s fantasy: “Je voudrais qu’il vînt me voir avec sa trousse et son tablier, même avec un peu de sang dessus” [I would like him to come see me with his instrument case and his apron, even with a little blood on it] (OC I: 355).

“The ‘serpent tout entier’”

“Mademoiselle Bistouri” / “Any where out of the world — N’importe où hors du monde”

“Any where out of the world — N’importe où hors du monde” [Baudelaire gives the title in two languages] (48) begins with an obvious allusion to the hospital that figures so prominently in “Mademoiselle Bistouri” (47): “Cette vie est un hôpital où chaque malade est possédé du désir de changer de lit. Celui-ci voudrait souffrir en face du poêle, et celui-là croit qu’il guérirait à côté de la fenêtre” [This life is a hospital where every patient is possessed by the desire to change beds. One wants to suffer by the stove; another believes he would get well by the window] (OC I: 356). When Mademoiselle Bistouri invites the narrator into her home, she tells him that it “vous rappellera l’hôpital” [will remind you of the hospital] (OC I: 353). Later, she will speak of a doctor who denounced to the government the insurgents he was treating “à son hôpital” [in his hospital] (OC I: 354) (the word appears only in these two prose poems). Hospitals and doctors are the consuming passion of her life. The narrator asks her about this obsession—Why do you take me for a doctor? how long have you had this idée fixe?—but only after repeated attempts does he get her to respond: “Difficilement je me fis comprendre; enfin j’y parvins” [With difficulty I made myself understood; at last I succeeded] (OC I: 355), although her answer even then was that she did not know.

The narrator’s conversation with his soul in “Any where out of the world” is similarly one-sided. First, he asks his soul if Lisbon would be a better place for them to live in. “Mon âme ne répond pas” [My soul does not answer] (OC I: 356). Then he proposes Holland. “Mon âme reste muette” [My soul remains silent] (OC I: 357). How about Batavia? “Pas un mot” [Not a word]. Torneo, perhaps? “Allons plus loin encore, à l’extrême bout de la Baltique” [Let’s go farther still, to the extreme end of the Baltic], paralleling the first words of “Mademoiselle Bistouri,” which situated the narrator’s encounter with her, and consequently the residence into which she invited him and that she said would remind him of the hospital, “à l’extrémité du faubourg” [at the extremity of the city’s outskirts] (OC I: 353). Still thinking of extremities, he proposes the Pole, “encore plus loin de la vie” [still farther from life] (OC I: 357), where darkness reigns for six months of the year. “Enfin, mon âme fait explosion, et sagement elle me

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crie: ‘N’importe où! n’importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!’”

[At last, my soul explodes, and quietly cries out to me: “Anywhere! Anywhere! Provided it be outside of this world!”]. The narrator’s attempt in both poems to get his partner in conversation to answer his question succeeds “enfin” [at last].

Poems 46, 47, and 48 are instructive instances of how Baudelaire can couch what is particular to one poem in the language and situation of another. Poem 47 is about a woman’s strange obsession with doctors, which takes the form of giving the narrator a new identity, which is precisely what the narrator of 46 is happy to obtain; in 47 he is unhappy at having it forced upon him. Poem 48 expresses Baudelaire’s oft-repeated desire to escape the ennui of where he is by traveling somewhere else, either in reality (as in the two poems titled “L’Invitation au voyage”) or virtually (as in “Parfum exotique” or “La Chevelure”), but here he does that by adapting the language (“Cette vie est un hôpital”) and the plotline (a conversation in which the narrator repeatedly attempts and enfin succeeds in provoking an answer from his interlocutor) of the preceding poem.

“A similar plotline undergirds “Assommons les pauvres!” [Let’s Beat Up the Poor!] (49). In 48 the narrator keeps asking questions of his soul, who does not respond until “Enfin, mon âme fait explosion” [At last my soul explodes] (OC I: 357) with an answer. In 49 the narrator keeps beating a beggar until at last he responds, with a sudden explosion of violence—‘Tout à coup,—ô miracle! . . . —je vis cette antique carcasse se retourner, se redresser avec une énergie que je n’aurais jamais soupçonnée” [Suddenly—O miracle! . . . —I saw that ancient carcass turn over, raise himself up with a force I would never have suspected] (OC I: 359)—and do to the narrator what he had done to him. Although the narrator does not explicitly say that the beggar was unresponsive during the time he beat him, as the narrator of 48 did say of his soul, it is clear that he was. For first the narrator punched him in the eye, then he broke two of his teeth, then he repeatedly crashed his head against a wall, then he kicked him in the back, then he grabbed a branch of a tree and beat him as if he were tenderizing a steak; only after the last of these five assaults does the man respond. The narrator beat the beggar in order to get a response, to provoke him into responding in kind, so that when he did he could call him his equal.

He did it for the beggar’s own good: “Par mon énergique médication, je lui avais donc rendu l’orgueil et la vie” [By my forceful medication, I had
thus restored his pride and his life] (OC I: 359). By calling it medication, he continues the medical motif begun when the narrator in 47 was mistaken for a doctor and continued in 48 when life is described as a hospital full of the sick, and that travel to foreign lands is the cure. This sentence was added to the manuscript at a later date, in smaller handwriting (Murphy, 395n), perhaps to increase the connections between this poem and the two that precede it.

The mostly one-sided conversation between the narrator of 48 and his soul is paralleled in 49 by another one-sided conversation, though its one-sidedness goes in the opposite direction. This time it is the narrator who remains silent, while his Angel or Demon does all the talking. Socrates’s daemon only spoke to dissuade him from committing a certain act, while the narrator’s “daigne conseiller, suggérer, persuader” [deigns to advise, suggest, persuade] (OC I: 358). When the narrator, coming out of a bar, saw the beggar holding his hat, the Angel whispered in his ear, “Celui-là seul est l’égal d’un autre, qui le prouve, et celui-là seul est digne de la liberté, qui sait la conquérir” [He alone is the equal of another who proves it, and he alone is worthy of freedom who can conquer it] (OC I: 358). So he beat him up to make him fight back and thereby prove he was his equal.

“Assommons les pauvres!” / “Les Bons Chiens”

While in his bizarre way the narrator of “Assommons les pauvres!” wants to restore dignity to the poor, the narrator of “Les Bons Chiens” [The Good Dogs] (50) wants to pay honor to their dogs. The good dogs alluded to in the title are not those of the rich, who sleep in a “niche soyeuse et capitonnée” [silky and cushioned kennel] (OC I: 361) but the poor bedraggled ones that everyone shuns “excepté le pauvre dont ils sont les associés, et le poète qui les regarde d’un œil fraternel” [except the poor man whose associates they are, and the poet who looks at them with a brotherly eye] (OC I: 360). “Que de fois j’ai contemplé, souriant et attendri, tous ces philosophes à quatre pattes, esclaves complaisants, soumis ou dévoués, que le dictionnaire républicain pourrait aussi bien qualifier d’officiers, si la république, trop occupée du bonheur des hommes, avait le temps de ménager l’honneur des chiens!” [How often have I contemplated, smiling and moved, all those four-footed philosophers, obliging slaves, submissive or devoted, whom the republican dictionary could have just as well described as ministering, if the republic, too preoccupied with the happiness of men, had the time to concern itself with the honor of dogs!] (OC I: 362). The italics are Baudelaire’s, but for the purpose of analysis I would have italicized esclaves, dictionnaire, and bonheur, for those are important words in the passage at
the beginning of “Assommons les pauvres!” (49) in which the narrator says that for two weeks he had done nothing but read books of different political persuasions,

les élucubrations de tous ces entrepreneurs de bonheur public,—de ceux qui conseillent à tous les pauvres de se faire esclaves, et de ceux qui leur persuadent qu’ils sont tous des rois détronés. . . . Il m’avait semblé seulement que je sentais, confiné au fond de mon intellect, le germe obscur d’une idée supérieure à toutes les formules de bonne femme dont j’avais récemment parcouru le dictionnaire.

Instead of dictionnaire Baudelaire in the manuscript had originally written catalogue (Murphy, 393n), which would have made more sense, but he evidently wished to have this dictionnaire match the one in “Les Bons Chiens” (the only other one in the Spleen de Paris) in the passage quoted above. In that passage from 50, it is the republic that concerns itself with the bonheur of men; in 49 it is the authors of the books the narrator has just read that do so. Were it not for that difference, the passage in 50 might be taken to allude directly to the one in 49 in the same way that the narrator of “Les Veuves” (13) alludes to what he had just said in “Les Foules” (12) (“comme je l’insinuais tout à l’heure . . . ”) (OC I: 292).

The idea, however, that 49’s narrator dimly perceives, and that he will grasp more clearly when his Demon speaks, leads him to the opposite conclusion with regard to poor men from what 50’s narrator says about poor dogs. The latter are deserving of honor because they are slaves (“esclaves complaisants, soumis ou dévoués” [obliging, submissive, or devoted slaves] [OC I: 362]), while the former are meritorious when they refuse that status: “celui-là seul est digne de la liberté, qui sait la conquérir” [he alone is worthy of freedom who can conquer it] (OC I: 358). The poor who fight for their liberty, and thereby refuse to be slaves, can actually convey honor. After the poor man beats him up more severely than the narrator had beaten him (knocking out four teeth instead of two, blackening two eyes instead of one), the narrator proclaims him his equal and asks, “veuillez me faire l’honneur de partager avec moi ma bourse” [deign to do me the honor of sharing my purse] (OC I: 359)—as the dogs honored
in 50 come to “partager le repas que leur a préparé la charité de certaines pucelles sexagénaires” [share the meal prepared for them by the charity of certain sexagenarian maidens] (OC I: 361), who by their age have something in common with the assaulted beggar, “ce sexagénaire affaibli” [that weakened sexagenarian] (OC I: 359). The request the narrator of 49 makes to the man he has assaulted to do him the honor of sharing his purse also finds its mirror opposite in the request that poor dogs make: “Je chante les chiens . . . qui ont dit à l’homme abandonné, avec des yeux clignotants et spirituels: ‘Prends-moi avec toi, et de nos deux misères nous ferons peut-être une espèce de bonheur!’” [I sing of the dogs . . . who have said to the abandoned man, with blinking and intelligent eyes, “Take me with you, and from our two miseries we can maybe forge a sort of happiness!”] (OC I: 361).

The assault on the sexagenarian’s back, “un coup de pied lancé dans le dos” [a kick aimed at his back] (OC I: 359), followed by the tree branch with which he tenderized that same part of his anatomy, finds its mirror opposite in the vest that the narrator “endosse” [puts on his back] as a reward for having honored dogs:

Aucun de ceux qui étaient présents dans la taverne de la rue Villa-Hermosa n’oubliera avec quelle pétulance le peintre s’est dépouillé de son gilet en faveur du poète, tant il a bien compris qu’il était bon et honnête de chanter les pauvres chiens. . . . Et toutes les fois que le poète endosse le gilet du peintre, il est contraint de penser aux bons chiens. . . .

[None of those who were present in the tavern on Villa-Hermosa Street will forget with what impetuosity the painter stripped himself of his vest in favor of the poet, so well that he truly understood that it was good and honorable to sing the praises of poor dogs. . . . And every time the poet puts the painter’s vest on his back, he has to think of the good dogs. . . .] (OC I: 363)

Auguste Poulet-Malassis, Baudelaire’s friend and the publisher of the Fleurs du mal, gives an interesting insight into the “pétulance” with which Baudelaire’s narrator says that Stevens removed his vest: “At the instant, with all imaginable vivacity, Stevens took off his coat, to the great astonishment of the habitués of the place . . . who, considering the impetuosity [la pétulance] of his gesture, were hoping for a fistfight.”24 Thus it makes even

more sense that by saying of the vest that it is something one “endosse,” by implying that it is exchanged between the painter’s back and the poet’s, Baudelaire alludes to the exchange involving backs in the pugilistic scene carried on between 49’s narrator and the beggar who became his equal (if, as it seems, it was to the narrator’s back that the beggar applied the branch, just as the narrator had to his).

The painter was the Belgian Joseph Stevens, known for his animal pictures, particularly of dogs. Baudelaire described one of them thus: “Misérable logis de saltimbanques. Tableau suggestif. Chiens habillés. Le saltimbanque est sorti et a coiffé un de ses chiens d’un bonnet de houzard pour le contraindre à rester immobile devant le miroton qui chauffe sur le poêle” [Saltimbank’s miserable lodgings. Suggestive painting. Costumed dogs. The saltimbank has gone out and has put a Hussard’s hat on one of the dogs to make him remain immobile before the beef stew cooking on the stove] (OC II: 964). Baudelaire rewrites that scene in “Les bons Chiens”:

Permettez-moi de vous introduire dans la chambre du saltimbanque absent. Un lit, en bois peint, sans rideaux, des couvertures traînantes et souillées de punaises, deux chaises de paille, un poêle de fonte, un ou deux instruments de musique détraqués. Oh! le triste mobilier! Mais regardez, je vous prie, ces deux personnages intelligents, habillés de vêtements à la fois éraillés et somptueux, coiffés comme des troubadours ou des militaires, qui surveillent, avec une attention de sorciers, l’œuvre sans nom qui mitonne sur le poêle allumé, et au centre de laquelle une longue cuiller se dresse, plantée comme un de ces mâts aériens qui annoncent que la maçonnerie est achevée.

[Allow me to invite you into the abode of the absent saltimbank. A bed, in painted wood, without curtains, covers dragging on the floor and infested with bedbugs, two straw chairs, a cast-iron stove, one or two broken musical instruments. What depressing furniture! But please look at these two intelligent personages, dressed in costumes both ragged and sumptuous, wearing troubadour or soldier hats, who keep watch with the attention of sorcerers over the nameless work simmering on the lit stove, and in the middle of which a long spoon stands upright, planted like one of those aerial masts that announce that the masonry is finished.] (OC I: 362; Baudelaire’s italics)

Among the details in the poem but not present in Baudelaire’s earlier description of the painting are “un ou deux instruments de musique détraqués” [one or two broken musical instruments], which bring to mind what the beggar became after the narrator beat him up, “une machine si singulièrement détraquée” [a machine so singularly broken] (the adjective détraqué appears in no other poem). There is one musical instrument (not two) in the painting, a drum, but it gives no appearance of being broken. So Baudelaire evidently added it to the poem to set up a connection with “Assommons les pauvres.”

In Baudelaire’s first description there are costumed dogs in the plural but only one is wearing a hat and watching the pot, while in the poem there are two wearing hats and watching the pot. In the painting, however, there are three dogs, though only one—the middle of the three—is watching the pot. He wears a military hat, as does the dog to his right, who is looking off to his right instead of at the pot. The third dog, not in costume, “is looking down at the ground,” as Yann Mortelette notes.\(^\text{26}\) Another addition, present neither in the first description nor the painting, is the transformation of the dogs into “sorciers.” Baudelaire remembered the spoon sticking up in the middle of the pot from the painting, though he did not mention it in his earlier description. It is only in the poem that he calls what is cooking “l’œuvre sans nom” and likens it to a construction project that is finally finished. Margery A. Evans writes: “The ‘œuvre sans nom’ which simmers on the saltimbank’s stove is open to being read as a metaphor for the Petits Poèmes en prose themselves” as “an extraordinary or unspeakable work” (108). Maria C. Scott concurs with Evans but gives an additional reason: the nameless work alludes to the collection “because no consensus exists as to its most appropriate title.”\(^\text{27}\) Baudelaire gave no collective title to the handwritten list of fifty poems on which Asselineau and Banville based their edition (Kopp 2006, 271), and he alternated between Petits poèmes en prose and Spleen de Paris during the time he was writing them (Kopp 1969, lxiv–lxv). Murphy, however, approves of Pichois’s decision to adopt Le Spleen de Paris as the title in the Pléiade edition, arguing that newly published letters by Baudelaire confirm it (37n).

In any case, as Jérôme Thélot discovered,\(^\text{28}\) Baudelaire is alluding to Macbeth, Act IV, Scene 1, where Macbeth asks the witches what they are cooking up in their cauldron and they reply, “A deed without a name.”

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\(^{27}\) Maria C. Scott, Baudelaire’s Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 128.

two dogs watching over the pot “avec une attention de sorciers” are behaving like Shakespeare’s sorcières [witches].

The spoon is upright because the cooking has advanced to the point that the pot’s contents have lost their liquidity, becoming “une soupe puis sante et solide” [a powerful and solid soup]. The narrator also describes it as a “maçonnerie . . . achevée,” which Evans takes to be an allusion to Freemasonry: “the edifice completed, . . . the secret, quasi-masonic understanding between poet and reader is at an end” (108). Kaplan even translates it as alluding only to that: “like one of those aerial masts announcing that the freemasonry is complete” (1989, 127). But Kaplan, Evans, and Scott, who seconds Evans’s masonic reading, are not paying enough attention to the more obvious sense of “maçonnerie,” as Bescherelle’s dictionary, contemporary with Baudelaire, defined it: “Construction où ont été employés les pierres ou les briques et le mortier” [Construction in which stones or bricks and mortar have been employed]. In fact, that entry makes no mention of Freemasonry at all, defining it only under Franc-Maçonnerie. Evans goes on to write, “Of all the prose poems it is arguable that ‘Les Bons Chiens’ alone must be read in the order of presentation, at the end of the collection” (108). “Les Bons Chiens” certainly belongs where Baudelaire put it, but it is not alone in having that quality. As Baudelaire here reveals, the Spleen de Paris is solidly built masonry, each of whose stones is placed where its author intended, each fitting tightly with the ones on either side in a solid and permanent structure which with “Les Bons Chiens” is at last “achevée.”

Soon after this point in the poem Baudelaire reveals another secret of his volume’s construction: “Les bergers de Virgile et de Théocrite attendaient, pour prix de leurs chants alternés, un bon fromage, une flûte du meilleur faiseur ou une chèvre aux mamelles gonflées. Le poète qui a chanté les pauvres chiens a reçu pour récompense un beau gilet . . . ” [The shepherds of Virgil and Theocritus would expect, as a prize for their alternating songs, a good cheese, a flute from the best maker or a goat with swollen breasts. The poet who sang of poor dogs received for reward a fine vest . . . ] (OC I: 362). As we know already, the poet who receives the prize for singing the praises of poor dogs is the narrator, and it will turn out to be the painter of the scene of the saltimbank’s two dogs who awards it. In this allusion to the shepherds’ “chants alternés” [alternating songs] in Theocritus and Virgil, coming significantly at the conclusion of the Spleen de Paris, Baudelaire reveals the classical basis for the peculiar structure of his collection, the tradition out of which come not only the Spleen de Paris but also the Fleurs du Mal. We recall that he had also said that the prose poems were related to each other by alternation when he told Houssaye that everything is “à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement” [at the same
time head and tail, alternatively and reciprocally]. The alternating songs in Theocritus’s *Idylls* and Virgil’s *Eclogues* are the loci classici of “amoebaean verses (‘responsive verses’) whereby verses, couplets, or stanzas are spoken alternately by two speakers. The second speaker is expected not only to match the theme introduced by the first but also to improve upon it in some way.”

Not only is the theme repeated but so are specific words, as Baudelaire does in poems 49 and 50 with “esclaves,” “dictionnaire,” “bonheur public” / “bonheur des hommes,” “sexagénaire,” “partager,” “détraqué,” and “dos” / “endosse.”

According to James B. Pearce,

The term amoebaean implies an exchange in which there are two singers singing in opposition. The one presents a “lead-off” song on a topic of his own choosing. . . . The “second” singer then would be expected to respond to the lead-off song in some way; he might give an opposing view, produce a song on a similar theme, or simply add information. His real task of course would be to outdo his opponent in some fashion. The lead-off singer would then begin the second round of the contest with a theme of his own choosing and the entire process would be repeated. It is felt by some, however, that if the lead-off singer were in some manner to build his song upon the previous response, he would “score more points,” so to speak, with the judge.

Virgil’s *Eclogue* 3 is an adaptation of Theocritus’s *Idyll* 5. As R. W. Garson explains, “Both poems are in the form of an amoebaean contest in couplets preceded by abuse and followed by an umpire’s verdict, and the number of verbal borrowings” on Virgil’s part from Theocritus “is very great indeed.”

In effect (this is my observation, not Garson’s), Virgil is the second singer here; he is to Theocritus as Lacon is to Comatas, the younger (as Lacon was) to the older. Garson (195) cites a number of verbal borrowings from the Greek of *Idyll* 5 into the Latin of *Eclogue* 3 (e.g., “deka mala” becomes “aurea mala decem”) and adds that “Virgil could take couplets from two different poems and make them responsive,” not only from other *Idylls* than the fifth, which was his principal source, but also by combining “two elements which occur in balancing couplets in his model” (196). That is, he took one element from what Comatas said (*Idyll* -).

5. 125) and another from what Lacon said (Idyll 5. 126) and combined them into what a single speaker in his poem says (Eclogue 3. 89). In addition, Damoetas, Virgil’s second speaker, on one occasion repeats an entire line of verse first spoken by his opponent, Menalcas: “necdum illis labra admovi sed condita servo” [Nor have I yet put my lips to them, but keep them in store] (ll. 3. 43 and 3. 47);32 the last exchange in Virgil’s Eclogue 3 provides another example: “DAMOETAS: Dic, quibus in terris (et eris mihi magus Apollo) / tris pateat Caeli spatium non amplius ulnas” [Tell me in what land—and you shall be my great Apollo—Heaven’s space is but three ells broad]. “MENALCAS: Dic, quibus in terris inscripti nomina regum / nascantur flores, et Phyllida solus habeto” [Tell me in what land spring up flowers with royal names written thereon—and have Phyllis to yourself!]. Both of these repetitions are noted by Walter Moskalew, who goes on to point out that usually Virgil’s are less obvious because of their more fragmentary and dispersed nature.33

That Baudelaire was familiar with the amoebaean structure in Theocritus and Virgil is clear not only from his allusion in “Les Bons Chiens” to their shepherds’ “chants alternés” but also in a remark he once made critical of “Les Deux Amours,” a poem by Hégésippe Moreau: “Les deux amours alternent, comme des bergers de Virgile, avec une symétrie mathématique désolante. C’est là le grand malheur de Moreau. Quelque sujet et quelque genre qu’il traite, il est élève de quelqu’un” [The two loves alternate, like Virgil’s shepherds, with a depressing mathematical symmetry. That is Moreau’s great misfortune: whatever subject or genre he treats, he is always someone’s student] (OC II: 160). Though by his allusion to his two predecessors in “Les Bons Chiens” Baudelaire reveals that his poems are part of the amoebaeanc tradition, he is hardly content to be their mere imitator; he surpasses them. Instead of a closed symmetry between two speakers in which the second speaker continually caps the first (and the first sometimes the second), what he provides in the sequential symmetry of the Spleen de Paris and the Fleurs du mal is an open process, a potentially endless progression, the second poem capping the first, the third the second, the fourth the third, and so forth, in a series that will stop only when he wants it to. Here we can see the relevance of at least part of his letter to Houssaye, for the poet can “couper” [interrupt] his “rêverie,” as he said, where he wishes. In 1857 the Fleurs du mal ended with “La Mort des artistes”; in 1861 they went past that point to end with “Le Voyage.” Similarly, the Spleen de Paris might have gone on for another fifty poems.

THE “SERPENT TOUT ENTIER”

had he lived to write them—to write them, that is, in such a way that, like the first fifty, they would fit together like stones in masonry, a difficult project that takes much longer to achieve than to simply write them without regard for their place in the fabric. Yet he either knew that he would not live to do that, and therefore said in “Les Bon Chiens” that the masonry was complete, or perhaps he would have put that poem, with its revelation that he was writing amoebaean “chants alternés,” at the end of whatever the book turned out to be, with attendant other changes, leading us to see how many of the poems such as “Assommons les pauvres” that precede it now would have had to come before it at the end of the sequence.

Stevens and Baudelaire both praised poor dogs, in painting and poetry, respectively. Like Comatas and Lacon (and Theocritus and Virgil), they performed in alternation, Stevens first painting three dogs, Baudelaire in “Les Bons Chiens” reducing them to two attentively watching the work in progress. By that change in number, he wrote himself and Stevens into the scene, wrote in his alternating poems as well, watching over the unnamed work coming to completion between them, reminding his readers that the real œuvre emerges not in his poems but between them.