

# **Baudelaire**



## **Eighty-Eight Selected Poems**

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'N'est ce pas qu'il est doux'

Is it not pleasant, now we are tired,  
and tarnished, like other men, to search for those  
fires  
in the furthest East, where, again, we might see  
morning's new dawn, and, in mad history,  
hear the echoes, that vanish behind us, the sighs  
of the young loves, God gives, at the start of our  
lives?

‘Il aimait à la voir’

It was in her white skirts that he loved to see  
her run straight through the branches and leaves,  
gracefully,  
but still gauche, and hiding her leg from the light,  
when she tore her dress, on the briars, in her flight.



## Incompatibility

Higher there, higher, far from the ways,  
from the farms and the valleys, beyond the trees,  
beyond the hills and the grasses' haze,  
far from the herd-trampled tapestries,

you discover a sombre pool in the deep  
that a few bare snow-covered mountains form.  
The lake, in light's, and night's, sublime sleep,  
is never disturbed in its silent storm.

In that mournful waste, to the unsure ear,  
come faint drawn-out sounds, more dead than the  
bell,  
of some far-off cow, the echoes unclear,  
as it grazes the slope, of a distant dell.

On those hills where the wind effaces all signs,  
on those glaciers, fired by the sun's pure light,  
on those rocks, where dizziness threatens the mind,  
in that lake's vermilion presage of night,

under my feet, and above my head,  
silence, that makes you wish to escape;  
that eternal silence, of the mountainous bed  
of motionless air, where everything waits.

You would say that the sky, in its loneliness,

gazed at itself in the glass, and, up there,  
the mountains listened, in grave watchfulness  
to the mystery nothing that's human can hear.

And when, by chance, a wandering cloud  
darkens the silent lake, moving by,  
you might think that you saw some spirit's robe,  
or else its clear shadow, travelling, over the sky.

## To A Creole Lady

In a perfumed land caressed by the sun  
I found, beneath the trees' crimson canopy,  
palms from which languor pours on one's  
eyes, the veiled charms of a Creole lady.

Her hue pale, but warm, a dark-haired enchantress,  
she shows in her neck's poise the noblest of  
manners:  
slender and tall, she strides by like a huntress,  
tranquil her smile, her eyes full of assurance.

If you travelled, my Lady, to the land of true glory,  
the banks of the Seine or green Loire, a Beauty  
worthy of gracing the manors of olden days,

you'd inspire, among arbours' shadowy secrets,  
a thousand sonnets in the hearts of the poets,  
whom, more than your blacks, your vast eyes would  
enslave.

## To A Woman of Malabar

Your feet are as slender as hands, your hips, to me,  
wide enough for the sweetest white girl's envy:  
to the wise artist your body is sweet and dear,  
and your great velvet eyes black without peer.  
In the hot blue lands where God gave you your nature  
your task is to light a pipe for your master,  
to fill up the vessels with cool fragrance  
and chase the mosquitoes away when they dance,  
and when dawn sings in the plane-trees, afar,  
fetch bananas and pineapples from the bazaar.  
All day your bare feet go where they wish  
as you hum old lost melodies under your breath,  
and when evening's red cloak descends overhead  
you lie down sweetly on a straw bed,  
where humming birds fill your floating dreams,  
as graceful and flowery as you it seems.

Happy child, why do you long to see France  
our suffering, and over-crowded land,  
and trusting your life to the sailors, your friends,  
say a fond goodbye to your dear tamarinds?  
Scantly dressed, in muslins, frail,  
shivering under the snow and hail,  
how you'd pine for your leisure, sweet and free,  
body pinned in a corset's brutality,  
if you'd to glean supper amongst our vile harms,  
selling the scent of exotic charms,

sad pensive eyes searching our fog-bound sleaze,  
for the lost ghosts of your coconut-trees!

## The Albatross

Often, for their amusement, bored sailors  
take albatrosses, vast sea-birds, that sleep  
in the air, indolent fellow travellers,  
following the ship skimming the deep.

No sooner are they set down on the boards,  
than those kings of the azure, maladroits, shamefully  
let their vast white wings, like oars,  
trail along their sides, piteously.

Winged traveller, gauche, gross, useless, laughable,  
now, one of them, with a pipe stem, prods you,  
who, a moment ago, were beautiful:  
another, limping, mimics the cripple who flew.

The Poet bears a likeness to that prince of the air,  
who mocks at slingshots, and haunts the winds:  
on earth, an exile among the scornful, where  
he is hampered, in walking, by his giant wings.

## Bertha's Eyes

You can scorn more illustrious eyes,  
sweet eyes of my child, through which there takes  
flight  
something as good or as tender as night.  
Turn to mine your charmed shadows, sweet eyes!

Great eyes of a child, adorable secrets,  
you resemble those grottoes of magic  
where, behind the dark and lethargic,  
shine vague treasures the world forgets.

My child has veiled eyes, profound and vast,  
and shining like you, Night, immense, above!  
Their fires are of Trust, mixed with thoughts of Love,  
that glitter in depths, voluptuous or chaste.

‘Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville,’

I’ve not forgotten, near to the town,  
our white house, small but alone:  
its Pomona of plaster, its Venus of old  
hiding nude limbs in the meagre grove,  
and the sun, superb, at evening, streaming,  
behind the glass, where its sheaves were bursting,  
a huge eye in a curious heaven, present  
to gaze at our meal, lengthy and silent,  
spreading its beautiful candle glimmer  
on the frugal cloth and the rough curtain.



'La servante au grand coeur dont vous étiez jalouse,'

The great-hearted servant of whom you were jealous,  
sleeping her sleep in the humble grass,  
shouldn't we take her a few flowers?

The dead, the poor dead, have griefs like ours,  
and when October sighs, clipper of trees,  
round their marble tombs, with its mournful breeze,  
they must find the living, ungratefully, wed,  
snug in sleep, to the warmth of their bed,  
while they, devoured by dark reflection,  
without bedfellow, or sweet conversation,  
old skeletons riddled with worms, deep frozen,  
feel the winter snows trickling round them,  
and the years flow by without kin or friend  
to replace the wreaths at their railing's end.

If some night, when the logs whistle and flare,  
seeing her sitting calm, in that chair,  
if on a December night, cold and blue,  
I might find her there placed in the room,  
solemn, and come from her bed, eternal,  
to guard the grown child with her eye, maternal,  
what could I answer that pious spirit,  
seeing tears under her hollow eyelid?

## Landscape

In order to write my chaste verses I'll lie  
like an astrologer near to the sky  
and, by the bell-towers, listen in dream  
to their solemn hymns on the air-stream.  
Hands on chin, from my attic's height  
I'll see the workshops of song and light,  
the gutters, the belfries those masts of the city,  
the vast skies that yield dreams of eternity

It is sweet to see stars being born in the blue,  
through the mists, the lamps at the windows, too,  
the rivers of smoke climbing the firmament,  
and the moon pouring out her pale enchantment.  
I'll see the springs, summers, autumns' glow,  
and when winter brings the monotonous snow  
I'll close all my doors and shutters tight  
and build palaces of faery in the night.  
Then I'll dream of blue-wet horizons,  
weeping fountains of alabaster, gardens,  
kisses, birdsong at morning or twilight,  
all in the Idyll that is most childlike.  
The mob that are beating in vain on the glass,  
won't make me raise my head as they pass.  
Since I'll be plunged deep in the thrill  
of evoking the springtime through my own will,  
raising the sun out of my own heart,

making sweet air from my burning thought.

## The Sun

Through the streets where at windows of old houses  
the persian blinds hide secret luxuries,  
when the cruel sun strikes with redoubled fury  
on the roofs and fields, the meadows and city,  
I go alone in my crazy sword-play  
scenting a chance rhyme on every road-way,  
stumbling on words and over the pavement  
finding verses I often dreamed might be sent.

This nurturing father, anaemia's foe  
stirs, in the fields, the worm and the rose,  
makes our cares evaporate into the blue,  
fills the hives and our brains with honey-dew.  
It is he who gives youth to the old man, the cripple,  
makes them like young girls, happy and gentle,  
and commands the crops to grow ripe in an hour  
of the immortal heart, that so longs to flower.

When he shines on the town, a poet that sings,  
he redeems the fate of the meanest things,  
like a king he enters, no servants, alone,  
all palaces, all hospitals where men moan.

## Sorrows of the Moon

The moon dreams more languidly this evening:  
like a sweet woman, in the pillows, at rest,  
with her light hand, discretely stroking,  
before she sleeps, the curve of her breast,

dying, she gives herself to deep trance,  
and casts her eyes over snow-white bowers,  
on the satined slope of a soft avalanche,  
rising up into the blue, like flowers.

When she sometimes lets fall a furtive tear,  
in her secret languor, on our world here,  
a pious poet, enemy of sleep's art,

takes that pale tear in the hollow of his palm,  
its rainbow glitter like an opal shard,  
and far from the sun sets it in his heart.

## Don Juan in Hell

When Don Juan went down to Hell's charms,  
and paid Charon his obol's fare,  
he, a sombre beggar with Antisthenes' glare,  
gripped the oars with strong avenging arms.

Showing their sagging breasts through open robes  
the women writhed under the black firmament  
and, like a crowd of sacred victims, broke  
behind him into long incessant lament.

Sganarelle laughing demanded his score,  
while Don Luis, with trembling hand,  
showed the wandering dead, along the shore,  
the insolent son who spurned his command.

By the treacherous spouse, who was her lover,  
chaste, skinny Elvira shivered in mourning dress,  
seeming to ask a last smile of him, where  
there might shine his first vow's tenderness.

Gripping the helm cutting the black wave,  
erect in armour, stood a giant of stone,  
but the hero, leaning, quiet, on his sword-blade,  
scornful of all things, gazed at the sea's foam.

On Tasso in Prison (Eugène Delacroix's painting)

The poet in his cell, unkempt and sick,  
who crushes underfoot a manuscript,  
measures, with a gaze that horror has inflamed,  
the stair of madness where his soul was maimed.

The intoxicating laughter that fills his prison  
with the absurd and the strange, swamps his reason.  
Doubt surrounds him, and ridiculous fear,  
hideous and multiform, circles near.

That genius pent up in a foul sty,  
those spectres, those grimaces, the cries,  
whirling, in a swarm, about his hair,

that dreamer, whom his lodging's terrors bare,  
such are your emblems, Soul, singer of songs obscure,  
whom Reality suffocates behind four walls!

## Femmes Damnées

Like pensive cattle, lying on the sands,  
they turn their eyes towards the sea's far hills,  
and, feet searching each other's, touching hands,  
know sweet languor and the bitterest thrills.

Some, where the stream babbles, deep in the woods,  
their hearts enamoured of long intimacies,  
go spelling out the loves of their own girlhoods,  
and carving the green bark of young trees.

Others, like Sisters, walk, gravely and slow,  
among the rocks, full of apparitions,  
where Saint Anthony saw, like lava flows,  
the bared crimson breasts of his temptations.

There are those, in the melting candle's glimmer,  
who in mute hollows of caves still pagan,  
call on you to relieve their groaning fever,  
O Bacchus, to soothe the remorse of the ancients!

And others, whose throats love scapularies,  
who, hiding whips under their long vestment,  
in the sombre groves of the night, solitaires,  
blend the sweats of joy with the tears of torment.

O virgins, o demons, o monsters, o martyrs,



great spirits, despisers of reality,  
now full of cries, now full of tears,  
pious and lustful, seeking infinity,

you, whom my soul has pursued to your hell,  
poor sisters, I adore you as much as I weep,  
for your dismal sufferings, thirsts that swell,  
and the vessels of love, where your great hearts steep!

## The Litanies of Satan

O you, the most knowing, and loveliest of Angels,  
a god fate betrayed, deprived of praises,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

O, Prince of exile to whom wrong has been done,  
who, vanquished, always recovers more strongly,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who know everything, king of the underworld,  
the familiar healer of human distress,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who teach even lepers, accursed pariahs,  
through love itself the taste for Paradise,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

O you who on Death, your ancient true lover,  
engendered Hope – that lunatic charmer!

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who grant the condemned that calm, proud look  
that damns a whole people crowding the scaffold,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who know in what corners of envious countries  
a jealous God hid those stones that are precious,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You whose clear eye knows the deep caches  
where, buried, the race of metals slumbers,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You whose huge hands hide the precipice,  
from the sleepwalker on the sky-scraper's cliff,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who make magically supple the bones  
of the drunkard, out late, who's trampled by horses,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who taught us to mix saltpetre with sulphur  
to console the frail human being who suffers,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who set your mark, o subtle accomplice,

on the forehead of Croesus, the vile and pitiless,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

You who set in the hearts and eyes of young girls  
the cult of the wound, adoration of rags,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

The exile's staff, the light of invention,  
confessor to those to be hanged, to conspirators,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

Father, adopting those whom God the Father  
drove in dark anger from the earthly paradise,

O Satan, take pity on my long misery!

Note: Croesus was the king of Lydia (c560-546BC), famed for his wealth. He was defeated and captured by Cyrus of Persia at the taking of Sardis, and rescued by his conqueror from the pyre (Herodotus 1.86)

## Beauty

O mortals, I am beautiful, like a stone dream,  
and my breast, where each man has bruised his soul,  
is created to inspire in poets a goal  
as eternal and mute as matter might seem.

An inscrutable Sphinx, I am throned in blue sky:  
I unite the swan's white with a heart of snow:  
I hate all movement that ruffles the flow,  
and I never cry and I never smile.

The poets, in front of my poses, so grand  
they seem borrowed from ancient tomb-covers,  
will exhaust their days in studying a hand,

since I, to fascinate my docile lovers,  
have pure mirrors that magnify everything's beauty:  
my eyes, my huge eyes, bright with eternity.

## Letter to Sainte-Beuve

On the old oak benches, more shiny and polished  
than links of a chain that were, each day, burnished  
rubbed by our human flesh, we, still un-bearded,  
trailed our ennui, hunched, round-shouldered,  
under the four-square heaven of solitude,  
where a child drinks study's tart ten-year brew.  
It was in those days, outstanding and memorable,  
when the teachers, forced to loosen our classical  
fetters, yet all still hostile to your rhyming,  
succumbed to the pressure of our mad duelling,  
and allowed a triumphant, mutinous, pupil  
to make Triboulet howl in Latin, at will.  
Which of us in those days of pale adolescence  
didn't share the weary torpor of confinement,  
- eyes lost in the dreary blue of a summer sky  
or the snowfall's whiteness, we were dazzled by,  
ears pricked, eager, waiting – a pack of hounds  
drinking some book's far echo, a riot's sound?

Most of all in summer, that melted the leads,  
the walls high, blackened, filled with dread,  
with the scorching heat, or when autumn haze  
lit the sky with its one monotonous blaze  
and made the screeching falcons fall asleep,  
white pigeons' terrors, in their slender keep:  
the season of reverie when the Muse clings  
through the endless day to some bell that rings:  
when Melancholy at noon when all is drowsing  
at the corridor's end, chin in hand, dragging –  
eyes bluer and darker than Diderot's Nun,  
that sad, obscene tale known to everyone,  
– her feet weighed down by premature ennui,  
her brow from night's moist languor un-free.  
– and unhealthy evenings, then, feverish nights,  
that make young girls love their bodies outright,  
and, sterile pleasure, gaze in their mirrors to see  
the ripening fruits of their own nubility: –  
Italian evenings of thoughtless lethargy,  
when knowledge of false delights is revealed  
when sombre Venus, on her high black balcony,  
out of cool censers, waves of musk sets free.

In this war of enervating circumstances,  
matured by your sonnets, prepared by your stanzas,  
one evening, having sensed the soul of your art,  
I transported Amaury's story into my heart.  
Every mystical void is but two steps away  
from doubt. – The potion, drop by drop, day by day,  
filtering through me, I, drawn to the abyss since I  
was fifteen, who swiftly deciphered René's sigh,  
I parched by some strange thirst for the unknown,  
within the smallest of arteries, made its home.  
I absorbed it all, the perfumes, the miasmas,  
the long-vanished memories' sweetest whispers,  
the drawn-out tangle of phrases, their symbols,  
the rosaries murmuring in mystical madrigals,  
– a voluptuous book, if ever one was brewed.



Now, whether I'm deep in some leafy refuge,  
or in the sun of a second hemispheres' days,  
the eternal swell swaying the ocean waves,  
the view of endless horizons always re-born,  
draw my heart to the dream divine, once more,  
be it in heavy languor of burning summer,  
or shivering idleness of early December,  
beneath tobacco-smoke clouds, hiding the ceiling,  
through the book's subtle mystery, always leafing,  
a book so dear to those numb souls whose destiny  
has, one and all, stamped them with that same  
malady,  
in front of the mirror, I've perfected the cruelty  
of the art that, at birth, some demon granted me,  
— art of that pain that creates true voluptuousness, —  
scratching the wound, to draw blood from my  
distress.

Poet, is it an insult, or a well-turned compliment?  
For regarding you I'm like a lover, to all intent,  
faced with a ghost whose gestures are caresses,  
with hand, eye of unknown charms, who blesses,  
in order to drain one's strength. – All loved beings  
are cups of venom one drinks with eyes unseeing,  
and the heart that's once transfixed, seduced by  
pain,  
finds death, while still blessing the arrow, every day.

Notes: Baudelaire in 1844 sent this poem to Saint-Beuve, whose novel *Volupté* has Amaury as its hero. Triboulet (c1479-1536), was the court jester of Louis XII, and Francois 1st, who inspired a scene in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Diderot was the author of *La Religieuse*, Chateaubriand of *René*.

## Elevation

High over the ponds, high over the vales,  
the mountains, clouds, woods and meres,  
beyond the sun, beyond the ethereal veils,  
beyond the confines of the starry spheres,

you ride, my spirit, ride with agility,  
swooning with joy, at the wave, strong swimmer  
and take your ineffable masculine pleasure,  
cutting through that endless immensity.

Fly far away from this deathly miasma:  
go, purify yourself in the upper air,  
and drink like a pure and divine liquor,  
what fills limpid space, that lucid fire.

Behind him the boredoms, the vast distress,  
that imposes its weight on fog-bound beings,  
happy the man, who on vigorous wings  
mounts towards fields, serene and luminous!

He whose thoughts, like larks, go soaring,  
flying freely towards dawn air, -  
who glides above life: grasps, easily, there,  
the language of flowers and silent Things!

## Correspondences

Nature is a temple, where, from living pillars, a flux  
of confused words is, sometimes, allowed to fall:  
Man travels it, through forests of symbols, that all  
observe him, with familiar looks.

Like far echoes that distantly congregate,  
in a shadowy and profound unity,  
vast as the night air, in its clarity,  
perfumes, colours, sounds reverberate.

There are fresh perfumes, like the flesh of children,  
mellow as oboes, green as prairies,  
- and others, rich, glorious and forbidden,

having the expansive power of infinities,  
amber, musk, benjamin and incense,  
that sing of the ecstasies of spirit and sense.

## The Jewels

My sweetheart was naked, knowing my desire,  
she wore only her tinkling jewellery,  
whose splendour yields her the rich conquering fire  
of Moorish slave-girls in the days of their beauty.

When, dancing, it gives out its sharp sound of  
mockery,  
that glistening world of metal and stone,  
I am ravished by ecstasy, love like fury  
those things where light mingles with sound.

So she lay there, let herself be loved,  
and, from the tall bed, she smiled with delight  
on my love deep and sweet as the sea is moved,  
rising to her as toward a cliff's height.

Like a tamed tigress, her eyes fixed on me  
with a vague dreamy air, she tried out her poses,  
so wantonly and so innocently,  
it gave a new charm to her metamorphoses:

and her arm and her leg, and her back and her thigh,  
shining like oil, undulating like a swan's,  
passed in front of my calm, clairvoyant eye:  
and her belly and breasts, those vine-clustered ones,

thrust out, more seductively than Angels of evil,

to trouble the repose where my soul had its throne,  
and topple it from the crystal hill,  
where it was seated, calm and alone.

I thought I saw Antiope's hips placed  
on a youth's bust, with a new design's grace,  
her pelvis accentuated so by her waist.  
The rouge was superb on that wild, tawny face!

- And the lamp resigning itself to dying,  
as only the fire in the hearth lit the chamber,  
each time it gave out a flame in sighing,  
it flooded with blood that skin of amber!

## The Snake That Dances

How I love to watch, dear indolence,  
like a bright shimmer,  
of fabric, the skin of your elegant  
body glimmer!

Over the bitter-tasting perfume,  
the depths of your hair,  
odorous, restless spume,  
blue, and brown, waves, there,

like a vessel that stirs, awake  
when dawn winds rise,  
my dreaming soul sets sail  
for those distant skies.

Your eyes where nothing's revealed  
either acrid or sweet,  
are two cold jewels where steel  
and gold both meet.

Seeing your rhythmic advance,  
your fine abandon,  
one might speak of a snake that danced  
at the end of the branch it's on.

Under its burden of languidness,  
your head at a child-like slant,

rocks with weak listlessness  
like a young elephant's,

and your body heels and stretches  
like some trim vessel,  
that, rocking from side to side, plunges  
its yards in the swell.

As when the groaning glacier's thaw  
fills the flowing stream,  
so when your mouth's juices pour  
to the tip of your teeth,

I fancy I'm drinking overpowering, bitter,  
Bohemian wine,  
that over my heart will scatter  
its stars, a liquid sky!



‘Je t’adore à l’égal de la voûte nocturne’

I adore you, the nocturnal vault’s likeness,  
o vast taciturnity, o vase of sadness:  
I love you, my beauty, the more you flee,  
grace of my nights, the more you seem,  
to multiply distances, ah ironically,  
that bar my arms from the blue immensity.

I advance to the attack, climb to the assault  
like a swarm of worms attacking a corpse,  
and I cherish, o creature cruel, and implacable,  
your coldness that makes you, for me, more  
beautiful!

## A Rotting Carcase

My soul, do you remember the object we saw  
on what was a fine summer's day:  
at the path's far corner, a shameful corpse  
on the gravel-bed, darkly lay,

legs in the air, like a lecherous woman,  
burning and oozing with poisons,  
revealing, with nonchalance, cynicism,  
the belly ripe with its exhalations.

The sun shone down on that rot and mould,  
as if to grill it completely,  
and render to Nature a hundredfold  
what she'd once joined so sweetly:

and the sky gazed at that noble carcass,  
like a flower, now blossoming.  
The stench was so great, that there, on the grass,  
you almost considered fainting.

The flies buzzed away on its putrid belly,  
from which black battalions slid,  
larvae, that flowed in thickening liquid  
the length of those seething shreds.

All of the thing rose and fell like a wave,  
surging and glittering:

you'd have said the corpse, swollen with vague  
breath, multiplied, was living.

And that 'world' gave off a strange music,  
like the wind, or the flowing river,  
or the grain, tossed and turned with a rhythmic  
motion, by the winnower.

Its shape was vanishing, no more than a dream,  
a slowly-formed rough sketch  
on forgotten canvas, the artist's gleam  
of memory alone perfects.

From behind the rocks a restless bitch  
glared with an angry eye,  
judging the right moment to snatch  
some morsel she'd passed by.

- And yet you too will resemble that ordure,  
that terrible corruption,  
star of my eyes, sun of my nature,  
my angel, and my passion!

Yes! Such you'll become, o queen of grace,  
after the final sacraments,  
when you go under the flowering grass  
to rot among the skeletons.

O my beauty! Tell the worms, then, as

with kisses they eat you away,  
how I preserved the form, divine essence  
of my loves in their decay !

## Beatrice

Through fields of ash, burnt, without verdure,  
where I was complaining one day to Nature,  
and slowly sharpened the knife of my thought,  
as I wandered aimlessly, against my heart,  
I saw descend, at noon, on my brow,  
a storm-filled and sinister cloud,  
holding a vicious demonic horde,  
resembling cruel, and curious dwarfs.  
Gazing at me, considering me, as cool  
as passers-by admiring a fool,  
I heard them laughing and whispering in synch,  
exchanging many a nudge and a wink:

‘ Let’s contemplate this caricature,  
this Hamlet’s shadow, echoing his posture,  
his indecisive looks, and wild hair.  
It’s a shame to see that epicure there,  
that pauper, that actor on holiday, that droll  
fellow, because he can play a fine role,  
trying to interest with his tears  
the eagles, the grasshoppers, streams and flowers,  
and even proclaiming his public tirades  
to us who invented those ancient parades?’

I might (since my pride, high as the mountains,  
overtops clouds and the cries of demons)  
simply have turned my regal head,

if I'd not seen, to that obscene crowd wed,  
a crime that failed to make the sun rock,  
the queen of my heart, with her matchless look,  
laughing with them at my dark distress,  
and now and then yielding a filthy caress.

## The Balcony

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,  
O you, all my pleasures! O you, all my learning!  
You will remember the joy of caresses,  
the sweetness of home and the beauty of evening,  
Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses!

On evenings lit by the glow of the ashes  
and on the balcony, veiled, rose-coloured, misted,  
how gentle your breast was, how good your heart to  
me!  
We have said things meant for eternity,  
on evenings lit by the glow of the ashes.

How lovely the light is on sultry evenings!  
How deep the void grows! How powerful the heart  
is!  
As I leaned towards you, queen of adored ones  
I thought I breathed perfume from your blood's kiss.  
How lovely the light is on sultry evenings!

The night it was thickening and closing around us,  
and my eyes in the dark were divining your glance,  
and I drank your nectar. Oh sweetness! Oh poison!  
your feet held, here, in these fraternal hands.  
The night it was thickening and closing around us.

I know how to summon up happiest moments,

and relive my past, there, curled, touching your knees.

What good to search for your languorous beauties  
but in your dear body, and your heart so sweet?

I know how to summon up happiest moments!

Those vows, those perfumes, those infinite kisses,  
will they be reborn, from gulfs beyond soundings,  
as the suns that are young again climb in the sky,  
after they've passed through the deepest of  
drownings?

-O vows! O perfumes! O infinite kisses!



## Exotic Perfume

When, in Autumn, on a sultry evening,  
eyes closed, I breathe your warm breasts' odour,  
I see the shore of bliss uncovered,  
in the monotonous sun's fierce gleaming:

a languorous island where Nature has come,  
bringing rare trees and luscious fruits:  
the bodies of lean and vigorous brutes,  
and women with eyes of astounding freedom.

Led by your odour to magic climes  
I see a harbour, of masts, sails, lines,  
worn down by the sea's waves still,

while the green tamarinds' perfume mounts,  
circling in air, and filling my nostrils,  
and blends, in my soul, with the sailors' chants.

## The Head of Hair

O fleece, billowing down to the shoulders!  
O curls! O perfume charged with languor!  
Ecstasy! To populate love's dark alcove,  
With memories sleeping tonight in your hair,  
I'd wave it, like a handkerchief, in the air!

Languid Asia and burning Africa,  
absent worlds, far-off, almost dead,  
live in your forest-depths of aromas!  
As music floats other spirits away,  
mine, my love, sails your fragrance instead.

I'll go where, full of sap, trees and men,  
Swoon endlessly in that ardent climate:  
Thick tresses, be my tide! You contain,  
O sea of ebony, the dazzling dream,  
of masts, flames, sails, and oarsmen:

an echoing port where my soul's a drinker  
of sound, colour, scent in rolling waves:  
where vessels, gliding through silk and amber,  
open wide their arms to clasp the splendour  
of a pure sky quivering with eternal day.

I'll plunge my head, in love with drunkenness,  
in this dark ocean which encloses the other:  
and my subtle spirit the breakers caress

will know how to find you, fertile indolence!  
Infinite lullaby, full of the balm of leisure!

Hair of blue, that hangs like a shadowy tent,  
you bring me the round, immense sky's azure:  
in your plaited tresses' feathery descent  
I grow fervently drunk with the mingled scent  
of coconut-oil, of musk, and coal-tar.

Now! Always! My hand in your heavy mane sowing  
jewels, the sapphire, the pearl, and the ruby,  
so that you'll not remain deaf to my longing!  
Oasis of dream, the gourd where I'm drinking,  
of you, long draughts of the wine of memory?

## A Phantom II: The Perfume

Reader, have you ever breathed deeply,  
with slow savour and intoxicated sense,  
a church's saturating grain of incense,  
or the long-lasting musk in a sachet?

Profound magical spell where we  
are drunk on the past restored in the present.  
So lovers on an adored body scent  
the exquisite flower of memory.

From her pliant and heavy hair,  
living sachet, censer of the alcoves,  
a fragrance, wild and savage, rose,

and from her clothes, velvet or muslin, there,  
impregnated through with her pure years,  
emanated a perfume of furs.

## Afternoon Song

Though your eyebrows surprise,  
and give you an air of strangeness,  
which isn't that of the angels,  
witch with seductive eyes,

I adore my frivolous girl,  
my terrible passion,  
with the devotion  
of a priest for his idol!

The forest and the desert  
perfume your wild hair:  
your head has an air  
of the enigma, the secret.

Round your flesh, perfume sweet  
swirls like a censer's cloud:  
you bewitch like the twilight's shroud,  
nymph of shadows and heat.

Ah! The strongest potions made  
can't match your idleness,  
and you know the caress  
that resurrects the dead.

Your hips are enamoured  
of your back and your breasts,

and the cushions are ravished  
with your poses, so languid.

Sometimes to appease  
your rage, mysteriously,  
you lavish, gravely  
your bites and your kisses.

You tear me, my dark-haired one,  
with a mocking smile's art,  
and then cast on my heart  
your gaze sweet as the moon.

Under your shoes so satiny,  
your graceful silken feet,  
I lay my genius, my wit,  
my joy, and my destiny,

restorer of my health's sweetness,  
you, all colour and light,  
explosion of warmth, bright  
in my Siberian darkness.

## The Death of Lovers

We will have beds filled with light scent, and  
couches deep as a tomb,  
and strange flowers in the room,  
blooming for us under skies so pleasant.

Vying to exhaust their last fires  
our hearts will be two vast flares,  
reflecting their double glares  
in our two spirits, twin mirrors.

One evening of mystic blue and rose  
we'll exchange a single brief glow  
like a long sob, heavy with goodbye,

and later, opening the doors, the angel who came  
faithful and joyful, will revive  
the lustreless mirrors, and the lifeless flame.



## The Flawed Bell

It's bitter, yet sweet, on wintry nights,  
near to the fire that crackles and fumes,  
listening while, far-off, slow memories rise  
to echoing chimes that ring through the gloom.

Lucky indeed, the loud-tongued bell  
still hale and hearty despite its age,  
repeating its pious call, true and well,  
like an old trooper in the sentry's cage!

My soul is flawed: when, at boredom's sigh,  
it would fill the chill night air with its cry,  
it often happens that its voice, enfeebled,

thickens like a wounded man's death-rattle  
by a lake of blood, vast heaps of the dying,  
who ends, without moving, despite his trying.

## The Owls

Among the black yews, their shelter,  
the owls are ranged in a row,  
like alien deities, the glow,  
of their red eyes pierces. They ponder.

They perch there without moving,  
till that melancholy moment  
when quenching the falling sun,  
the shadows are growing.

Their stance teaches the wise  
to fear, in this world of ours,  
all tumult, and all movement:

Mankind, drunk on brief shadows,  
always incurs a punishment  
for his longing to stir, and go.

## To A Red-headed Beggar-girl

Pale girl with fiery hair,  
whose tattered dress shows there  
glimpses of your poverty  
and your beauty,

a wretched poet, for me,  
your young skinny body  
with its freckled brownness  
has its sweetness.

You wear, more stylishly  
than a queen in story  
wears her velvet shoe  
your heavy two.

Instead of your dress, ripped, short,  
may a fine robe of court  
trail in long folds to greet  
your slender feet:

in place of your torn hose  
may daggers of gold,  
down your legs, blaze  
for the eyes of roués:

may ribbons loosely tied  
unveil in your pride

your two lovely breasts, bright  
as your eyes:

may your arms be coaxed too,  
to sweetly undress you,  
and with pert blows  
discourage those

impish fingers, pearls that glow,  
sonnets of master Belleau,  
by your captive lovers,  
endlessly offered.

The poets, in pursuit,  
dedicating to you their fruit,  
and gazing at your shoes, there  
from beneath the stair:

many a page-boy's game,  
many a famous name,  
would spy, still hoping,  
on your cool lodging!

You, in your bed, would count  
more kisses than lilies no doubt,  
and subject to your law  
a Valois or more!

- Meanwhile you go seeking

any old scraps, cadging,  
outside the back door  
of some shabby store:

you go gazing, from afar,  
at valueless beads that are  
still, alas, so much more  
than I can afford!

Go then, with no ornament,  
perfume, pearl or diamond,  
only your slender nudity,  
O my beauty!

## Wandering Gypsies

The prophetic tribe with burning eyes  
yesterday took to the highway, carrying  
children slung on their backs, or offering  
proud hunger the breast's ever-ripe prize.

The men go on foot, with shining weapons,  
by the carts where their folk huddle together,  
sweeping the heavens, eyes grown heavier  
with mournful regret for absent visions.

The cricket, deep in his sandy retreat,  
redoubles his call, on seeing their passing feet:  
Cybele, who loves them, re-leafs the glades,

makes the rocks gush, the desert bloom,  
before these voyagers, thrown wide to whom  
is the intimate kingdom of future shades.

Note: Cybele was the Phrygian great goddess,  
personifying the earth in its savage state,  
worshipped in caves and on mountaintops.

## Bad Luck

To roll the rock you fought  
takes your courage, Sisyphus!  
No matter what effort from us,  
Art is long, and Time is short.

Far from the grave of celebrity,  
my heart, like a muffled drum,  
taps out its funereal thrum  
towards some lonely cemetery.

- Many a long-buried gem  
sleeps in shadowy oblivion  
far from pickaxes and drills:

in profound solitude set,  
many a flower, with regret,  
its sweet perfume spills.

## The Death of the Poor

It is Death, alas, persuades us to keep on living:  
the goal of life and the only hope we have,  
like an elixir, rousing, intoxicating, giving  
the strength to march on towards the grave:

through the frost and snow and storm-wind, look  
it's the vibrant light on our black horizon:  
the fabulous inn, written of in the book,  
where one can eat, and sleep and sit oneself down:

it's an Angel, who holds in his magnetic beams,  
sleep and the gift of ecstatic dreams,  
who makes the bed where the poor and naked lie:

it's the glory of the Gods, the mystic granary,  
it's the poor man's purse, his ancient country,  
it's the doorway opening on an unknown sky!



## Music

Music, like an ocean, often carries me away!  
Through the ether far,  
or under a canopy of mist, I set sail  
for my pale star.

Breasting the waves, my lungs swollen  
like a ship's canvas,  
night veils from me the long rollers,  
I ride their backs:

I sense all a suffering vessel's passions  
vibrating within me:  
while fair winds or the storm's convulsions  
  
on the immense deep  
cradle me. Or else flat calm, vast mirror there  
of my despair!

## The Ransom

Man, with which to pay his ransom,  
has two fields of deep rich earth,  
which he must dig and bring to birth,  
with the iron blade of reason.

To obtain the smallest rose,  
to garner a few ears of wheat,  
he must wet them without cease,  
with briny tears from his grey brow.

One is Art: Love is the other.  
- To render his propitiation,  
on the day of conflagration,  
when the last strict reckoning's here,

full of crops' and flowers' displays  
he will have to show his barns,  
with those colours and those forms  
that gain the Angels' praise.

## Voyage to Cythera

My heart soared with joy, like a bird in flight,  
haunting the rigging sliding by:  
The ship swayed under a cloudless sky,  
like an angel, dazed by radiant light.

What island is that, dark and sad? - Cythera,  
in verse, it's famous you understand,  
every aged child's golden land.  
Look, after all, there's nothing here.

- Isle of sweet secrets and the heart's delight!  
Ancient Venus's marvellous shadow,  
like perfume, covers the sea, around you,  
fills the mind with love, and the languorous night.

Isle of green myrtle and flowers, wide open,  
beautiful, revered by every nation,  
where the sighs, of the heart's adoration,  
glide like incense, over a rose garden,

or are cooing, like doves, in scented air!  
- Cythera, now a desert, to mock,  
full of piercing calls, a barren rock.  
But I saw a strange thing there!

It was not a temple, shaded by trees,  
where the young priestess, with flower-like desires,

her body alight with secret fires,  
goes, opening her robes to the passing breeze.

But a shore where our white sails moving by  
disturbed the birds, and we saw, like jet,  
the black of a cypress tree's silhouette,  
a three-branched gibbet, against the sky.

A fierce bird, perching, on the head  
of a hanged man, rent him, surely,  
planting its impure beak, in fury,  
in the bloody corners of the dead.

The eyes were two holes: from the cavernous belly  
the weight of his guts poured down his sides,  
and his torturers, gorged on hideous delights,  
had castrated him, most efficiently.

Beneath his feet, circling, spun a jealous pack  
their muzzles lifted, of whirling beasts,  
one large one, leaping in their midst,  
an executioner, with cohorts at his back.

Inhabitant of Cythera, son, of that lovely sky,  
you suffered their insults, silently,  
to expiate your infamy,  
lacking the tomb your crimes deny.

Hanged man, grotesque sufferer, your pain is mine!

I felt at the sight of your dangling limbs,  
the long stream of gall, old sufferings,  
rise to my teeth like acid bile.

Before you, poor devil, of dear memory,  
I felt all the beaks, and ravening claws,  
of swooping ravens, dark panthers' jaws,  
that were once so fond of tearing at me.

- The sky was entrancing, so calm the sea,  
but, to me, all was dark, and smeared with blood.  
Alas! My heart was buried, for good,  
in the depths, the winding sheet, of an allegory.

O Venus, what I found, in your island, was just  
a symbolic gallows, with my image, in suspense.  
O God! Give me the courage, and the strength,  
to contemplate my heart, and body, without disgust!

Note: The island of Cythera in the Aegean Sea is the  
symbolic isle of Venus Aphrodite, who was born  
from the sea-foam, near the island.

## Evening Twilight

Here's the criminal's friend, delightful evening:  
come like an accomplice, with a wolf's loping:  
slowly the sky's vast vault hides each feature,  
and restless man becomes a savage creature.

Evening, sweet evening, desired by him who can say  
without his arms proving him a liar: 'Today  
we've worked!' – It refreshes, this evening hour,  
those spirits that savage miseries devour,  
the dedicated scholar with heavy head,  
the bowed workman stumbling home to bed.  
Yet now unhealthy demons rise again  
clumsily, in the air, like busy men,  
beat against sheds and arches in their flight.  
And among the wind-tormented gas-lights  
Prostitution switches on through the streets  
opening her passageways like an ant-heap:  
weaving her secret tunnels everywhere,  
like an enemy planning a coup, she's there  
burrowing into the wombs of the city's mires,  
like a worm stealing from Man what it desires.  
Here, there, you catch the kitchens' whistles,  
the orchestras' droning, the theatres' yells,  
low dives where gambling's all the pleasure,  
filling with whores, and crooks, their partners,  
and the thieves who show no respite or mercy,  
will soon be setting to work, as they tenderly,

they too, toil at forcing safes and doorways,  
to live, clothe their girls, for a few more days.



Collect yourself, my soul, at this grave hour,  
and close your ears to the rising howl.  
It's now that the pains of the sick increase!  
Dark Night clasps them by the throat: they reach  
their journey's end, the common pit's abandon:  
the hospital fills with their sighs. – Many a one,  
will never return to their warm soup by the fire,  
by the hearth, at evening, next to their heart's desire.

And besides the majority have never known  
never having lived, the gentleness of home!

## Morning Twilight

Reveille was sounding on barrack-squares,  
and the wind of dawn blew on lighted stairs.

It was the hour when a swarm of evil visions  
torments swarthy adolescents, when pillows hum:  
when, a bloodshot eye, throbbing and quivering,  
the lamp makes a reddened stain on the morning:  
when the soul, by dull sour body, bowed down,  
enacts the struggle between lamp and dawn.  
Like a tearful face that the breeze wipes dry,  
the air's filled with the *frisson* of things that fly,  
and man is tired of writing, woman with loving.

The chimneys, here and there, began smoking.  
The women of pleasure, with their bleary eyes,  
and gaping mouths, were sleeping stupefied:  
poor old women, with chilled and meagre breasts,  
blew the embers, then fingers, roused from rest.  
It was the hour, when frozen, with money scarcer,  
the pains of women in childbirth grew fiercer:  
and like a sob cut short by a surge of blood  
a cock-crow far away broke through the fog:  
a sea of mist bathed the buildings, dying men,  
in the depths of the workhouse, groaned again  
emitting their death-rattles in ragged breaths.  
Debauchees, tired by their efforts, headed for rest.

Shivering dawn in a robe of pink and green  
made her way slowly along the deserted Seine,  
and sombre Paris, eyes rubbed and watering,  
groped for its tools, an old man, labouring.

## The Invitation to the Voyage

My sister, my child  
imagine, exiled,  
The sweetness, of being there, we two!  
To live and to sigh,  
to love and to die,  
In the land that mirrors you!  
The misted haze  
of its clouded days  
Has the same charm to my mind,  
as mysterious,  
as your traitorous  
Eyes, behind glittering blinds.

There everything's order and beauty,  
calm, voluptuousness, and luxury.

The surface gleams  
are polished it seems,  
Through the years, to grace our room.  
The rarest flowers  
mix, with fragrant showers,  
The vague, amber perfume.  
The dark, painted halls,  
the deep mirrored walls,  
With Eastern splendour hung,  
all secretly speak,  
To the soul, its discrete,  
Sweet, native tongue.

There, everything's order and beauty,  
calm, voluptuousness and luxury.

See, down the canals,  
the sleeping vessels,  
Those nomads, their white sails furled:  
Now, to accomplish  
your every wish,  
They come from the ends of the world.  
- The deep sunsets  
surround the west,  
The canals, the city, entire,  
with blue-violet and gold;  
And the Earth grows cold  
In an incandescent fire.

There, everything's order and beauty,  
calm, voluptuousness and luxury.

## The Invitation to the Voyage (Prose Poem)

There's a magnificent land, a land of Cockaigne, they say, that I've dreamed of visiting with a dear mistress. A unique land, drowned in our Northern mists, that you might call the Orient of the West, the China of Europe, so freely is warm and capricious Fantasy expressed there, so patiently and thoroughly has she adorned it with learned and luxuriant plants.

A true land of Cockaigne, where all is lovely, rich, tranquil, honest: where luxury delights in reflecting itself as order: where life is full and sweet to breathe: from which disorder, turbulence, the unforeseen are banished: where happiness is married to silence: where the cooking itself is poetic, both rich and exciting: where everything resembles you, my sweet angel.

Do you know that fevered malady that seizes us in our cold misery, that nostalgia for an unknown land, that anguish of curiosity? There's a country you resemble, where everything is lovely, tranquil and honest, where Fantasy has built and adorned a western China, where life is sweet to breathe, where happiness is married to silence. There we must go and live, there we must go to die!

Yes, there we must go to breathe, dream, prolong the hours with an infinity of sensations. Some

musician has composed *The Invitation to the Waltz*: who shall compose *The Invitation to the Voyage*, one can offer to the beloved, the sister of their choice?

Yes, it would be good to be alive in that atmosphere, - there where the hours that pass more slowly contain more thought, where the clocks chime happiness with a deeper, more significant solemnity.



On shining wall-panels, on walls lined with gilded leather, of sombre richness, blissful paintings live discreetly, calm and deep as the souls of the artists who created them. The sunsets that colour the dining-room, the salon, so richly, are softened by fine fabrics, or those high latticed windows divided in sections by leading. The furniture, vast, curious, bizarre, is armed with locks and secrets like refined souls. The mirrors, metals, fabrics, plate and ceramics play a mute, mysterious symphony for the eyes: and from every object, every corner, the gaps in the drawers, the folds of fabric, a unique perfume escapes: the call of Sumatra, that is like the soul of the apartment.

A true land of Cockaigne, I tell you, where all is rich, clean and bright like a clear conscience, like a splendid battery of kitchenware, like magnificent jewellery, like a multi-coloured gem! The treasures of the world enrich it, as in the home of some hard-working man, who's deserved well of the whole world. A unique land, superior to others, as art is to Nature, re-shaped here by dream, corrected, adorned, remade.

Let them search and search again, tirelessly extending the frontiers of their happiness, those alchemists of the gardener's art! Let them offer sixty, a hundred thousand florins reward to whoever realises their ambitious projects! I though, have found my *black tulip*, my *blue dahlia*!

Incomparable bloom, tulip re-found, allegorical dahlia, it is there, is it not, to that beautiful land so calm and full of dreams, that you must go to live and flower? Would you not be surrounded by your own analogue, could you not mirror yourself, to speak as the mystics do, in your own *correspondence*?

Dreams! Always dreams! And the more aspiring and fastidious the soul, the more its dreams exceed the possible. Every man has within him his dose of natural opium, endlessly secreted and renewed, and how many hours do we count, from birth to death, that are filled with positive pleasure, by successful deliberate action? Shall we ever truly live, ever enter this picture my mind has painted, this picture that resembles you?

Those treasures, items of furniture, that luxury, order, those perfumes, miraculous flowers, are you. They are you also, those great rivers and tranquil canals. Those huge ships they carry charged with riches, from which rise monotonous sailors' chants, those are my thoughts that sleep or glide over your breast. You conduct them gently towards that sea, the Infinite, while reflecting the depths of the sky in your sweet soul's clarity: - and when, wearied by the swell, gorged with Oriental wares, they re-enter their home port, they are my thoughts still, enriched, returning from the Infinite to you.

## The Irreparable

Can we stifle the old, long-lived Remorse,  
that lives, writhes, heaves,  
feeds on us, like a worm on a corpse,  
like oak-gall on the oak-trees?  
Can we stifle the old, long-lived Remorse?

In what potion, in what wine, in what brew,  
shall we drown this old enemy.  
greedy, destructive as a prostitute,  
ant-like always filled with tenacity?  
In what potion? – In what wine? – In what brew?

Tell us, lovely witch, oh, tell us, if you know,  
tell the spirit filled with anguish  
as if dying crushed by the wounded, oh,  
crumpled beneath the horses,  
tell us, lovely witch, oh, tell us, if you know,

tell the one in agony the wolf's already scented  
whom the raven now surveys,  
tell the shattered soldier! Say, if he's intended  
to despair of cross and grave:  
poor soul in agony the wolf's already scented!

Can we illuminate a black and muddied sky?  
can we pierce the shadowy evening,  
denser than pitch, with neither day or night,

star-less, with no funereal lightning?  
Can we illuminate a black and muddied sky?

The Hope that shone in the Tavern window  
is quenched, is dead forever!  
How to find without sunlight, without moon-glow,  
for the foul road's martyrs, ah, shelter!  
The Devil's quenched all in the Tavern window!

Adorable witch, do you love the damned?  
Say, do you know the unforgivable?  
Do you understand Remorse, its poisoned hand,  
for which our heart serves as target?  
Adorable witch, do you love the damned?

The Irreparable, with its accursed tooth bites  
at our soul, this pitiful monument,  
and often gnaws away like a termite,  
below the foundations of the battlement.  
The Irreparable, with its accursed tooth, bites!

- Sometimes on the boards of a cheap stage  
lit up by the sonorous orchestra,  
I've seen a fairy kindling miraculous day,  
in the infernal sky above her:  
sometimes on the boards of a cheap stage,

a being, who is nothing but light, gold, gauze,  
flooring the enormous Satan:  
but my heart, that no ecstasy ever saw,  
is a stage where ever and again  
one awaits in vain the Being with wings of gauze!



## The Poison

Wine can clothe the most sordid hole  
in miraculous luxury,  
and let many a fabulous portico float free  
in the gold of its red glow,  
like a setting sun in the sky's cloudy sea.

Opium expands things without boundaries,  
extends the limitless,  
makes time profounder, deepens voluptuousness,  
fills the soul beyond its capacities,  
with the pleasures of gloom and of darkness.

None of that equals the poison that flows  
from your eyes, your eyes of green,  
lakes where, mirrored, my trembling soul is seen...  
my dreams come flocking, a host,  
to quench their thirst in the bitter stream.

None of that equals the dreadful marvel though  
of your saliva's venom,  
that plunges my soul, remorseless, into oblivion,  
and causing vertigo,  
rolls it swooning towards the shores of doom!



## Clouded Sky

One would say your gaze was a misted screen:  
your strange eyes (are they blue, grey or green?)  
changeable, tender, dreamy, cruel, and again  
echoing the indolence and pallor of heaven.

You bring me those blank days, mild and hazy,  
that melt bewitched hearts into weeping,  
when twisted, stirred by some unknown hurt,  
our over-stretched nerves mock the numbed spirit.

Often you resemble the loveliest horizons  
lit by the suns of foggy seasons....  
how splendid you are, a dew-wet country,  
inflamed by the rays of a misted sky!

O dangerous woman, o seductive glow,  
will I someday adore your frost and snow,  
and learn to draw, from implacable winter  
sharp-edged as steel or ice, new pleasure?

## The Cat

### I

A fine cat prowls about in my brain,  
as if in his own apartment,  
he's charming, gentle, confident,  
when he mews you have to strain

to hear the discreet and tender tone:  
whether it soothes or scolds its sound  
is always rich, always profound.  
It's his secret charm, and his alone.

This voice which purls and filters  
to the darkest depths of my being  
swells in me like verse multiplying  
and delights me like a magic philtre.

It comprehends all ecstasy,  
calms my cruellest suffering:  
and has no need of words to sing  
the longest sentences to me.

No, there's no bow that gliding  
over my heart's pure instrument,  
could make its most sensitive string  
deliver more noble tidings,

than your voice, which as  
in an angel, cat of mystery,  
seraphic, extraordinary,  
is as subtle as it's harmonious!

## II

From its light-brownish fur, such  
a sweet perfume gathers,  
I was scented by it after  
stroking it once, one touch.

It's the room's familiar spirit:  
it judges, presides, inspires,  
all things within its empire:  
a god perhaps, a faery is it?

When my eyes are obediently  
drawn to this cat I love,  
like a magnet, and I look  
into myself profoundly,

I see with pure amazement  
the fire of his pale pupils,  
bright lamps, living opals,  
fixed on me, in contemplation.

## Monologue

You are a lovely autumn sky, rose-clear!  
But sadness is flowing in me like the sea,  
And leaves on my sullen lip, as it disappears,  
of its bitter slime the painful memory.

- Your hand glides over my numb breast in vain:  
what it seeks, dear friend, is a place made raw  
by woman's ferocious fang and claw, refrain:  
seek this heart, the wild beasts tear, no more.

My heart is a palace defiled by the rabble,  
they drink, and murder, and clutch each other's  
hair!

- About your naked throat a perfume hovers!...

O Beauty, harsh scourge of souls, this is your care!  
With your eyes of fire, dazzling as at our feasts,  
Burn these scraps to ashes, spared by the beasts!

## Autumn Song

### I

Soon we'll plunge into the bitter shadows:  
Goodbye bright sunlit summers, all too short!  
Already I can hear the gloomy blows:  
the wood reverberates in some paved court.

Winter once more will enter in my being: anger,  
shuddering, horror, hate, forced labour's shock,  
like the sun in its deep hell, northern, polar,  
my heart no more than a red, frozen block.

Trembling, I hear every log that falls:  
building a scaffold makes no duller echoes.  
My spirit's like a shattered tower, its walls  
split by the battering ram's slow tireless blows.

Rocked by monotonous thuds, I feel it's done,  
a coffin's being nailed in haste somewhere.  
For whom? – Yesterday summer, now it's autumn!  
The mysterious noise rings of departure there.

## II

I love the greenish light of your almond eyes,  
gentle beauty, but all's bitter to me today,  
and nothing, your love, the boudoir, your fire,  
matches the sun, for me, glittering on the waves.

Yet tender heart, love me still! Be like a mother  
however ungrateful, however unworthy I am:  
be the short-lived sweetness, sister or lover,  
of a glorious autumn or the setting sun.

Short task! The grave waits: it is greedy!  
Ah, let me rest my forehead on your knees,  
regretting summer, white and torrid, let me  
enjoy the late season's gentle yellow rays!

### Autumn Sonnet

Your eyes, clear as crystal, ask me: 'Strange lover,  
what do I mean to you?' - Hush, and be charming!  
My heart, irritated by all but the one thing,  
the primitive creature's absolute candour,

is unwilling to show its infernal secret to you,  
cradler whose hand invites to deep slumber,  
and its black inscription written in fire,  
I hate passion, the spirit sickens me too!

Let us love gently. Love in hiding, discreet,  
in shadowy ambush, bends his fatal bow.  
The weapons of his ancient arsenal I know:

Crime, horror, madness! – My pale marguerite!  
are you not, as I am, an autumn sun though,  
O my so white, my so cold Marguerite?



## To She Who Is Too Light-hearted

Your head, your gesture, your air,  
are lovely, like a lovely landscape:  
laughter's alive, in your face,  
a fresh breeze in a clear atmosphere.

The dour passer-by you brush past there,  
is dazzled by health in flight,  
flashing like a brilliant light  
from your arms and shoulders.

The resounding colours  
with which you sprinkle your dress,  
inspire the spirits of poets  
with thoughts of dancing flowers.

Those wild clothes are the emblem  
of your brightly-hued mind:  
madcap by whom I'm terrified,  
I hate you, and love you, the same!

Sometimes in a lovely garden  
where I trailed my listlessness,  
I've felt the sunlight sear my breast  
like some ironic weapon:

and Spring's green presence  
brought such humiliation

I've levied retribution on  
a flower, for Nature's insolence.

So through some night, when the hour  
of sensual pleasure sounds,  
I'd like to slink, mute coward, bound  
for your body's treasure,

to bruise your sorry breast,  
to punish your joyful flesh,  
form in your startled side, a fresh  
wound's yawning depth,

and – breath-taking rapture! –  
through those lips, new and full  
more vivid and more beautiful  
infuse my venom, my sister!

## Reversibility

Angel of joyfulness, do you know anguish,  
shame, remorse, sobbing, despondency,  
those dreadful nights of vague anxiety,  
when, like crumpled paper, the heart's crushed?  
Angel of joyfulness, do you know anguish,

Angel of goodness, do you know hatred,  
fists clenched in the darkness, tears of gall,  
when vengeance taps out its infernal call,  
and takes control of thoughts in the head?  
Angel of goodness, do you know hatred?

Angel of health, do you know the fevers,  
that the length of the dingy workhouse wall,  
like exiles, dragging their feet along, all  
moving their lips, seek absent summers?  
Angel of health, do you know the fevers?

Angel of beauty, do you know those furrows,  
and fears of old-age, and the hideous torture  
of reading devotion's intimate horror,  
in eyes where for years our greedy eyes burrowed?  
Angel of beauty, do you know those furrows?

Angel of happiness, of joy's bright flares,  
King David would have found life, near the tomb,  
in your enchanted body's perfume:

but, angel, all I ask of you is your prayers,  
Angel of happiness, of joy's bright flares!

Note: The servants of King David, sought for a young virgin to warm him in his old age, because he could get no heat. See The First Book of Kings 1-4.

## Confession

Once, once only, sweet and lovable woman,  
you leant your smooth arm on mine  
(that memory has never faded a moment  
from the shadowy depths of my mind):

it was late: the full moon spread its light  
like a freshly minted disc,  
and like a river, the solemnity of night  
flowed over sleeping Paris.

Along the houses, under carriage gates,  
cats crept past furtively,  
ears pricked, or else like familiar shades,  
accompanied us slowly.

Suddenly, in our easy intimacy,  
that flower of the pale light,  
from you, rich, sonorous instrument, eternally  
quivering gaily, bright,

from you, clear and joyous as a fanfare  
in the glittering dawn  
a strange, plaintive sigh escaped  
a faltering tone

as from some stunted child, detestable, sullen, foul,  
whose family in shame

hide it for years, to conceal it from the world  
in the cellar's dark cave.

My poor angel, that harsh voice of yours cried:  
‘That nothing on earth is certain,  
and however carefully it's disguised,  
human selfishness rips the curtain:

it's a hard life being a lovely woman,  
it's the banal occupation  
of a cold, crazed dancer who summons  
the mechanical smile's occasion:

it's stupid to build on the mortal heart:  
everything shatters, love and beauty,  
till Oblivion hurls them into its cart,  
and returns them to Eternity!’

I've often recalled that enchanted silence,  
its moon, and its languor: all  
of that dreadful whispered confidence  
in the heart's confessional.

## For Madame Sabatier

What will you say tonight, poor soul in solitude,  
what will you say my heart, withered till now,  
to the so beautiful, so sweet, so dear one,  
whose divine gaze recreated the flower?

- We will set Pride now to singing her praises:  
Nothing outdoes her sweet air of authority.  
Her spiritual flesh has the perfume of angels,  
and her eye surrounds us in robes of infinity.

Whether in the night, and alone, and in solitude,  
Whether in the street, and among the multitude,  
her phantom dances in air, like a flame.

Sometimes it speaks and it says 'I am beautiful.  
You, for the love of me, must love beauty alone:  
for I am your Madonna, Muse, Guardian Angel.

## The Living Torch

They go before me, those Eyes full of light  
that some wise Angel has magnetised,  
those divine brothers, my brothers, go, bright,  
flashing their diamond fires in my eyes.

Leading my steps on Beauty's way,  
saving me from snares, from grievous crime,  
they are my servants and I am their slave:  
all my being obeys that living flame.

Charmed Eyes, you shine with the mystic glow  
of candles lighted in broad day, the sun  
reddens, fails to quench, their eerie flow:

they celebrate Death: you sing the Resurrection:  
you sing the resurrection of my soul,  
Stars whose fires no sun can ever cool!



## Hymn

To the too-dear, to the too-beautiful,  
who fills my heart with clarity,  
to the angel, to the immortal idol,  
All hail, in immortality!

She flows through my reality,  
air, mixed with the salt sea-swell:  
into my soul's ecstasy,  
pours the essence of the eternal;

Ever-fresh sachet, that scents  
the dear corner's atmospheric light,  
hidden smoke, of the burning censer,  
in the secret paths of night.

How, incorruptible love,  
to express your endless verities?  
Grain of musk, unseen, above,  
in the depths of my infinities!

To the too-dear, to the too-beautiful,  
who is my joy and sanity,  
to the angel, to the immortal idol,  
All hail in immortality!

## Moesta et Errabunda

Tell me, does your heart sometimes soar, Agathe,  
far from the dark sea of the sordid city,  
towards another sea, a blaze of splendour that  
is blue, bright, deep as virginity?  
Tell me, does your heart sometimes soar, Agathe?

The sea, the vast sea, consoles us for our efforts!  
What demon entrusted the sea, that hoarse singer  
that accompanies the immense roar of tempests,  
with being the sublime sleep-bringer?  
The sea, the vast sea, consoles us for our efforts!

Carry me wagons! Take me, frigate!  
Far, far! Here the city slime is made of our weeping!  
Is it true that your sad heart, Agathe,  
cries: 'Far from remorse, from crime, from  
suffering,  
carry me wagons, take me frigate!

How far perfumed paradise, you are removed  
from us, where the clear blue is all love and  
happiness,  
where what one loves is worthy of being loved,  
where the heart drowns in pure voluptuousness!  
How far, perfumed paradise, you are removed!

But the green paradise of childhood's thrill,

the games, the songs, the kisses, and the flowers,  
the violin making music behind the hill,  
and the wine glass, under the trees, in twilight hours,  
- But the green paradise of childhood's thrill,

the innocent paradise full of secret yearning,  
is it already further than India or China?  
Can we call it back, with cries of longing,  
and re-create it, with its voice of silver,  
the innocent paradise full of secret yearning?

Note: Moesta et Errabunda: Sad and Restless.  
'Agathe' is pronounced as 'Agat', to rhyme  
with 'that'.

## Harmony of Evening

Now those days arrive when, stem throbbing,  
each flower sheds its fragrance like a censer:  
sounds and scents twine in the evening air:  
languorous dizziness, Melancholy dancing!

Each flower sheds its fragrance like a censer:  
the violin quivers, a heart that's suffering:  
languorous dizziness, Melancholy dancing!  
the sky is lovely, sad like a huge altar.

The violin quivers, a heart that's suffering:  
a heart, hating the vast black void, so tender!  
the sky is lovely, sad like a huge altar:  
the sun is drowned, in its own blood congealing.

A heart, hating the vast black void, so tender:  
each trace of the luminous past it's gathering!  
The sun is drowned, in its own blood congealing...  
A vessel of the host, your memory shines there.

## Semper Eadem

‘Where does it come from,’ you ask, ‘this strange sadness,

that climbs, like the sea, over black, bare stone?’

- When our heart has once reaped the harvest,  
life is an evil. That’s known,

as the simplest of miseries, and nothing mysterious,  
and seen by everyone, like your ecstasy.

Stop searching, you, beauty, so curious!

And, though your voice is sweet, sit, silently!

Be quiet, fool! Ever-ravished soul!

Lips of childish laughter! Often, more than the  
whole

of Life, Death grips us, with subtle ties we have  
made.

Let me, let my heart, then, be drunk on its lies,  
plunge as into a beautiful dream, into your eyes,  
and, forever, sleep, in your eyelids’ shade.

### To the Reader

Stupidity and error, avarice and vice,  
possess our spirits, batten on our flesh,  
we feed that fond remorse, our guest,  
like ragged beggars nourishing their lice.

Our sins are mulish, our repentance vain:  
we make certain our confessions pay,  
we'll happily retrace the muddied way,  
thinking vile tears will wash away the stain.

Satan Trismegistes rocks the bewitched  
Mind, endlessly, on evil's pillow, till,  
all the precious metal of our will's  
vaporised by that knowing alchemist.

The Devil pulls the strings that make us move!  
We take delight in such disgusting things:  
one step nearer Hell each new day brings  
us, void of horror, to the stinking gloom.

We clutch at furtive pleasure as we pass,  
like the debauchee whose lips are pressed  
to some antique whore's battered breast,  
squeezing the rotten orange that we grasp.

Packed, and seething like a million worms,  
a host of Demons riot in our brains,  
and when we breathe, invisibly, Death drains  
into our lungs, stream full of silent groans.



If poison, arson, knives, base desire,  
haven't yet embroidered deft designs  
on the dull canvas of our pitiful lives  
it's only, alas, because our souls lack fire.

Among the jackals, bitches, panthers,  
monkeys, scorpions, serpents, vultures,  
that screech, howl, grunt, and crawl, ogres,  
in the vile menagerie of our errors,

there's one of uglier, nastier, fouler birth!  
Without one wild gesture, one savage yell,  
it would willingly send this world to hell,  
and in one great yawn swallow up the earth:

it's Boredom! –in its eye's an involuntary tear,  
dreaming of scaffolds, as it smokes its *hookah*,  
You know it, Reader, that fastidious monster,  
hypocrite, Reader, – my brother, – and my peer!

Note: Trismegistes. Baudelaire here fuses the persons of Satan and Hermes Trismegistes (or Trismegistus). The works of Hermes Trismegistes (The Thrice Great), known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* were believed during the Renaissance to be Egyptian but were later attributed to Hellenistic writers of the second century A.D, writing in the style of Plotinus. The *Corpus Hermeticum* takes the form of dialogues between

Trismegistus, Thoth, and several other Egyptian deities, including Isis. Little in the text is original. Much of the Hermetic world view is grounded in the philosophy of Plato. Hermetics saw the universe in terms of light and dark, good and evil, spirit and matter. Like their Gnostic contemporaries, practitioners preached mind-body dualism and salvation through the possession of true and divine knowledge.

## The Enemy

My youth was only a threatening storm,  
pierced here and there by glowing heat:  
my garden scarcely let a ripe fruit form,  
the thunderous rain's destruction is complete.

Now I've reached the autumn of ideas,  
I must needs labour with rake and spade,  
to reclaim afresh the inundated meres,  
where pits were scooped as deep as graves.

Who knows whether the flowers I dream  
will find in soil, washed by the salt-stream,  
the mystic manna that will give them vigour?

– O Sadness! Sadness! Time eats at our lives,  
the unseen Enemy drinks, that gnaws our  
heart, our wasted blood, digs in, and thrives!

## Mist and Rain

Late autumns, winters, spring-times steeped in mud,  
anaesthetizing seasons! You I praise, and love  
for so enveloping my heart and brain  
in vaporous shrouds, in sepulchres of rain.

In this vast landscape where chill south winds play,  
where long nights hoarsen the shrill weather-vane,  
it opens wide its raven's wings, my soul,  
freer than in times of mild renewal.

Nothing's sweeter to my heart, full of sorrows,  
on which the hoar-frost fell in some past time,  
O pallid seasons, queens of our clime,

than the changeless look of your pale shadows,  
- except, two by two, to lay our grief to rest  
on some moonless night, on a perilous bed.

## Lover's Wine

Today Space is fine!  
Like a horse mount this wine,  
without bridle, spurs, bit,  
for a heaven divine!

We, two angels they torture  
with merciless fever,  
will this mirage pursue  
in the day's crystal blue!

Sweetly balanced, fly higher  
through the whirlwind's wise air  
in our mirrored desire,

my sister, swim there  
without rest or respite  
to my dream paradise!

## The Solitary's Wine

A flirtatious woman's singular gaze  
as she slithers towards you, like the white rays  
the vibrant moon throws on the trembling sea  
where she wishes to bathe her casual beauty,

the last heap of chips in the gambler's grasp,  
skinny Adeline's licentious kiss,  
a fragment of music's unnerving caress,  
resembling a distant human gasp,

none of these equal, O profound bottle,  
the powerful balm of your fecund vessel,  
kept for the pious poet's thirsting heart:

you pour out youth, and hope, and life,  
and the deepest poverty's treasure – pride,  
filling us with triumph, and the Gods' divine art!

## The Pipe

I am the pipe of an author:  
from my complexion you can see,  
like an Abyssinian girl's ebony,  
that my owner's a heavy smoker.

When he's overcome by pain  
I'm like the cottage chimney smoking,  
where the evening supper's cooking,  
for the ploughman home again.

I entwine his soul, and soothe it,  
in the blue and swirling veil,  
that floats from my mouth, pale

rings of powerful balm around it,  
that charm his heart, and bless  
his spirit freed from weariness.

## The Game

Old courtesans in washed-out armchairs,  
pale, eyebrows blacked, eyes 'tender', 'fatal',  
simpering still, and from their skinny ears  
loosing their waterfalls of stone and metal:

Round the green baize, faces without lips,  
lips without blood, jaws without the rest,  
clawed fingers that the hellish fever grips,  
fumbling an empty pocket, heaving breast:

below soiled ceilings, rows of pallid lights,  
and huge candelabras shed their glimmer,  
across the brooding brows of famous poets:  
here it's their blood and sweat they squander:

this the dark tableau of nocturnal dream  
my clairvoyant eye once watched unfold.  
In an angle of that silent lair, I leaned  
hard on my elbows, envious, mute, and cold,

yes, envying that crew's tenacious passion,  
the graveyard gaiety of those old whores,  
all bravely trafficking to my face, this one  
her looks, that one his family honour,

heart scared of envying many a character  
fervently rushing at the wide abyss,



drunk on their own blood, who'd still prefer  
torment to death, and hell to nothingness!

## Spleen

I'm like the king of a rain-soaked country,  
rich but impotent, young in senility,  
who despises his tutors' servile features,  
as bored with his dogs as with other creatures.  
Nothing enlivens him, hunting or falconry,  
or his people dying beside the balcony.  
His favourite fool's most grotesque antic  
won't calm this brow so cruelly sick:  
his fleur-de-lys bed has become a tomb,  
his ladies, who give all princes room,  
can't invent new dresses so totally wanton  
as to raise a smile from this young skeleton.  
The alchemist, making him gold, has never  
banished from his being the corrupted matter,  
or in baths of blood that the Romans gave,  
that men of power recall near the grave,  
been able to warm that living cadaver,  
where instead of blood, runs Lethe's water.

## The Voyage

À Maxime du Camp

### I

For the child, in love with globe, and stamps,  
the universe equals his vast appetite.  
Ah! How great the world is in the light of the lamps!  
In the eyes of memory, how small and slight!

One morning we set out, minds filled with fire,  
travel, following the rhythm of the seas,  
hearts swollen with resentment, and bitter desire,  
soothing, in the finite waves, our infinities:

Some happy to leave a land of infamies,  
some the horrors of childhood, others whose doom,  
is to drown in a woman's eyes, their astrologies  
the tyrannous Circe's dangerous perfumes.

In order not to become wild beasts, they stun  
themselves, with space and light, and skies of fire:  
The ice that stings them, and the scorching sun,  
slowly erase the marks of their desire.

But the true voyagers are those who leave  
only to move: hearts like balloons, as light,  
they never swerve from their destinies,

and, without knowing why, say, always: 'Flight!'

Those whose desires take on cloud-likenesses,  
who dream of vast sensualities, the same  
as a conscript dreaming of the guns, shifting  
vaguenesses,  
that the human spirit cannot name.

## II

We imitate, oh horror, tops and bowls,  
in their leaps and bounds, and even in dreams, dumb  
curiosity torments us, and we are rolled,  
as if by a cruel Angel that whips the sun!

Strange fate, where the goal never stays the same,  
and, belonging nowhere, perhaps it's no matter  
where  
Man, whose hope never tires, as if insane,  
rushes on, in search of rest, through the air.

Our soul, a three-master, heads for the isle, of  
Icarus.

A voice booms, from the bridge 'Skin your eyes!'  
A voice, from aloft, eager and maddened, calls to us:  
'Love... Fame... Happiness! Hell, it's a rock!' it  
cries.

On every island, that the lookouts sight,  
destiny promises its Eldorado:  
Imagination conjuring an orgiastic rite,  
finds only a barren reef, in the afterglow.

O, the poor lover of chimeric sands!  
Clap him in irons, toss him in the sea,  
this drunken sailor, inventing New Found Lands,  
whose mirage fills the abyss, with fresh misery?

Like an old tramp, trudging through the mire,  
dreaming, head up, of dazzling paradise,  
his gaze, bewitched, discovering Capua's fire,  
wherever a candlelit hovel meets his eyes.

### III

Astounding travellers! What histories  
we read in your eyes, deeper than the ocean there!  
Show us the treasures of your rich memories,  
marvellous jewels made of stars and air.

We wish to voyage without steam or sails!  
Project on our spirits, stretched out, like the sheets,  
lightening the tedium of our prison tales,  
your past, the horizon's furthest reach completes.

Tell us, what did you see?

### IV

‘We saw the sand,  
and waves, we also saw the stars:  
despite the shocks, disasters, the unplanned,  
we were often just as bored as before.

The sunlight's glory on the violet shoals,  
the cities' glory as the sunlight wanes,  
kindled that restless longing in our souls,  
to plunge into the sky's reflected flames.

The richest cities, the greatest scenes, we found  
never contained the magnetic lures,

of those that chance fashioned, in the clouds.  
Always desire rent us, on distant shores!

Enjoyment adds strength to our desire.  
Desire, old tree, for whom, pleasure is the ground,  
while your bark thickens, as you grow higher,  
your branches long to touch the sky you sound!

Will you grow forever, mighty tree  
more alive than cypress? Though, we have brought,  
with care,  
a few specimens, for your album leaves,  
brothers, who find beauty, in objects, from out there!

We have saluted gods of ivory,  
thrones, jewelled with constellated gleams,  
sculpted palaces, whose walls of faery,  
to your bankers, would be ruinous dreams.

Clothes that, to your vision, bring drunkenness,  
women with painted teeth and breasts,  
juggling savants gliding snakes caress.'

## V

And then, what then?

## VI

‘O, Childishness!

Not to forget the main thing, everywhere,  
effortlessly, through this world, we’ve seen,  
from top to bottom of the fatal stair,  
the tedious spectacle of eternal sin.

Woman, vile slave, full of pride and foolishness,  
adoring herself without laughing, loving without  
disgust:

Man, greedy tyrant, harsh, lewd, merciless,  
slave of that slave, a sewer in the dust.

The torturer who plays; the martyr who sobs;  
the feast, perfumed and moist, from the bloody drip;  
the poison of power, corrupting the despot;  
the crowd, in love with the stupefying whip:



Several religions just like our own,  
all climbing heaven. Sanctity,  
like an invalid, under the eiderdown,  
finding in nails, and hair-shirts, ecstasy:

Drunk with its genius, chattering Humanity,  
as mad today as ever, or even worse,  
crying to God, in furious agony:  
“ O, my likeness, my master, take my curse!

And, the least stupid, harsh lovers of Delirium,  
fleeing the great herd, guarded by Destiny,  
taking refuge in the depths of opium!  
- That is the news, from the whole world's country.'

## VII

Bitter the knowledge we get from travelling!  
Today, tomorrow, yesterday, the world shows what  
we see,  
monotonous and mean, our image beckoning,  
an oasis of horror, in a desert of ennui!

Shall we go, or stay? Stay, if you can stay:  
Go, if you must. One runs, another crouches, to  
elude  
Time, that vigilant, shadow enemy.

Alas! There are runners for whom nothing is any good,

like Apostles, or wandering Jews,  
nothing, no vessel or railway car, they assume,  
can flee this vile slave driver; others whose  
minds can kill him, without leaving their room.

When, at last he places his foot on our spine, a  
hope still stirs, and we can shout: 'Forward!'  
Just as when we left for China,  
the wind in our hair and our eyes fixed to starboard,

sailing over the Shadowy sea,  
with a young traveller's joyous mind.  
Do you hear those voices, sadly, seductively,  
chanting: 'Over here, if you would find,

the perfumed Lotus! It's here we press  
miraculous fruits on which your hopes depend:  
Come and be drunk, on the strange sweetness,  
of the afternoons, that never end.'

Behind a familiar tongue we see the spectre:  
Our Pylades stretches his arms towards our face.  
'To renew your heart, swim towards your Electra!'  
she calls, whose knees we once embraced.

## VIII

O Death, old captain, it is time! Weigh anchor.  
This land wearies us, O Death! Take flight!  
If the sky and sea are dark as ink's black rancour,  
our hearts, as you must know, are filled with light!

Pour out your poison, and dissolve our fears!  
Its fire so burns our minds, we yearn, it's true,  
to plunge to the Void's depths, Heaven or Hell, who  
cares?  
Into the Unknown's depths, to find the *new*.

Notes: Circe was the sea-nymph of Aeaea, who bewitched the followers of Ulysses, and delayed him on her island (See Homer, *Odyssey* X). Icarus fell into the Icarian Sea, and gave his name to the Sea and the island of Icaria in the Aegean, after his waxen wings had melted when he flew too near the sun. The wings had been made for the two of them by his father Daedalus, who buried him on the island (See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII 195). Eldorado was the mythical golden man of Inca Peru, hunted for by the Spaniards, synonymous with an unattainable treasure. Capua was the wealthy capital of ancient Campania. After the Battle of Cannae, Hannibal and his troops wintered there, in 215 BC, succumbing, it was said, to the delights of its climate, food, baths

etc. The expression the 'delights of Capua' later signified wasting precious time on idle pleasures. Here it represents a paradisaical mirage. The Lotus was the mythical drug of the Lotus Eaters, whom Ulysses visited (See Homer, *Odyssey IX*), their land a synonym for the world of languor outside time. Pylades was the friend of Orestes, who helped Orestes in his journey to avenge Agamemnon and return to his sister Electra (See Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy: The Choephoroi*).

## The Seven Old Men

À Victor Hugo

Ant-like city, city full of dreams,  
where the passer-by, at dawn, meets the spectre!  
Mysteries everywhere are the sap that streams  
through the narrow veins of this giant ogre.

One morning, when, on the dreary street,  
the buildings all seemed heightened, cold  
a swollen river's banks carved out to greet,  
(their stage-set mirroring an actor's soul),

the dirty yellow fog that flooded space,  
arguing with my already weary soul,  
steeling my nerves like a hero, I paced  
suburbs shaken by the carts' drum-roll.

Suddenly, an old man in rags, their yellow  
mirroring the colour of the rain-filled sky,  
whose looks alone prompted alms to flow,  
except for the evil glittering of his eye,

appeared. You'd have thought his eyeballs  
steeped in gall: his gaze intensified the cold,  
and his long beard, as rigid as a sword,  
was jutting out like Judas's of old.

He was not bent but broken, his spine  
made a sharp right angle with his legs,  
so that the stick, perfecting his line,  
gave him the awkward shape and step

of three-legged usurer, or sick quadruped.  
Wading through snow and mud he went  
as if, under his feet, he crushed the dead,  
hostile to the world, not just indifferent.

Then his double: beard, eyes, rags, stick, back,  
no trait distinguished his centenarian twin:  
they marched in step, two ghosts of the Baroque,  
sprung from one hell, towards some unknown end.

Was I the butt of some infamous game,  
some evil chance, aimed at humiliation?  
Since minute by minute, I counted seven,  
of that sinister old man's multiplication!

Whoever smiles at my anxiety,  
and balks at shivering, the un-fraternal,  
consider then, despite their senility,  
those seven vile monsters looked eternal!

Could I have lived to see an eighth: yet one  
more ironic, fatal, inexorable replication,  
loathsome Phoenix, his own father and son?  
- I turned my back on that hell-bent procession.

Exasperated, a drunk that sees things doubled,  
I stumbled home, slammed the door, terrified,  
sick, depressed, mind feverish and troubled,  
wounded by mystery, the absurd, outside!

In vain my reason tried to take command,  
its efforts useless in the tempest's roar,  
my soul, a mastless barge, danced, and danced,  
over some monstrous sea without a shore!

## The Digging Skeleton

### I

In the anatomical plates  
displayed on the dusty quays  
where many a dry book sleeps  
mummified, as in ancient days,

drawings to which the gravity  
and skill of some past artist,  
despite the gloomy subject  
have communicated beauty,

you'll see, and it renders those  
gruesome mysteries more complete,  
flayed men, and skeletons posed,  
farm-hands, digging the soil at their feet.



## II

Peasants, dour and resigned,  
convicts pressed from the grave,  
what's the strange harvest, say,  
for which you hack the ground,

bending your backbones there,  
flexing each fleshless sinew,  
what farmer's barn must you  
labour to fill with such care?

Do you seek to show – by that pure,  
and terrible, emblem of too hard  
a fate! – that even in the bone-yard  
the promised sleep's far from sure:

that even the Void's a traitor:  
that even Death tells us lies,  
that in some land new to our eyes,  
we must, perhaps, alas, forever,

and ever, and ever, eternally,  
wield there the heavy spade,  
scrape the dull earth, its blade  
beneath our naked, bleeding feet?

## Far Away from Here

This is the sanctuary  
where the prettified young lady,  
calm, and always ready,

fans her breasts, aglow,  
elbow on the pillow,  
hears the fountain's flow:

it's the room of Dorothea.  
- The breeze and water distantly  
sing their song, mingled here  
with sobs to soothe the spoiled child's fear.

From tip to toe, most thoroughly,  
her delicate surfaces appear,  
oiled with sweet perfumery.  
- the flowers nearby swoon gracefully.

## The Swan

### I

Andromache, I think of you! That false Simois  
that narrow stream, meagre and sad, flowing there  
where the immense majesty of your widowed grief,  
shone out, growing from your tears,

stirred my fertile memory, suddenly,  
as I was crossing the new Carrousel.  
The old Paris is gone (the shape of a city  
changes faster than the human heart can tell)

I can only see those frail booths in the mind's eye,  
those piles of rough-cut pillars, and capitals,  
the weeds, the massive greening blocks, that used to  
lie  
water-stained: the bric-a-brac piled in shop  
windows.

There, there used to be a menagerie:  
One dawn, at the hour when labour wakes, there,  
under the cold, clear sky, or, when the road-menders  
set free  
a dull hammering, into the silent air,

I saw a swan, that had escaped its cage,  
striking the dry stones with webbed feet;

trailing, on hard earth, its white plumage;  
in the waterless gutter, opening its beak;

bathing its wings frantically, in the dust,  
and crying, its heart full of its native streams:  
‘Lightning, when will you strike? Rain when will  
you gust?’  
Unfortunate, strange, fatal symbol, it seems

I see you, still: sometimes, like Ovid's true  
man transformed, his head, on a convulsive neck,  
strained  
towards the sky's cruel and ironic blue,  
addressing the gods with his complaint.

## II

Paris changes! But nothing, in my melancholy,  
moves. New hotels, scaffolding, stone blocks,  
old suburbs, everything, becomes allegory,  
to me: my memories are heavier than rocks.

So, in front of the Louvre, an image oppresses me.  
I think of my great swan, with its mad movements,  
ridiculous, sublime, as exiles seem,  
gnawed by endless longing! And then,

of you, Andromache, fallen from the embrace  
of the great hero, vile chattel in the hands of proud  
Pyrrhus,  
in front of an open tomb, in grief's ecstatic grace,  
Hector's widow, alas, and wife of Helenus!

I think of the negress, consumptive, starved,  
dragging through the mire, and searching, eyes  
fixed,  
for the absent palm-trees of Africa, carved

behind the immense walls of mist:

Of those who have lost what they cannot recover,  
ever! Ever! Those who drink tears like ours,  
and suck on sorrow's breasts, their wolf-mother!  
Of the skinny orphans, withering like flowers!

So in the forest of my heart's exile,  
an old memory sounds its clear encore!  
I think of sailors forgotten on some isle,  
prisoners, the defeated! ....and of many more!

Note. Andromache was Hector's wife who mourned his death in the Trojan War. The Simois and the Scamander (Xanthus) were the two rivers of the Trojan Plain. Pyrrhus is Neoptolemus, son of Achilles. Andromache fell to him as a spoil after the fall of Troy. Helenus was a son of Priam and brother of Hector. Baudelaire follows Virgil, *The Aeneid* III 289, where Aeneas reaches Epirus and Chaonia, and finds Helenus and Andromache. Helenus has succeeded to the throne of Pyrrhus and married Andromache. Aeneas finds Andromache sacrificing to Hector's ashes in a wood near the city (Buthrotum) by a river named after the Simois. This is Baudelaire's 'false Simois'. Andromache explains that Pyrrhus has left her for Hermione, and passed her on to Helenus, who has been accepted as a

Greek prince. Helenus has built a second 'little' Troy in Chaonia. Andromache is a symbol of fallen exile. The Carrousel is a bridge over the Seine in Paris, recent at the time of the poem. The Ovid reference is (arguably) to Cycnus, son of Sthenelus, changed to a swan, grieving for Phaethon (See *Metamorphoses* II 367 and also Virgil, *Aeneid* X 187). The Louvre Palace is now a Museum and Art Gallery, on the right bank of the Seine, in Paris.

## Parisian Dream

À Constantine Guys

### I

The vague and distant image  
of this landscape, so terrifying,  
on which no mortal's gazed  
thrilled me again this morning.

Sleep is full of miracles!  
By a singular caprice  
from that unfolding spectacle  
I'd banned all shapeless leaf,

a painter proud of my artistry  
I savoured in my picture  
the enchanting monotony  
of metal, marble, water.

Babel of stairs and arcades,  
it was an infinite palace  
full of pools and cascades,  
falling gold, burnt, or lustreless:

and heavy cataracts there



like curtains of crystal,  
dazzling, hung in air  
from walls of metal.

Not trees, but colonnades  
circled the sleeping pools  
where colossal naiads gazed  
at themselves, as women do.

Between banks of rose and green,  
the blue water stretched,  
for millions of leagues  
to the universe's edge:

there were un-heard of stones,  
and magic waves: there were,  
dazzled by everything shown,  
enormous quivering mirrors!

Impassive and taciturn,  
Ganges, in the firmament,  
poured treasures from the urn  
into abysses of diamond.

Architect of this spell,  
I made a tame ocean swell  
entirely at my will,  
through a jewelled tunnel:

and all, seemed glossy, clear  
iridescent: even the shades  
of black, liquid glory there  
in light's crystallised rays.

Not a single star, no trace  
of a sun even, low in the sky,  
to illuminate this wondrous place  
that shone with intrinsic fire!

And over these shifting wonders  
hovered (oh dreadful novelty!  
All for the eye, none for the ear!)  
the silence of eternity.

## II

Opening eyes filled with flame  
I saw the horrors of my hovel,  
and felt the barbs of shameful  
care, re-entering my soul:

brutally with gloomy blows  
the clock struck mid-day,  
and the sky poured shadows  
on a world, benumbed and grey.

## The Inquisitive Man's Dream

Á Nadar

Do you know, as I do, delicious sadness  
and make others say of you: 'Strange man!'  
- I was dying. In my soul, singular illness,  
desire and horror were mingled as one:

anguish and living hope, no factious bile.  
The more the fatal sand ran out, the more  
acute, delicious my torment: my heart entire  
was tearing itself away from the world I saw.

I was like a child eager for the spectacle,  
hating the curtain as one hates an obstacle...  
at last the truth was chillingly revealed:

I'd died without surprise, dreadful morning  
enveloped me. – Was this all there was to see?  
The curtain had risen, and I was still waiting.

## Obsession

Great forests you frighten me, like vast cathedrals:  
You roar like an organ, and in our condemned souls,  
aisles of eternal mourning, where past death-rattles  
sound, the echo of your De Profundis rolls.

I hate you, Ocean! My mind, in your tumultuous  
main,  
sees itself: I hear the vast laughter of your seas,  
the bitter laughter of defeated men,  
filled with the sound of sobs and blasphemies.

How you would please me without your stars, O  
Night!  
I know the language that their light employs!  
Since I search for darkness, nakedness, the Void!

But the shadows themselves seem, to my sight  
canvases, where thousands of lost beings, alive,  
and with a familiar gaze, leap from my eyes.

## Sympathetic Horror

‘From that sky livid, bizarre  
as your tortured destiny,  
what thoughts fill your empty heart,  
Freethinker, answer me.’

- Insatiable and avid  
for vague and obscure skies,  
I’ll not groan like Ovid,  
banned from Rome and paradise.

Skies, shores split and seamed,  
my pride’s mirrored in you:  
your clouds in mourning, too,

are the hearses of my dreams,  
Hell’s reflected in your light,  
where my heart takes delight.

## The Alchemy of Sadness

One man lights you with his ardour  
one decks you in mourning, Nature!  
What says to the first: 'A Sepulchre!'  
To the other cries: 'Life and splendour!'

Unknown Hermes, who assists,  
yet intimidates me as well,  
you make me Midas' equal,  
the saddest of alchemists:

You help me change gold to iron,  
paradise to hell's kingdom:  
in the shrouded atmosphere

I find a dear corpse, and on  
the celestial shores, it's there,  
I build a mighty sepulchre.

Notes: Hermes was the mercurial Greek messenger god, spirit of alchemy, and as Hermes Trismegistes a source of wisdom. Midas was offered a gift by the god Bacchus, and asked to turn everything to gold. Bacchus reversed the dreadful results, at Midas' request.



Draft Epilogue for the Second Edition of Les Fleurs  
du mal

Tranquil as a sage and gentle as one who's  
cursed....I said:

I love you, oh my beauty, my charmer...  
many a time...

your debauches without thirst, your soul-less loves,  
your longing for the infinite  
which proclaims itself everywhere, even in evil,

your bombs, knives, victory marches, public feasts,  
your melancholy suburbs,  
your furnished rooms,  
your gardens full of sighs and intrigue,  
your churches vomiting prayer as music,  
your childish despairs, mad hags' games,  
your discouragements:

and your fireworks, eruptions of joy,  
that make the dumb and gloomy sky smile.  
Your venerable vice dressed in silk,  
and laughable virtue, with sad gaze,  
gentle, delighting in the luxury it shows.

Your saved principles and flouted laws,  
your proud monuments on which mists catch,  
your metal domes the sun inflames,  
your theatrical queens with seductive voices,

your tocsins, cannon, deafening orchestra,  
your magic cobbles heaped as barricades,

your petty orators' swollen rhetoric,  
preaching love, while your sewers run with blood,  
rushing towards Hell like the Orinoco's flood,

your angels, your fresh clowns in ancient rags.

Angels dressed in gold, purple and hyacinth,  
O you, bear witness that I've discharged my task,  
like a perfect alchemist like a sainted soul.

From every thing I've extracted the quintessence,  
you gave me your mud and I've turned it into gold.

## Epilogue

With quiet heart, I climbed the hill,  
from which one can see, the city, complete,  
hospitals, brothels, purgatory, hell,

prison, where every sin flowers, at our feet.  
You know well, Satan, patron of my distress,  
I did not trudge up there to vainly weep,

but like an old man with an old mistress,  
I longed to intoxicate myself, with the infernal  
delight  
of the vast procuress, who can always make things  
fresh.

Whether you still sleep in the morning light,  
heavy, dark, rheumatic, or whether your hands  
flutter, in your pure, gold-edged veils of night,

I love you, infamous capital! Courtesans  
and pimps, you often offer pleasures  
the vulgar mob will never understand.

## The Voice

I was the height of a folio, my bed just  
backed on the bookcases' sombre Babel,  
everything, Latin ashes, Greek dust  
jumbled together: novel, science, fable.

Two voices spoke to me. One, firmly, slyly,  
said: 'The Earth's a cake filled with sweetness:  
I can give you (and your pleasure will be  
endless!) an appetite of comparable vastness.'

The other said: 'Come! Come voyage in dream,  
beyond the known, beyond the possible!'  
And that one sang like the ocean breeze,  
phantom, from who knows where, its wail

caressing the ear, and yet still frightening.  
You I answered: 'Yes! Gentle voice!' My  
wound and what, I'd call my fatality, begins  
alas, from then. From behind the scenery

of vast existence, in voids without light,  
I see the strangest worlds distinctly:  
ecstatic victim of my second sight,  
snakes follow me striking at my feet.

Since then, like the prophets, I greet  
the desert and the sea with tenderness:

I laugh at funerals, I cry at feasts,  
wine tastes smooth that's full of bitterness:

and, eyes on the sky, I fall into holes,  
and frequently I take facts for lies.  
But 'Keep your dreams!' the Voice consoles,  
'Madmen have sweeter ones than the wise!'

## The Warner

Every man worth the name  
has a yellow snake in his soul,  
seated as on a throne, saying  
if he cries: 'I want to!': 'No!'

Lock eyes with the fixed gaze  
of Nixies or Satyresses, says  
the Tooth: 'Think of your duty!'

Make children, or plant trees,  
polish verses, or marble frieze,  
the Tooth says: 'Tonight, where will you be?'

Whatever he likes to consider  
there's never a moment passing  
a man can't hear the warning  
of the insufferable Viper.

## Calm

Have patience, O my sorrow, and be still.  
You asked for night: it falls: it is here.  
A shadowy atmosphere enshrouds the hill,  
to some men bringing peace, to others care.

While the vile human multitude  
goes to earn remorse, in servile pleasure's play,  
under the lash of joy, the torturer, who  
is pitiless, Sadness, come, far away:

Give me your hand. See, where the lost years  
lean from the balcony in their outdated gear,  
where regret, smiling, surges from the watery deeps.

Underneath some archway, the dying light  
sleeps, and, like a long shroud trailing from the East,  
listen, dear one, listen to the soft onset of night.



## The Lid

Whatever place he goes, on land or sea,  
under a sky on fire, or a polar sun,  
servant of Jesus, follower of Cytherea,  
shadowy beggar, or Croesus the glittering one,

city-dweller or rustic, traveller or sedentary,  
whether his tiny brain works fast or slow,  
everywhere man knows the terror of mystery,  
and with a trembling eye looks high or low.

Above, the Sky! That burial vault that stifles,  
a ceiling lit for a comic opera, blind walls,  
where each actor treads a blood-drenched stage:

Freethinkers fear, the hermit sets his hope on:  
the Sky! The black lid of the giant cauldron,  
under which we vast, invisible Beings rage.

## The Sunset of Romanticism

How beautiful a new sun is when it rises,  
flashing out its greeting, like an explosion!  
- Happy, whoever hails with sweet emotion  
its descent, nobler than a dream, to our eyes!

I remember! I've seen all, flower, furrow, fountain,  
swoon beneath its look, like a throbbing heart...  
- Let's run quickly, it's late, towards the horizon,  
to catch at least one slanting ray as it departs!

But I pursue the vanishing God in vain:  
irresistible Night establishes its sway,  
full of shudders, black, dismal, cold:

an odour of the tomb floats in the shadow,  
at the swamp's edge, feet faltering I go,  
bruising damp slugs, and unexpected toads.

## The Void

Pascal had his Void that went with him day and night.  
- Alas! It's all Abyss, - action, longing, dream,  
the Word! And I feel Panic's storm-wind stream  
through my hair, and make it stand upright.

Above, below, around, the desert, the deep,  
the silence, the fearful compelling spaces...  
With his knowing hand, in my dark, God traces  
a multi-formed nightmare without release.

I fear sleep as one fears a deep hole  
full of vague terror, where to, who knows?  
I see only infinity at every window,

and my spirit haunted by vertigo's stress  
envies the stillness of Nothingness.  
- Ah! Never to escape from Being and Number!

## The Moon, Offended

Oh moon our fathers worshipped, their love discreet,  
from the blue country's heights where the bright  
seraglio,  
the stars in their sweet dress, go treading after you,  
my ancient Cynthia, lamp of my retreat,

do you see the lovers, in their bed's happiness  
showing in sleep their mouths' cool enamels,  
the poet bruising his forehead on his troubles,  
or the vipers coupling under the dry grass?

Under your yellow cloak, with clandestine pacing,  
do you pass as before, from twilight to morning,  
to kiss Endymion's faded grace?

- 'I see your mother, Child of this impoverished  
century,  
who, over her mirror, bends a time-worn face,  
and powders the breast that fed you, skilfully.'

## Lament of an Icarus

Lovers of whores don't care,  
happy, calm and replete:  
But my arms are incomplete,  
grasping the empty air.

Thanks to stars, incomparable ones,  
that blaze in the depths of the skies,  
all my destroyed eyes  
see, are the memories of suns.

I look, in vain, for beginning and end  
of the heavens' slow revolve:  
Under an unknown eye of fire, I ascend  
feeling my wings dissolve.

And, scorched by desire for the beautiful,  
I will not know the bliss,  
of giving my name to that abyss,  
that knows my tomb and funeral.

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Oh moon our fathers worshipped, their love discreet, 164  
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