

# BAUDELAIRE AND BARTHES: THE PLEASURE OF THE PROSE POEM

by

STEVEN G. CRAWFORD

(Under the Direction of Timothy Raser)

## ABSTRACT

Both the nineteenth-century poet, Charles Baudelaire and the twentieth-century literary critic Roland Barthes considered the concept of “pleasure” in their writings. Baudelaire’s life was so bleak that pleasure and its counterpart “spleen” became natural objects of his artistic endeavors. The resulting works, especially *Les Fleurs du mal*, have evoked a mass of critical comment, but only limited amounts concerning his *poèmes en prose*. A small subset of his prose poems seem intent on subverting the usual dark side of his work in order to prove that indeed one can find the pleasure of the text in this poetry. Baudelaire fashions a working definition for the enigmatic “prose poem” and then uses his own concept of pleasure as a major ingredient in these prose poems. Roland Barthes wrote in 1973 *Le Plaisir du texte* where he discusses the less evident ways of experiencing the pleasure of literature. Here we have two “littérateurs” separated by two generations, yet both writing with an essential motivation in mind, the pleasure of the text. The discussion begins with some history of the prose poem, a genre difficult to define. Next is a short history of Baudelaire’s shift from rhymed verse towards the prose poem. The pleasure as defined by Baudelaire leads to the same concept as elaborated by Barthes. These theories help in commenting the six *poèmes nocturnes* as quintessential texts of pleasure. Finally, one particular prose poem is discussed as an unusual title having over the years been variously incorporated into music, theater, rhymed poetry, prose poetry, and painting.

INDEX WORDS: Baudelaire, Barthes, poème en prose, prose poem, poèmes nocturnes, *Invitation to the Dance*, *Invitation au voyage*, Houssaye, *Le Spleen de Paris*, *Les Petits Poèmes en prose*, *Les Fleurs du mal*, *Le Plaisir du texte*, *The Pleasure of the Text*.

BAUDELAIRE AND BARTHES: THE PLEASURE OF THE PROSE POEM

by

STEVEN G. CRAWFORD

B.S., Georgia Tech, 1976

B.A., Georgia State, 1992

B.A., Georgia State, 1995

M.A., Georgia State, 2002

A dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

© 2008

Steven G. Crawford

All Rights Reserved

BAUDELAIRE AND BARTHES: THE PLEASURE OF THE PROSE POEM

by

STEVEN G. CRAWFORD

Major Professor: Timothy Raser  
Committee: Catherine Jones  
Jonathan Krell  
Jan Pendergrass

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
December 2008

DEDICATION

For Mom. I'm glad you can run and jump again.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A man came across a common dirt clod and asked: "What art thou?" "I am but a lump of clay, but fortune has placed me next to a rose and I have caught its fragrance.

To my whole committee, I think this applies. Merci.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROSE POEM .....	1
2 THE PROSE POEM ACCORDING TO BAUDELAIRE .....	18
3 THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT ACCORDING TO BAUDELAIRE .....	49
4 THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT ACCORDING TO BARTHES.....	83
5 PLEASURE & THE <i>POÈMES NOCTURNES</i> .....	113
6 ONE TITLE, FIVE ARTS.....	152
REFERENCES.....	170
APPENDIX.....	177
A Lettre programme .....	177
B Poèmes nocturnes .....	178
C Luxe, calme et volupté .....	183



## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: PROSE POEM DEFINITIONS .....	15
Table 2: PROSE POEM CLAIMANTS.....	19
Table 3: DOUBLETS.....	43
Table 4: PLAISIR v. JOUISSANCE .....	90
Table 5: CHRONOLOGY OF BAUDELAIRE’S PROSE POEMS .....	116

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND OF THE PROSE POEM

Studies of prose poems have understandably concentrated on formal elements: the name begs that sort of study. Form, however, was not uppermost in Charles Baudelaire's (1821-1867) mind when, in 1861, with obvious pride he presented a group of prose poems to his friend and editor, Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896). This is significant because in his dedication of *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857 to Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), he insisted on form. What he did point out later instead was the hedonic, or pleasurable aspect of these works. Such a clear-cut criterion is hard to ignore, but equally difficult to define. What, for instance, is the nature of the pleasure a text affords? A century after Baudelaire's death, the celebrated critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) wrote a book addressing just that question: *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973). I intend, to use Barthes's insights to attempt a study of Baudelaire's prose poems concentrating on pleasure, whether that of the poet or that of the reader, whether pleasure described or pleasure produced.

Baudelaire – Barthes; the prose poem – the pleasure of the text. Pleasure and reading poetry traditionally go together. This association springs from two reasons – one ordinary, the other philosophical. First, poetry is by its nature dense with suggestion; it intimates more than it spells out. Compared to a prose narrative, poetry leaves the reader with the responsibility to glean meaning and effect from the words. Its open-endedness sets aside a great space for interpretation. Second, the prose in the prose poem liberates the text from the rigor of rhyme and strict order. The pleasure of the prose poem is thus twofold; one, it takes advantage of inherent poetic effect and two, it benefits from narrative explanation without prolonging the text. Working with words, literature and especially poetry is an uplifting activity, an activity that has a large dose of pleasure as its byproduct. Among various literary genres – poetry, novels, plays, essays, short stories – one finds the evolution of the prose poem not as straightforward as with the more common genres.

Defining the term prose poem, has not been simple. The warning flags of definitional complication go up immediately with the oxymoronic name. As with expressions such as “forward-lateral” or “semi-boneless” – something does not fit. “Poems” and “prose” are by definition opposing genres. How can they be fused? As it turns out, forward-lateral describes a not infrequent ball-game manoeuvre, because all laterals do not go sideways. As it turns out also, prose poem is a legitimate if not widespread literary genre.

If the history of defining the prose poem has not always been smooth-sailing and without dispute, its relationship to pleasure is nonetheless undeniable. Being first an art-form / literary work, and also enjoying poetic and prosaic values, the prose poem is intimately tied to the concept of pleasure. The writings of Baudelaire and Barthes can help us more clearly to see the pleasure inherent in the prose poem. Baudelaire often mentions the theme of pleasure in his works as a way to offset the misery of his life. As a young man, he searched largely for physical pleasures and for the rest of his relatively short time on earth (46 years) he paid a heavy price for his indiscretions. Naggng ailments drained his energy, sickened him and plunged him into weeklong despondencies. But even then, he constantly refers to pleasure in his writing, sometimes in the physical sense, but more often in the artistic sense.

The composition of poetry with its attractive themes and lyrics is antithetical to the most common conception of Baudelaire, the famous “Rôdeur de Paris” (Parisian Prowler) who wrote many poems dealing with life’s somber side. Baudelaire became infamous with the 1857 publication of his collected verse, *Les Fleurs du mal* where the titles of many of the poems convey preoccupations with penury and death: “La Muse vénale,” “Le Vampire,” or “Sépulture” are some examples. The reason Baudelaire seemed obsessed with the theme of evil is not hard to discern; there is a clear connection between his personal life and the contents of his poetry. His letters reveal a man, a poet, struggling with debt and increasing illness. At the age of 42, he wrote a typical letter to his mother: “Je m’étais promis de ne t’écrire que quand j’aurais secoué le poids de léthargie qui m’a accablé pendant de si longs mois.

Comment suis-je tombé si bas, à ce point que j'ai cru que je ne saurais plus me relever."<sup>1</sup> ("I had promised myself not to write you until I had shaken off this smothering depression which has strangled me for so many months. How could I have fallen so low, to the point where I believed I would never get back up").<sup>2</sup> Although a brief expression, short verses from the poem "Le Vin du solitaire" CVII<sup>3</sup> relate, in a typically elegant way, the melancholy to which he was prone: "Les sons d'une musique énervante et câline, / Semblable au cri lointain de l'humaine douleur;" OC 177).<sup>4</sup> ("The sounds of an irritating, caressing music, / like distant cries of human pain").

In spite of his financial struggles and his eccentric, often gloomy reputation Baudelaire also treated themes ranging from the joy of artistic creation to the intoxication of love. It is via these works that he offered (unbeknownst to himself) the groundwork for the "pleasure of the text" that came to be explicated in 1973 by Roland Barthes. This twentieth-century literary critic posits that pleasure, although difficult to define, involves itself in so many facets of life that we must investigate it. He justified his research on literary pleasure thusly: "Cette question, il faut la poser, ne serait-ce que pour une raison tactique: il faut affirmer le plaisir du texte contre les indifférences de la science et le puritanisme de l'analyse idéologique"<sup>5</sup> ("This question, must be asked, if only for a tactical reason: the pleasure of the text must be affirmed against scientific indifference and puritanical ideological analysis.") The concept of pleasure, not having a scientifically measurable basis, is typically left to our variable ideologies for definition and justification. Barthes investigates the pleasure of the text, if not scientifically, at least in a comprehensive way. The importance of inquiries into the pleasure of the text is obscured by its ubiquity. Barthes claims that this is precisely the rationale for his exploration.

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated 3 June 1863 (*Corr. II* 300).

<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire's verse poems are translated by Keith Waldrop. Edward K. Kaplan translates the prose poems and Richard Miller translates Barthes's *Le Plaisir du texte*. I translate the rest as needed.

<sup>3</sup> The roman numerals order the poems as they are now found in *Baudelaire Œuvres complètes*, Gallimard, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> OC refers to *Baudelaire Œuvres complètes* edited by Le Dantec, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> From the back cover: *Le Plaisir du texte*. Seuil, 1973.

It is especially with the prose poem that we find a Baudelaire – Barthes connection. As mentioned, a large measure of Baudelaire’s work describes depravity, but a certain portion of prose poems, specifically *les poèmes nocturnes*,<sup>6</sup> speak of pleasure. Barthes will say: “A text about pleasure is not necessarily a pleasurable text,” yet these poems set themselves apart. They address less morbidity and more the sensual intoxication of life: the everlasting memory of a woman’s scent, the mystique of tropical islands, or the search for the eternal. Barthes’s exploration and definition of reading pleasure will offer a unique retrospective view on the pleasure of Baudelaire’s prose poem.

The topic of pleasure, seemingly so ordinary and pervasive in our lives, has attracted few critics to explain its literary manifestation.<sup>7</sup> Barthes enumerates a number of approaches for defining, finding and feeling literary pleasure. One he terms a “sanctioned Babel,” a metaphor for how world languages work side by side to perform the pleasurable miracle of communication. Other Barthesian criteria are more concrete – the pleasure of asyndeton, anacoluthon or tmesis,<sup>8</sup> or psychological – that of letting go of the ego. In short, one of the most important French poets of the nineteenth century and one of the most influential literary commentators of the twentieth century have delved into the pleasure of the text. How do poems from the nineteenth century fit into a twentieth-century theory of pleasure?

Two generations separate the death of Baudelaire (31 August 1867) and the birth of Barthes (12 November 1915). Baudelaire was chiefly a poet but also an art critic and a social commentator. He got his start publishing critiques of the art salons, the yearly exhibitions of painting and sculpture held in Paris.

<sup>6</sup> Six poems published 24 August 1857 in *Le Présent*, a Parisian literary magazine.

<sup>7</sup> Two articles from the last sixty years follow a similar approach to the subject as that of Barthes: “Difference: Roland Barthes’s Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure” by Robert Miklitsch (1983) and “The Pleasures of Music: Speculation in British Music Criticism, 1750-1800” by Herbert M. Schueller (1950). One finds other theories on “reading for pleasure” but mostly in the pedagogical sense; there is thus little to explain *pleasure*.

<sup>8</sup> Asyndeton – absence of conjunctive links in a phrase: “I came (and) I saw (then) I conquered.” Anacoluthon – a rupture in the construction of a sentence, for example, “You go to the ... okay, I’ll go to the bank and you go to the grocery.” Tmesis – rupture of normal word construction as in: “whatsoever person” for “ what person soever.”

For this literary task he used knowledge that he had nurtured from an early age.<sup>9</sup> Barthes investigates various modes of communication – signs, gesture and image – plus the more complex machines of mass twentieth-century cultural diffusion such as radio, television and movies. Baudelaire and Barthes look hard at the aesthetics of art and the age-old question: What defines beauty? Claiming to have modeled his prose poems on the work of Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), Baudelaire is one of the genre’s pioneers. Barthes takes on, in his hallmark studies, the mythology of modern living, semiology and socially important literature. Baudelaire helped usher in modern poetry and gave prose poetry its legitimacy. It is in the latter part of Barthes’s career that he elaborates his poetics of pleasure and takes up the voice and photography as unique artistic expressions.

The prose poem links the two writers together. The latter’s theory of pleasure helps to determine and to explain the derivation of pleasure from the prose poems. As a literary genre the prose poem’s history is relatively short. It does not have ancient roots, as would epic poetry or theater, but its poetic “half” is essentially that of poetry as first theorized by Aristotle (384-322 BC).

In his *Poetics* Aristotle honors the art of writing, calling it *poiēma* or creation (Adams 50). For ages humans have been creating with language and have been motivated in this act by pleasure; here poetry and pleasure form an early relation. In the Biblical tradition, the *word*, surged forth at the moment of creation.<sup>10</sup> Both traditions, Aristotelian and Christian place great value on “the word” and on “poetry” as ingredients of our creation.

Aristotle contemplated the origins of poetry as emerging from the human tendency to imitate. By imitation, humans learn and pass along knowledge more efficiently. Imitation and learning are requisite for survival. Thus, the “word” is at the basis of instruction and can be called a form of creation, as the subsequent transmissions of lessons contain new and original additions. A good way to record an instance

<sup>9</sup> Baudelaire’s father, François, was an amateur painter and allowed the toddler Charles to accompany him on his visits to neighborhood galleries in Paris.

<sup>10</sup> As stated in Saint John: “In the beginning was the Word, [. . .] and the Word was God.”

of imitation is by writing it down. Aristotle remarked that the inclination to imitate included an aspect of pleasure. Thus in ancient times two motivations for pleasure are joined, the act of creation and that of imitation. In the fourth chapter of *Poetics*, in the space of one paragraph, Aristotle mentions pleasure three times: “And no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated [. . .]. The cause of this again is that learning gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general [. . .]. For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause.”<sup>11</sup> Creation as a concept, as a value, and as an art is rooted in the human experience. The “word,” so often used in the creative process provides poetry’s (and by extension prose poetry’s) pleasurable foundation.

Considering that we do not normally converse in rhymed sentences, the poet who rhymes and marries felicitous phrases enjoys a special esteem. A unique pleasure of rhyme is its palpable link to the future. Rhyme requires at least two corresponding sounds, and in the gap between them we are momentarily assured that there is the second part (a future) to come. If we can hear or read the rhyme as it unfolds, we can count on the next moment to arrive so as to complete the cadence. There is a certain amount of pleasure that goes with knowing “a future is coming;” rhyme assures us that it will.

Rhymed poetry held a place of undisputed preeminence at the dawn of French literature (playing a role for example in *La Chanson de Roland*, end of the eleventh century) until the end of the seventeenth century when “La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes” took on, as one of its points of dispute, the developing unrhymed verse as a new genre. The larger debate pitted the traditional allegiance for all things Greek and Roman against the “modern” confidence in the newer sciences and contemporary literary forms, one of which was the novel. Nicholas Boileau (1636-1711), a leader for the *Anciens*, wrote a letter to the leader of the *Modernes*, Charles Perrault (1628-1703) where, though he concedes a modern initiative, he announces the confusion of defining literary genres – here labeling “prose poetry” the

<sup>11</sup> Adams 50, Dorsch 35.

“novel”: “Il y a des genres de poésie, où non seulement les Latins ne nous ont point surpassés, mais qu’ils n’ont même pas connus, comme par exemple ces poèmes en prose que nous appelons Romans” (Bernard 22). (“There are styles of poetry, where not only did the Latins not outdo us, but they did not even make the acquaintance of, for example, these prose poems that we call Novels”).

At this time, more and more foreign poetry was being translated into French, without any attempt to repair the rhyme. L’abbé Prévost (1697-1763) praised this form of literature calling it “prose poétique.” In 1714, Fénelon (1651-1715), one of Boileau’s supporters and a staunch traditionalist, showed that upsetting rhyme and genre could be a good thing: “Notre versification perd plus, si je ne me trompe, qu’elle ne gagne par les rimes: elle perd beaucoup de variété, de facilité et d’harmonie” (Bernard 22). (“Our poetry loses more, if I am not mistaken, than it gains by rhyming: it loses variety, ease of expression and harmony”). The *Modernes* eventually prevailed over the *Anciens* in their quarrel.

The prose poem established three root sources: 1) in translated poetry, 2) in partly rhymed traditional poems (“Télémaque” of Fénelon, for example) and 3) in “poetic prose.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), though known for his graceful prose, did little to clarify the definition of prose poetry when he wondered in a letter: “How does one become a prose poet?” (Bernard 29). With the exception of early epic works rhymed by assonance, French poetry was for the most part, until the nineteenth century, rigorously rhymed. At this relatively recent point in history the symbolists and their successors started calling free verse and blank verse, (neither of which rhyme) poetry.

A prose work can qualify as poetic, according to Bernard, in the “choice of subject, the lyrical quality, the images, the structure” and with a notion affirmed by Edgar Allen Poe, “the unity of impression.” In this instance, Poe (a hero and model for Baudelaire) remarked: “A long poem does not exist; what we understand as a long poem is a simple contradiction in terms.”<sup>12</sup> The theater influenced the establishment of the prose poem when it relaxed its inveterate rule of rhyming all speech. Classical

<sup>12</sup> From the “Poetic Principle” quoted by Baudelaire in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires* of Poe.



French theater had rhymed. Racine provides an example from his play *Britannicus* (1669) that highlights the traditional alexandrine: “Ils me reprocheraient non des crimes impuissants / Des dessins étouffés aussitôt que naissants, / Mais des crimes pourvus commis à votre vu / Et dont je ne serais que trop tôt convaincu.”<sup>13</sup> Approaching the eighteenth century the rules of rhyme are debated and eventually relaxed. Stemming from experiences in translation, unrhymed theater and the liberation of verse, a new genre emerged that as yet, had no decisive name.

Aloysius Bertrand composed for all intents and purposes the first modern prose poem, “Gaspard de la nuit.”<sup>14</sup> The action in “Gaspard” takes place in various Dutch settings of the Middle Ages. Helen Hart Goldsmith remarks that the work imitates painting and by this characteristic resembles poetic prose (130). The lines, the swirls of colors, the figures of a painting are recognized directly, and a message is communicated. With certain signifiers – image, gesture and sound – all arrive at the receiver ready for discernment. In contrast, the word must be deciphered, before the signified is grasped, and yet understanding is only available via words. If asked do we understand such and such painting, we go into a speech of so many sentences: “This form symbolizes freedom,” “that color evokes laughter” etc. Goldsmith calls the prose of Bertrand “precisely chiseled to elaborate perfection, with a color first brighter then darker; [further] the white space on the layout of the page simulates the frame of a painting.” She adds that “the poem confirms that [Bertrand] was not trying to depict real life, but the imagined life of impressions which by his art, becomes the immediate reality” (Goldsmith 130).

After the example of Bertrand, Baudelaire’s second predecessor is Maurice de Guérin (1810-1839) who wrote two prose poems: “Le Centaure” (published posthumously by George Sand in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 May 1840), and “La Bacchante” (unfinished, published posthumously in 1861). “Le Centaure” talks of ancient myths where the protagonist experiences the freedom of youth and then the

<sup>13</sup> Act IV Scene 2.

<sup>14</sup> In his letter (Noël 1861) to Arsène Houssaye, Baudelaire complimented Bertrand: “It was, as I perused the famous ‘Gaspard de la Nuit,’ for the twentieth time, of Aloysius Bertrand.”

harsh reality of adulthood afflicted by knowledge and caprice. In “La Bacchante,” again set in mythical Greece, the leading participant in the plot is a girl servant to the god Bacchus. With these characters populating a mythical countryside, De Guérin sets out on a religious quest, seeking to understand modern man’s place in traditional ceremony. “Je voulais qu’une marche lente, appliquée aux escarpements des monts, engendrât en moi une disposition pareille à celle que les astres tirent de leur cours, mon chemin me portant vers le comble” (Vadé 29). (“I was hoping that my slow, deliberate pace in the foothills of the mountains would impart to me a movement similar to that of the stars as they move along, my path taking me toward fulfillment”). As early prose poet models for Baudelaire, both Bertrand and De Guérin, evoke the feeling of days gone by. After the publications of his verse collection *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857 and 1861), Baudelaire’s later years focused on the prose poem, but instead of the ancient, mythic scenes portrayed by his predecessors, he writes mostly of modern Parisian life.

Gradually, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, writers took more and more chances with their poetic forms. Rimbaud put together his prose poems for *Illuminations* in the 1870’s. Jules Laforgue wrote his collection of prose poems *Complaintes* published in 1885. Mallarmé released *Divagations* in 1897, which included prose poems. Valéry came out with *Alphabet* in 1925. Each of the authors had their own reasons for delving into the new genre. For Baudelaire the additional liberty in length and style were attractive, but most unusually with the prose poem, he felt a capacity to better express abstractions.

We see in Baudelaire’s correspondence, as well as in his literary works, the recurrence of the concept of pleasure. According to Cargo (382) the noun plaisir and the verb plaire are mentioned thirty-seven times in the fifty prose poems. The only nominatives used more frequently are homme (forty-three times), and yeux (seventy times).<sup>15</sup> We see a growth in the number of references to plaisir as Baudelaire matures and as he increasingly shifts his artistic interests toward the prose poem. From the more

<sup>15</sup> Out of fifty poems, every single one between numbers XXIII and XXXI mentions *plaisir* at least once. Out of the twenty-two poems between numbers IX and XXXI all but eight incorporate the term *plaisir*.

numerous *Fleurs du mal* (126 poems in the 1861 edition) Cargo counts 37 uses of plaisir and its verbal forms. One can infer, quite accurately, from the sheer statistics (yeux, homme, plaisir) that the prose poems of Baudelaire, in general attempt a “clairvoyance” – a seeing more clearly into the human condition; and it appears that plaisir will lead to a deeper comprehension of the prose poem.

Barthes, in his numerous books and articles, cites Baudelaire only in isolated instances, even though he does choose to analyze authors from the French canon such as Racine (1639-1699), Sade (1740-1814), Fourier (1772-1873), and Michelet (1798-1874).<sup>16</sup> Barthes would have been a teenager in 1931 when the editors of the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* were planning their editions of canonical authors. Among all possible French writers, they decided to begin the collection (now revered) with Baudelaire as their first author.<sup>17</sup> This was an important outward sign of Baudelaire’s growing importance in French literature at the time Barthes was coming of age.

Barthes, for his part, developed a wide range of literary interests, among them literary history, mythology, criticism and semiology. Baudelaire, on the other hand, proudly called himself poet; but he also was a philosopher as he addressed questions such as: What is beauty? What is the good? What is not? For instance, in his early role as critic for the *Salon of 1846* Baudelaire not only evaluates the works of art, but he speaks of the function of the critic, the conception of romanticism and the use of color in painting. He is always ready to comment on the motivation of the artist and to relate technique with history as he does in the *Salon of 1846* (OC 646).

The prose poems of Baudelaire can be situated in a literary framework whose parts follow a logical and chronological path. Painting, his earliest artistic motivation (see note 9) and painters are frequently referenced in his works. Rhyme and rhythm underscore his own genius as a verse poet plus

<sup>16</sup> One of two situations where Barthes quotes Baudelaire can be found in *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* where he says in an aside: “Baudelaire has spoken somewhere of the importance placed on the gesture during the important moments of life” (*Degré* 26).

<sup>17</sup> *Charles Baudelaire Œuvres, I* Éd. J. Schiffrin (10 September 1931).

interest he had in theater and music. His prose poems profit from all these elements. One example is the title “L’Invitation au voyage” that appears in a rhymed version, a prose poem version, a painted version (by Matisse), even a musical corollary called “L’Invitation à la Valse.”<sup>18</sup> A dream-like ambiance is common to all these presentations. Moreover, in the prose work “L’Invitation au voyage” we hear: “Des rêves! toujours des rêves! et plus l’âme est ambitieuse et délicate, plus les rêves s’éloignent du possible” (OC 299). (“Dreams! always dreams! and the more ambitious and delicate the soul, the more dreams remove it from the possible”). “Gaspard de la Nuit,” Baudelaire’s first model, is alternatively called a fanciful dream or an imitation of a painting. Reverie, painter-like presentation and poetic rhythm become regular features of the pleasure of the prose poem.

Ambiguity defines the prose poem, even for the experts. Suzanne Bernard, author of the most exhaustive volume on the prose poem distills three obligatory traits for the genre: 1) unity 2) autonomy and 3) brevity (Bernard 439), all three characteristics of verse poetry. The prose poem, like the verse poem, is considered an “organic whole.”<sup>19</sup> Bernard stresses the importance of autonomy or the need of a well delineated environment. In poetry and in the prose poem the *raison d’être* is firm. Poetry, rhymed or not, has no other motive for existence than to be a work of art. This criterion is occasionally challenged by Baudelaire as his prose poems offer, if not moral lessons, at least observations on the morality of his day.<sup>20</sup> An example of a “closed universe” is exhibited in the prose poem XXXV “Les Fenêtres,” where in only twenty-three lines, human nature and human possibility are weighed against one another. The narrator of “Les Fenêtres” notes that writing about others is really applicable to himself as it helps him “to live, to feel that I am and what I am” (line 23). The *fenêtre* symbolizes the mind, where seeing (understanding) is fraught with reflections and constantly vacillating sources of light. The author has the

<sup>18</sup> A piano rondo (1819) of Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826).

<sup>19</sup> A quality of all poetry is its intrinsic worth; it does not need to recount a tale, teach a lesson etc.; it has value in itself and constitutes an organic whole.

<sup>20</sup> The prose poem XXIII *La Solitude*, one of the first two published, ventures a moral argument that solitude is preferable to community .

revelation that it is feelings that count the most – “et quelquefois je me la raconte à moi-même en pleurant.” (“and sometimes I tell it to myself weeping”). Among Bernard’s principles for the prose poem, unity and gratuity lead naturally to brevity. A long poem runs the risk of losing its autonomy, and with this loss, its accompanying poetic quality.

Henri Lemaitre proposes a pattern that he deduced from Baudelaire’s prose poems. In *Petits Poèmes en prose* (1962) he claims the narrative steps of anecdote, allegory, and supernatural interpretation.<sup>21</sup> However, Lemaitre seems to circumvent his own analysis with the prose poem “L’Invitation au voyage” XVIII,<sup>22</sup> because instead of a tripartite organization he emphasizes the typical Baudelarian binary order. The poem begins with a declaration by the narrator, but not necessarily an anecdote: “Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on, que je rêve de visiter avec une vieille amie.” (“There exists a magnificent land, a land of Cockaigne, as they say, which I dream of visiting with a familiar confidante”). At first the reader is struck with the need to decipher who is involved, the speaker “je,” the enigmatic “on,” or this “old friend?” The third and fourth paragraphs are more intimate as the narrator addresses his “tu”: “Tu connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s’empare de nous dans les froides misères, cette nostalgie du pays qu’on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité?” (*OC* 297). (“Do you feel that feverish ailment seizing us in our stark affliction, that longing for unheard-of realms, that anguish of curiosity?”) Other references to this person are “la femme aimée” and “la sœur d’élection” (lines 26-27).

The second part of Lemaitre’s formula stipulates that allegory serves to recount some truth about man’s existence. In this particular poem our narrator simply wants protection from the storm, from the mind’s ceaseless searching for answers. As far as the third step supernatural intervention the narrator does speak of l’Infini in the last line (l. 88) but otherwise refers to the sights and sounds of a seaport. The poem fails to provide the interpretation outlined by Lemaitre’s definition.

<sup>21</sup> Note 1 page 90 of Lemaitre.

<sup>22</sup> See the appendix for a copy and the rest of the *poèmes nocturnes*.

By contrast, the final prose poem of the collection *Le Spleen de Paris* (*Petits Poèmes en prose*), numbered L, “Les Bons Chiens,” does correspond to Lemaitre’s theory: the narrator recounts the sources of his doggish beliefs as being gathered from an anecdote by Laurence Sterne, the Irish novelist (1713-1768). The allegory of the poem encourages the reader to look for more, to seek another level of signification, as the secondary meaning of allegory is usually hidden. And Lemaitre’s supernatural part? “Les Bons Chiens” makes reference to Swedenborg (1688-1782), a metaphysical philosopher and by virtue of his mystical affinities, a precursor to surrealism. So Lemaitre’s theory can account for prose poetry, but not in all cases.

The first prose poem in Baudelaire’s collection, “L’Étranger,” consists of fifteen lines and can be used as a counter-example to Lemaitre’s theory. In the first line a conversation is underway: “Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta sœur ou ton frère?” (*OC* 275). (“Tell me, whom do you love the most, enigmatic man? your father, your mother, your sister or your brother?”) This dialogue could pass for an anecdote; but then the second conjecture of allegory is doubtful. The second section is really an enumeration of entities (la patrie, la beauté, l’or) that are presented to the poet for his opinion. The array of family members echoes the parable of Jesus where he claims sacrifice to be even more precious than family members.<sup>23</sup> The number of various interpretations available for the second part of the poem is evidence of an allegorical effect. Lemaitre’s third criterion of supernatural interpretation is also unsure. Could this mean a penchant for the metaphysical? The poet’s references to “Dieu” and “les nuages” call to mind at least the ephemeral if not the supernatural.

The definition of the prose poem as given by Lemaitre is too narrow to describe Baudelaire’s work effectively. Most of his petits poèmes begin with a sweeping declaration of some kind followed by an anecdote and end with an intervention by the poet. The prose poem “L’Horloge” XVI starts with an historical declaration which seems of great import: “Les Chinois voient l’heure dans l’œil des chats.”

<sup>23</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:26.

(“The Chinese tell time in a cat’s eyes.”) An anecdote follows where a missionary in Nanking, China takes a stroll. In the third part the poet enters the scene with dramatic vows: “Oui, je vois l’heure; il est l’Éternité!” (“Yes, I see the time, it is Eternity!”).

In the prose poem “La Solitude” XXIII a broad opening gesture is made by the narrator: “Un gazetier philanthrope me dit que la solitude est mauvaise pour l’homme” (“A philanthropic journalist tells me that solitude is bad for people”). In the second stage anecdote the poet pursues religious associations by citing the “Démon” who haunts deserted and isolated places as an instigator of aberrant and immoral behavior. The third stage intervention brings the narrator back to assert: “‘Presque tous nos malheurs nous viennent de n’avoir pas su rester dans notre chambre,’ dit un autre sage, Pascal, je crois rappelant ainsi dans la cellule du recueillement tous ces affolés qui cherchent le bonheur dans le mouvement et dans une prostitution que je pourrais appeler fraternitaire, si je voulais parler la belle langue de mon siècle” (*OC* 308). (“Almost all of our woes come from not being capable of remaining in our rooms, said another wise man, Pascal, I believe, by way of summoning to their meditative cells all the panic-stricken who seek happiness in movement and in a prostitution I would call fraternitary, if I would agree to speak the lovely tongue of my century”).

This brief look at Bernard and Lemaitre reveals the ambiguity typical of pinning down the prose poem. The term itself gives pause: “Is it prose or is it a poem? Do poems not rhyme? How then can a poem be in prose? There is unrhymed poetry; it’s called blank verse – if related to the English iambic pentameter – free verse if not. Volumes have been compiled attempting to define this literary genre. Suzanne Bernard has her 1959 definitive study of the French prose poem. Vincent-Munnia published *Les premiers poèmes en prose: généalogie d’un genre dans la première moitié du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle français* in 1993 and Yves Vadé called his 1996 study *Le poème en prose et ses territoires*.

The prose poem is an equivocal literary genre. Further, the number of *un*-rhymed poetic forms is not limited to the prose poem. “Prose blanche” for example, does not rhyme, yet it retains a certain

rhythm by using poetic devices such as assonance, alliteration and metaphor. In addition to the above authors, others have offered formulas for the prose poem as the following table summarizes and compares:

Table 1: Prose Poem Definitions

<u>Critic</u>	<u>Principles of the prose poem</u>
Suzanne Bernard	Dual principle: poetic and prosaic, plus unity, brevity, autonomy (Bernard 441).
Patrick Labarthe	Prose with a poetic objective, lyrical, anecdotic, contemplative (Labarthe 18, 24).
Henri Lemaitre	Use of anecdote, allegory, the supernatural (Lemaitre 90).
Michel Sandras	Metonymic prose, transitive or disconnected time (Sandras 35).
Yves Vadé	Brevity, concentration, autonomy, discontinuity (Vadé 179-184).

From these various experts is distilled this definition for the prose poem: short, evocative prose treating autonomous subjects. In paragraphs of at most five lines, Rimbaud composed the prose poems “Aube” and “Fleurs.” Mallarmé employed longer paragraphs but within the limits of two pages he composed “Le Phénomène futur” and “Plainte d’automne.” Ponge is known for his singular, concentrated descriptions of everyday objects, for example: “L’Huitre” and “Le Cageot.” Despite its controversy, the prose poem allows a certain salubrious liberty of form, style and impression. Since the time of Aristotle rhyming verse has separated itself from prose by its agreeable cadence and its suggestive nature. As the chart above suggests, the theory of reuniting the two major poles of literature is a contentious affair. Baudelaire’s “resolution” to the dilemma comes to us by experience – he practiced this art before refining his definition. During the 1850’s and 60’s when Baudelaire was working on his prose poems, only two other authors had shown much interest in the genre, Bertrand and Guérin. The clearest conception then, as



now, for the prose poem is spelled out by Baudelaire in a letter to his editor-friend, Arsène Houssaye, in December 1861.<sup>24</sup>

Along the same lines as the verse poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*, most of Baudelaire's prose poems treat scenes from the streets of Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century. Paris at this time was not the polished city we see today, but a city "under construction" and partly demolished. The urban developer Haussmann (1809-1891) razed swaths of the city between the years 1855 and 1870 such that Baudelaire and his fellow pedestrians would often have been disrupted by a veil of dust. As with most of his "flowers of evil," the prose poem again creates a beauty as it simultaneously portrays life's sordid features.

Just days after Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* were censored by the government of Napoléon III in the summer of 1857 (where he was fined and forced to withdraw six of his poems from circulation) he published in *Le Présent* (August 1857) his first substantial collection of prose poems entitled *Poèmes nocturnes*. This collection includes: "L'Horloge," "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure," "L'Invitation au voyage," "Le Crépuscule du soir," "La Solitude," and "Les Projets." His prose poems are really a response to the failure of his verse to achieve acceptance. A Baudelarian definition of the emerging prose poem can be formulated by examining these poems and the letter to Houssaye. It is from this moment that the modern prose poem claims its birth.

This dissertation is organized into six chapters with the overall goal of illustrating how *Les Poèmes nocturnes* make manifest the theory that Roland Barthes formulated in his 1973 book *Le Plaisir du texte*. Besides the opportune alliteration afforded by *Baudelaire and Barthes: the Pleasure of the Prose Poem*, the two authors share intriguing characteristics. Baudelaire was poet first, but employed prose in art critiques, social commentaries and the prose poem. Barthes eschewed poetry (at least for his publications) but similarly commented on various social phenomena (advertising, television,

<sup>24</sup> Baudelaire wrote two letters to Houssaye dated Christmas 1861. The first (*Corr. II* 207) talked "shop." Baudelaire had some literary projects in mind; he needed a loan, and was desisting his candidacy from the *Académie française*. Although this first letter is important, it is the second one (*OC* 273) that outlines his theory for the prose poem. From the outset, this letter had as an objective its publication with a collection of prose poems; it's called "une lettre programme." This letter will be a principal topic of chapter 2.

photography) and the workings of semiology. Language was their common tool, instrument or weapon as the case demanded. They wielded this language with impeccable style, the better to deal with the nuances of philosophical questions such as: At what point does blank or free verse become prose poetry, or how does a simple concept such as “adjective” become a component of the pleasure of the text?

Chapter one gives background for the sometimes convoluted history of the prose poem. Throughout, portions of the biographies of Baudelaire and Barthes are inserted, as they pertain to the development of the new genre. Chapter two spells out Baudelaire’s definition; what better expert than one who practiced and discussed the art with his literary colleagues? Chapter three continues to lean on Baudelaire’s expertise, as it recounts his concept of the pleasure of the text. This Baudelairian formulation is, of course, well ahead of Barthes’s direct approach to the subject, but produces some surprising commonalities. In chapter four Barthes defines the pleasure of the text. The chapter condenses his theory into summary points and underscores those that are shared with Baudelaire. Chapter five looks at the six *poèmes nocturnes* in the light of the explanations of chapters three and four. The sixth and final chapter recapitulates the foregoing and looks specifically at “L’Invitation au voyage” as it represents the quintessential *poème nocturne*, but in addition reveals an uncanny adaptability to music, theater, verse, prose and painting.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE PROSE POEM ACCORDING TO BAUDELAIRE

Despite differences and ambiguities in experts' definitions of the prose poem, one can find a workable, if somewhat cryptic definition for the genre, in Baudelaire. His conception allows one to differentiate a prose poem from other short prose works such as free verse or poetic prose. His explanation also hints at the dimension of pleasure that will be realized most distinctly in his group of six *Poèmes nocturnes*. This chapter will look at some of the prose poem's historical complexity and then focus on Baudelaire's disentanglement of it as revealed in his letter to Arsène Houssaye. Baudelaire's prose poems, especially the *nocturnes*, put into practice his theory. Baudelaire did not formulate his definition by borrowing from other prose poets, though he stayed up to date with contemporary literature and he did pay homage to Bertrand as noted. His method was to ponder and craft his poems and then, having published a number of them, enunciate his definition.

As table I indicates, Suzanne Bernard explains the prose poem using the terms: "unified," "brief," and "autonomous," suggesting that the prose poem must fulfill its own purpose and need not recount a narrative, teach a lesson, or achieve some other goal. In a more recent definition, Barbara Johnson emphasizes the irreducible duality of the genre: "The prose poem of Baudelaire and Mallarmé declares, in reality, a moment of crisis where the question of *a* difference between poem and prose becomes defined by *the* difference" (Johnson *Critical* 10).<sup>25</sup> This is not a moment of crisis, in that unrhymed poetry has long (since the mid-nineteenth century) proliferated and is more in acceptance now than ever before. What is more troublesome for the definition of the prose poem is the mincing of syntax that continues to surround it.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson shifts the focus from the difference between prose and poetry to *why* there is a difference within the language, where a distinction of literal and figurative meaning is everywhere present.

Another contemporary take on the prose poem comes from Michel Sandras (1995), who reiterates the ambiguity of the genre: “The definition of the prose poem is not certain; it is still undefined; there are only affinities which exist between the verse poem and the prose that defines it” (Sandras 94). Sandras’s definition takes, as point of departure, the verse affinity of the prose poem. If a work maintains poetic suggestion and resonance, even when presented in paragraph-form, it is most correctly called prose poem and not free verse. Free verse, does not rhyme either, but is laid out with verses instead of sentences.

From a technical point of view, a simple definition of the prose poem is the following: a type of literature that shares with verse poetry the characteristics of rhythm and suggestion. It is unrhymed. It includes a variety of literary figures and combines these elements pleasurably for ear and intellect. Since the prose poem has no verses as such, it could be just a series of statements. However the prose poem differs from a paragraph of prose. The prose poem suggests and connotes; the prose paragraph tells and denotes. The prose poem thus allows a wider reader interpretation of the author’s work. It is worth a look at samples of various literary forms that are often confused with the prose poem: free verse or prose blanche, the verset and poetic prose.

Table 2: Prose Poem Claimants

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Citation</u> (excerpts)
free verse = <i>prose blanche</i>	non-rhyming verse with much rhythmic variation; written especially for the ear with much assonance and internal rhyme.	Tous ces rameaux avaient encor leurs feuilles vertes, / Les sous-bois ne sont plus qu’un fumier de feuilles mortes; / Feuilles, folioles, qu’un bon vent vous emporte / Vers les étangs par ribambelles, / Ou pour le feu du garde-chasse, / Ou les sommiers des ambulances Pour les soldats loin de la France. (“L’Hiver qui vient” [1886], Laforgue)
verset	a sub-category of free verse; spoken poetry, rhythm follows feeling;	Si le corps exténué désire le vin, si le cœur adorant salue l’étoile retrouvée, / Combien plus à résoudre l’âme désirante ne vaut point l’autre

	sometimes associated with prophecy.	âme humaine? / Et moi aussi, je l'ai donc trouvée à la fin, la mort qu'il me fallait ! J'ai connu cette femme. J'ai connu l'amour de la femme. ("L'eau qui purifie" [1910], Claudel)
poetic prose	prosaic yet lyrical writing often used in the novel.	Tantôt nous marchions en silence, prêtant l'oreille au sourd mugissement de l'automne, ou au bruit des feuilles séchées, que nous traînions tristement sous nos pas; tantôt, dans nos jeux innocents, nous poursuivions l'hirondelle dans la prairie, l'arc-en-ciel sur les collines pluvieuses; quelquefois aussi nous murmurions des vers que nous inspirait le spectacle de la nature [. . .]. ( <i>René</i> [1802], Chateaubriand)
prose poem	rhythmic, structured writing, dreamlike, meditative.	A la grand'ville elle fuyait parmi les clochers et les dômes, et courant comme un mendiant sur les quais de marbre, je la chassais. ("Aube" [1872], Rimbaud)

Is there a clear difference between poetic prose, free verse, the verset and the prose poem? None of the above genres rhymes. Free verse (and sub-category, verset) are composed in verse-stanza form; poetic prose and the prose poem in sentence-paragraph structure. The first two require a more pronounced rhythm and shorter phrasing than poetic prose. In the last two samples the longer poetic prose narrates while the prose poem intimates, being brief and concentrated. The only difference between Chateaubriand's excerpt and that of Rimbaud is in the prose – poetic resonance. Chateaubriand is more statement-like, here: someone walking quietly, listening for sounds of autumn; the dried leaves crackling under foot. The scene shifts to the "prairie" where the hikers spy a rainbow; inspired by their surroundings, they whisper poetic verse. Rimbaud's short extract is more metaphoric: A female flees among steeples and domes, suggesting supernatural powers. The poet is just the opposite, running about, earthbound by his poverty and yet, still in the chase, a fact that implies "hope" as a theme.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a writer known for poetic prose, writes these lines: "Quand le soir approchait, je descendais des cimes de l'île, et j'allais volontiers m'asseoir au bord du lac, sur la grève, dans quelque asile caché; là, le bruit des vagues et l'agitation de l'eau, fixant mes sens et chassant

de mon âme toute autre agitation, la plongeaient dans une rêverie délicieuse, où la nuit me surprenait souvent sans que je m'en fusse aperçu.”<sup>26</sup> (“As evening approached I was coming down from the island’s peaks, and I had the intention to sit down beside the lake, on the edge, somewhere hidden; there, the waves’ noise and the water’s motion, concentrating my senses and chasing from my soul any other bother, plunging it into a delicious daydream, where the night came over me often without me noticing”). For comparison Baudelaire offers prose poem “Le Port” XLI: “Un port est un séjour charmant pour une âme fatiguée des luttes de la vie. L’ampleur du ciel, l’architecture mobile des nuages, les colorations changeantes de la mer, le scintillement des phares, sont un prisme merveilleusement propre à amuser les yeux sans jamais les lasser.” (“A harbor is an enchanting abode for souls wearied by life’s struggles. The sky’s fullness, the mobile architecture of the clouds, the seas’s shimmering colorations, the sparkling of lighthouses, are a prism marvelously suited to entertain the eyes without ever tiring them”). The difference? Rousseau describes; Baudelaire paints a scene.

Baudelaire offers an example of prose turned prose poem, enabling a comparison of form and language that make the verse-prose shift. In April 1853 his publication of an essay entitled “Morale du joujou” portends the development of prose poem XIX “Le Joujou du pauvre,” not published until September 1862. The seven-page story evolved into the eight-paragraph prose poem. The original *joujou*, being an essay, runs counter to the more typical order of production – verse followed by prose. In this case, the more elaborate essay precedes the compact prose poem. The essay compared to the prose poem is analogous to the prose poem compared to verse. The two *joujous* share certain features (for example the opening line of the second paragraph in the verse version is taken verbatim from the prose paragraph twelve: “Quand vous sortirez le matin avec l’intention décidée de flâner (solitairement) sur les grandes routes, remplissez vos poches de (ces)<sup>27</sup> petites inventions à un sol.” (“When some morning you go out

<sup>26</sup> From *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Cinquième Rêverie.

<sup>27</sup> “Solitairement” and “ces” are inserted in the essay but not in the prose poem.

firmly intending to stroll on the open roads, fill your pockets with small penny devices [. . .]”). Both pieces make slightly hidden reference to *joujous* for children, mimicing paintings (or art) for adults. Both underscore the affinity Baudelaire has with moral themes. He prefers prose poetry when writing about abstract subjects and it turns out to be especially effective for his later investigations into questions of the conscience, feelings etc.

From “Morale du joujou” Baudelaire weaves, a musing on art into an intriguing tale: “(L’enfant [. . .] pour qu’il pût continuer seul le plaisir du spectacle et des marionnettes, s’accoutumât déjà à considérer le théâtre comme la forme la plus délicieuse du beau ” (OC 676). (“The child [. . .] so that he could enjoy the pleasure of watching the marionettes, had already decided that the theater was the most delicious form of beauty”). Ostensibly discussing toys and their influence on children of his era, the author explores the urgency of time in relation to the soul, all in a childlike context: “Elles ne connaissent pas et ne permettent pas les moyens poétiques de passer le temps” (OC 678). (“They do not recognize nor permit the children to mix with poetry in order to pass time”). The terms soul, beauty and time proliferate across all fifty prose poems and here: “La plupart des marmots veulent surtout voir l’âme, les uns au bout de quelque temps d’exercice, les autres tout de suite.” (“Most of the kids especially want to see the soul, some after an exploration, the others right away”). One can transmute this discussion of children to a more general application and deduce that most people want to understand or experience the extreme or infinite experience; and some are more impatient than others. Barthes employed the term “jouissance” to denote this intense experience aligned in the essay.

“Morale du joujou” is narrative at the beginning: “Il y a bien des années, – combien? je n’en sais rien; cela remonte aux temps nébuleux de la première enfance, [. . .]” (OC 673). (“Quite a few years ago – how many? I have no idea; it goes back to the hazy days of early childhood [...]”). Whereas the prose poem begins: “Je veux donner l’idée d’un divertissement innocent. Il y a si peu d’amusements qui ne soient pas coupables! (OC 299). (“I want to present an idea about innocent entertainment. For so few diversions are not wicked!”). The second half of this opening could count as a maxim, typical of prose poems.

From the outset the prose poem lists a series of penny toys while the essay goes into sort of moral instruction. Both versions of text lean toward a suggestive, poetic resonance rather than toward a narrative thread. Baudelaire inserted into the prose poem almost exact reproductions of extracts from the essay, barely different from narrative paragraphs. The essay delves into the psychology of toys, their impact on perceptions of beauty and art and enumerates a number of different toys before arriving at the surprise culmination – one child keeps a live rat as a toy.

The essay “Morale du joujou” contains essentially the same content as that of the prose poem which closes ambiguously: “Et les deux enfants se riaient l’un à l’autre fraternellement, avec des dents d’une égale blancheur.” (“And the two children laughed at each other fraternally, with teeth of equal whiteness”). This conclusion incites a puzzling but pleasurable question: Why does the narrator focus on teeth in order to illustrate equality? The essay takes the time and space to expand on the philosophy of the soul as it may play out with children. “Sont-ils pris d’une colère superstitieuse contre ces menus objets qui imitent l’humanité, ou bien leur font-ils subir une espèce d’épreuve maçonnique avant de les introduire dans la vie enfantine?—*Puzzling question!*” (“Are they angered by at these little objects that imitate life, or perhaps they are undergoing a sort of masonic initiation before being introduced to the child’s life? – *Puzzling question!*”). In the final analysis, the prose poem suggests that there is a mystery at hand and the essay declares it straight out.

Baudelaire’s poems have been called “little jewels” because of their brevity, density and esthetic value. His stylistic perfection has also been termed “jewel-like.” In a letter to his mother<sup>28</sup> concerning his plans for composing prose poetry he relates that he is working on “some little ornaments;” “little” but “well fashioned,” and he mentions “a large amount of mental concentration” involved in their creation. He always considered poetry his first calling and was proud of both his rhymed verse and his prose. In the verse poem “Bénédiction” (OC 81) the narrator elevates this praise: “Je sais que vous gardez une place au

<sup>28</sup> From Brussels, 9 March 1865, (*Corr. II*)



Poète / Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions, / Et que vous l'invitez à l'éternelle fête / Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations.” (“I know You have prepared a place for the Poet / In the blessed ranks of the sanctified Legions, / That you invite him to the eternal feast / Of Thrones, Power, Dominions”).

Baudelaire, the perfectionist berated well-meaning editors who shortened or otherwise altered his works to fit their publications. In a letter of 20 June 1863 to Gervais Charpentier, editor for *La Revue nationale et étrangère*, Baudelaire scolds: “J’ai passé ma vie entière à apprendre à construire des phrases, et je dis, sans crainte de faire rire, que ce que je livre à une imprimerie est parfaitement fini. Monsieur, je désire sincèrement vous remercier du bon accueil que vous m’avez fait; mais je sais ce que j’écris, et je ne raconte que ce que j’ai vu ” (*Corr. II* 307) [my emphasis]. (“I have spent my entire life fashioning sentences, and I can say, without fear of ridicule, that what I deliver to the publisher is perfectly finished. Sir, I want to sincerely thank you for the cordial welcome that you afforded me; but I know what I put to paper and I only put there what I know”). It is also worthwhile to note that ceremony and courtesy are unfailing mainstays of Baudelaire’s correspondence even as he castigates an acquaintance. Despite lacking rhyme and the resulting regularity of verse poetry, Baudelaire’s prose poems demand equal investments of imagination and precise execution.

On 15 December 1859, in a letter to Alphonse de Calonne, the Director of *La Revue Contemporaine*, Baudelaire affirms his commitment to the prose poem: “J’ai encore trois petits poèmes sur le chantier; “Dorothée” (beauté de la nature tropicale, idéal de la beauté noire); “Une Femme sauvage à la foire (sermon adressé à une petite-maîtresse qui a des douleurs imaginaires) enfin “le Rêve” (la fortune, l’amour et la gloire, s’offrent, pendant son sommeil, à un homme qui les repousse, et qui dit en se réveillant: si j’avais été éveillé, je n’aurais pas été si sage!)” (*Corr. I* 637). (“I continue to have three little prose poems in the works: “Dorothy” (a natural tropical beauty; the ideal of dark beauty); “The Circus wild woman” (a sermon directed at a midinette who has been imagining things) and finally “the Dream” (fortune, love, and glory, are offered up to a man, during his sleep; he ignores these offers, and upon awakening says: “If I had been awake, I would not have been so wise”). These communications hint that

Baudelaire's version of the prose poem will take up unusual topics (exotic females, the dream) but remain a refined, dense work.

In 1861, four years after the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire turned his poetry in the direction of prose. Although the traditional rhymed sonnet had been the strength of his writings,<sup>29</sup> he finds in the prose poem several advantages over verse poetry. The extended length though modest, of the prose poem offers the time and space to develop new themes. The two versions of “L’Invitation au voyage” (*OC* 125 verse, 297 prose) can be compared in terms of these different paths leading toward the same objective. The reader is moved through a dreamlike, exotic ambiance in both works. First the verse: “Des meubles luisants, / Polis par les ans, / Décoreraient notre chambre; / Les plus rares fleurs / Mêlant leurs odeurs / Aux vagues senteurs de l’ambre, / Les riches plafonds, / Les miroirs profonds, / La splendeur orientale, [. . .] Sa douce langue natale.” (“Rubbed furniture, / Polished by the years, / Would decorate our room; / The rarest of flowers / Mixing their aroma / With the vague scent of amber, / The rich ceilings, / The profound mirrors, / The oriental splendor, [. . .] Her sweet native language”).

We pass through similar but more tangible surroundings in the prose version: “Les meubles sont vastes, curieux, bizarres, armés de serrures et de secrets comme des âmes raffinés.” (“The furniture is huge, unusual, weird, armed with locks and hiding places like refined souls”). The verse evokes a dream-state via rhyme and cadence. This rhythm is provided by the oscillating position of the adjectives: first anterior “rares fleurs [. . .] vagues senteurs” then posterior “miroirs profonds [. . .] splendeur orientale” finally anterior and posterior adjectives used together, as in “douce langue natale”). The prose uses standard syntax for the subject – verb and traditional post-positions for the adjectives. A cadence is present, but no rhyme other than the occasional internal quasi-rhyme (“*armés de secrets comme des âmes raffinées*”).

<sup>29</sup> 48 out of 126 *Fleurs* (38%) are traditional sonnets.

Baudelaire confirms his attachment to the prose compositions in a letter to Jules Troubat, a colleague and secretary for Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869):<sup>30</sup> “En somme, c’est encore *Les Fleurs du mal*, mais avec beaucoup plus de liberté, et de détail, et de raillerie” (*Corr. II* 615). (“All in all, the collection of prose poems is just another *Flowers of Evil* but with a lot more freedom, and detail and humor”). By the particular phrasing (liberté, de détail and de raillerie ) suppositions can be made about Baudelaire’s adjectival use. In the prose poem, the additional stylistic freedom comes from dropping the traditional alexandrine or other rhyme schemes. The prose incorporates increased detail. Finally, Baudelaire plans and includes in this new genre good-natured laughter and well-honed parody.

In tracing the history of how Baudelaire came to his definition of the prose poem it is pertinent to look back at the single most important event in Baudelaire’s professional life, the moment of, and the time surrounding, the release of *Les Fleurs du mal*, 25 June 1857. The publication of this collection represented the culmination of his life’s work and the surrounding controversy must be seen as deeply disturbing to Baudelaire and alternately the starting point for a new direction toward prose poetry. A historical view of his obscenity trial shows Baudelaire shocked by the government’s intervention into his literary business, yet strangely cognizant of the likely outcome. He responds, in the short term, to his censorship with a quick return to “business as usual.” This meant meager production, little in the way of new publication and continued financial worries.

A closer look at these events surrounding the summer of 1857 shows a calculated if not planned reaction to *expected* government censorship. In the letter to his mother of 9 July 1857, Baudelaire shows no qualms at pushing the limits of societal and governmental tolerance with the intensity of his writings. “Mais ce livre, dont le titre: *Fleurs du mal*, dit tout, est revêtu, vous le verrez, d’une beauté sinistre et froide; il a été fait avec fureur et patience. D’ailleurs, la preuve de sa valeur positive est dans tout le mal qu’on en dit. Le livre met les gens en fureur” (*Corr. I* 411). (“But this book, with the title: *Flowers of Evil*, says it all, as it is fitted out, you will see, with a sinister and cold beauty; it was produced with fury

<sup>30</sup> The letter is from Brussels, 9 February 1866.

and patience. Besides, the proof of its positive value is in all the criticism it is receiving. The book is making people furious”). In fact, Baudelaire foresees and prepares for government intervention by continuing the development of his prose poems. He clearly declares that the prose poem will surpass *Les Fleurs du mal* in their antithetical force where the frightening meets the comic (*Corr. II* 473).

But how could a publishing event four years prior to the 1861 announcement of the prose poems impact the definition? Essentially the trial pushed Baudelaire to shift from verse poetry – an easy target for government censors – to a newer form, the prose poem. In this new genre, he is able to intensify his art with more provocative subjects – physical assaults, meetings with the devil or child suicide, for example. There are two reasons Baudelaire felt more comfortable with the notion that the prose poems would confuse the censors, given that some of the prose poems were just as violent and impious as *Les Fleurs du mal*. First, comparing verse with prose titles, the verse poems’ titles are in general more inciting: “Le Mauvais moine,” (“The Bad Monk”) “Alchimie de la douleur,” (“Alchemy of Pain”) or “Femmes damnées” (“Women damned”). We compare this with the more circumspect prose poems: “Le Joueur généreux” (“The Generous Gambler”) is really about the Devil; “La Corde” recounts child suicide and a title as provocative as “Assommons les Pauvres!” (“Let’s Beat Up the Poor!”) though duly violent, is actually humorous and insightful. Second, the extended narratives enable Baudelaire to layer meaning and thus frustrate cursory investigation. Finally, he is able to develop these themes more extensively than is possible with traditional rhyming verse.

Baudelaire is ahead of his time in terms of promoting his work. Although he is a ferocious defender of literature and its accompanying pretention to cultural superiority, he is not beyond the vulgar aspects of marketing and popularity. So he knew that a public censorship trial, even with his conviction, would bring publicity to himself and to this work, and perhaps relief from his financial woes.

The government did not strictly target Baudelaire per se, though making an example of him was not a bad manoeuvre from the official point of view. Napoleon III’s administration did indeed want to

stifle the spread of what was considered immoral literature. The government's case describes Baudelaire as a talented but misguided artist. The prosecuting attorney, Ernest Pinard, admits in his introduction to the list of charges: "L'auteur arrive devant vous, protégé par des écrivains de valeur, des critiques sérieux" (Pichois *I* 1206). ("The author has come before you, protected by respected writers, and serious critics"). Prior to the trial Baudelaire had in fact worked for the government as an independent contractor, translating or otherwise providing the educational system with materials. Only two weeks<sup>31</sup> ahead of the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal* he received a 200-franc payment from the government for a translation of Poe's *Histoires extraordinaires* (*OC* xl). On more than one occasion, he prepared texts for lessons and was reimbursed by the same people who would censor his poems. He knew people in the government who dealt with documents and was intimately familiar with their rules for censorship. Further, predicting his future fate, Baudelaire says in the 9 July letter to his mother: "Du reste, épouvanté moi-même de l'horreur que j'allais inspirer, j'en ai retranché un tiers aux épreuves [. . .]. On avait répandu le bruit que j'allais être poursuivi, mais il n'en sera rien. Un gouvernement qui a sur les bras les terribles élections à Paris n'a pas le temps de poursuivre un fou." ("Further, I myself, fearing the horror that I am inspiring, have pulled aside a third of the drafts [. . .]. Some have spread the word that I will be the target of the government; but who cares? A government that has its hands full with the elections in Paris does not have the time to go after a wildman.")<sup>32</sup>

Baudelaire, anticipating the possible seizure of his editions had set aside some copies. He wrote ardently to his editor and partner, Poulet-Malassis on 11 July 1857: "Vite, cachez, mais cachez bien toute l'édition; vous devez avoir 900 exemplaires en feuilles. [. . .] Je vais vous écrire une lettre officielle, antidatée, dont vous détruirez l'enveloppe. [. . .] et ils ont poussé la platitude jusqu'à faire la remise de librairie à M. l'inspecteur général de la presse, pour le séduire!!!" ("Quick, hide everything you can get your hands on; you must have at least 900 copies under print [. . .] I will write you an official letter,

<sup>31</sup> 16 June 1857 (Pichois *OC I Chronologie* xl).

<sup>32</sup> 9 July 1857 (*Corr. I* 410).

predated, the envelope of which you should destroy. [. . .] and they have pushed their baseness all the way to the receiver of the edition, the Inspector general of the press, it's up to you to sway him !!!").<sup>33</sup>

Once the indictment was handed down, Baudelaire acted to secure some volumes and went silent for several days, seemingly waiting for the government to make the next move. On 17 July the Attorney General for the state filed suit against Baudelaire and Poulet-Malassis. Baudelaire chose for his defense attorney Gustave Chaix d'Est-Ange, the son of a well-known Parisian lawyer. The government prosecuted its case with Pinard who had already tried Gustave Flaubert the previous January for a similar "infraction démoralisatrice." Flaubert had however, been acquitted. Baudelaire's case was heard on 20 August. The procedures were concluded expeditiously. The fines handed down (300 francs for Baudelaire, 100 francs for Poulet-Malassis) were not exorbitant. The penalty to delete six poems aggrieved Baudelaire the most. Two months later, on 6 November 1857 Baudelaire petitioned the Empress to reduce his monetary penalty, knowing that such a supplication would likely work. It did, lowering his fine to only 50 francs. There is a *fleur du malesque* duality operating here, where a poor poet could go before the wife of the Emperor (whose rules he had broken) and get palliative treatment. In his letters he complains bitterly about the establishment represented often by literary academicians, who had refused or otherwise reproached his works. Even though art and beauty are his bywords, "economics" and "publishing nepotism" garner his attention constantly. He maintains a running feud with most authoritarian figures (his father Général Aupick,<sup>34</sup> the distributor of his monthly allowance Narcisse Ancelle, several publishers, and authors such as Hugo) but he works intermittently with of all these adversaries (writing glowing letters to Hugo's wife, for example) to advance his cause.

Two ingredients for Baudelaire's verse-shift-to-prose (when his literary production turned from rhymed poetry to prose) were in place: the efficacy of prose in developing his themes (city life, the

<sup>33</sup> *Corr. I* 222.

<sup>34</sup> A brief chronology of Aupick's career shows him *Capitaine* in 1814, *Lieutenant-colonel* in 1830, *Général* in 1839 and *Sénateur* in 1853. He died in April of 1857.

infinite, the dream) and the effectiveness of the genre to diffuse his intensity. Attracted by the potential of the prose poem, Baudelaire goes on in the second part<sup>35</sup> of his career to concentrate on its development. The elegant poet no longer chooses to stay within the borders of rhyme and finds his forms less restricted by classical rules. His letter of May 1859 to Jean Morel, then the director of *La Revue française* witnesses this shift: “C’est le premier numéro d’une nouvelle série que je veux tenter, et je crains bien d’avoir simplement réussi à dépasser les limites assignées à la Poésie.” (“It’s the first example of a new series that I am attempting for which I’m afraid to say, I have simply gone beyond the limits imposed by classical poetry”). Baudelaire shows great confidence in the new direction by proposing over a hundred prose titles (*OC* 357) in his plans. The titles reveal a consistent theme and dark humor: “Le Vieux Petit Athée,” “Les Deux Ivrognes,” “Le Philosophe en carnaval” (“The little old atheist,” “The two drunks,” “The philosopher at carnival”). In his list pertaining to dreams we see: “Condamnation à mort,” “La Souricière” and “Un Désir” (“Condemned to death,” “The Mouse trap” and “A Desire”). From the group on symbols and morals we see: “Ni remords ni regrets,” “Le Sphinx rococo” et “N’offensons pas les mânes.” (“No remorse, no regret;” “The rococo Sphinx” and “Let’s not anger the dead”).

Baudelaire’s evolution toward the prose poem as favored artistic vehicle was enhanced by the adaptability of prose that helped him project his wry and sardonic humor. He was curious about the nature of humor and studied it in two formal essays, one entitled “De l’Essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques” (*OC* 702) where he claims that the essence of laughter is in the need for control over a situation. (This foreshadows Freud’s “death instinct.”) Laughter helps humans feel superior to a problematic situation. Baudelaire’s humor is understated but often acerbic. He uses humor as a defense from, or attack on others when he feels vulnerable. For example, when leaving the courtroom after his trial in August 1857, where he had received a fine and censorship, a friend asked: “Vous vous attendiez à être acquitté? – Acquitté! répondit Baudelaire, j’attendais qu’on me ferait réparation

<sup>35</sup> Though not chronologically exact, one can date the second half of his career from the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal* 1857 until his death in 1867.

d'honneur!"<sup>36</sup> (You were expecting to get acquitted? – Acquitted! responded Baudelaire, I was expecting to receive an official apology!").

The satisfaction that leads to pleasure in turn often deals with humorous situations. The double entendre is a specialty of Baudelaire's. Humor is not essential, but sufficient for the pleasure of the text. Baudelaire's sense of humor shows up most clearly in his day-to-day correspondence as opposed to his literary work. The "incongruous" is however a mainstay in the formulation of laughter as it is an ingredient for his prose poems. For instance, in the first prose poem, "L'Étranger," it is amusing that after making Biblical references on the level of Christian doxa: "Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta sœur ou ton frère?" ("Whom do you love the most, you enigmatic man? your father, your mother, your sister or your brother?"); or philosophical ones on the level with Kant or Swedenborg; "Ta patrie? [. . .] La beauté? [. . .] L'or?" ("Your fatherland [. . .] Beauty? [. . .] Gold?") – the "homme énigmatique" replies: "J'aime les nuages[. . .] les nuages qui passent" ("I like the clouds[. . .] the drifting clouds").

In another poem, "Le Mauvais Vitrier," IX (*OC* 282) the violence (the narrator tosses a flower pot onto the neck of a glass salesman) precludes a hearty laugh, but the incongruity is active as the attacker rationalizes his behavior with philosophical solemnity: "Mais qu'importe l'éternel de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l'infini de la jouissance?" ("But what does an eternity of damnation matter to someone who has experienced for one second the infinity of delight?"). From the aforementioned examples, "Le Mauvais Vitrier" IX, "L'Etranger" I, and "De l'Essence du rire" we see a variety of characteristics emerge from Baudelaire's poetics for the prose poem: a sharp humor, the element of surprise, and undeniable strangeness.

The letter to his mother dated 9 March 1865 reveals Baudelaire's thoughts on his continuing prose effort: "Oui, je continue les *Poèmes en prose*. D'ailleurs, il le faut bien, puisqu'il y a un engagement

<sup>36</sup> Pichois I *OC* 1182



depuis deux ans, et que *Les Fleurs du mal* ne reparaîtront qu'après les Poèmes en prose. Mais je vais lentement, très lentement. L'atmosphère de ce pays est alourdissante, et puis, tu as pu deviner, par la lecture des quarante ou cinquante qui ont paru, que la confection de ces petites babioles est le résultat d'une grande concentration d'esprit. Cependant, j'espère que je réussirai à produire un ouvrage singulier, plus singulier, plus volontaire du moins, que *Les Fleurs du mal*, où j'associerai l'effrayant avec le bouffon, et même la tendresse avec la haine" (*Corr. II* 473). ("Yes, I am continuing the Prose poems. Indeed I must, as it has been my duty for the last two years now that *Les Fleurs du mal* will only reappear after the Poèmes en prose. But I move slowly, very slowly. The atmosphere of this country is depressing and as you could guess, by having read forty or fifty of those that have come out, that the creation of these little oddities is only by dint of great concentration. However, I hope to arrive at a unique product, more unique, more striking at least, than *Les Fleurs du mal*, one where I will mingle the fearful with the comic and even tenderness with hate"). In this citation the term "unique" affirms the objective of Baudelaire to separate himself from the mass of other writers. The phrase "more striking at least, than *Les Fleurs du mal*" describes an intense prose: vigorous adjectives, rapid tonal changes and surprising content.

The half-dozen prose poems published on the heels of Baudelaire's censorship are grouped in "le cycle crépusculaire" or "the nighttime series."<sup>37</sup> These plots locate themselves metaphorically between the moments of sunset and sunrise, the "other time," the traditional time for strange activity. "Crépuscule" or twilight separates what we can see and predict from the unexpected.

Just as elements of the prose poems sometimes appear, disappear and reappear,<sup>38</sup> so did the proposed titles considered by Baudelaire for his collection of prose poems. The back and forth struggle to land on a single title portends the quixotic nature of the enterprise and the product. In the letter to

<sup>37</sup> He received his fine 20 August 1857; the *Poèmes nocturnes* ("L'Horloge," "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure," "L'Invitation au voyage," "Le Crépuscule du soir," "La Solitude," "Les Projets,") came out 24 August 1857.

<sup>38</sup> In "L'Invitation au voyage" *un pays* is repeated in lines 1, 2, 8, 16, (18 as the synonym *contrée*); eclipsed by an interior treatment, to resurface in lines 47, 52.

Houssaye dated “Noël 1861” Baudelaire says: “Je crois que j’ai enfin trouvé un titre qui rend bien mon idée: *La Lueur et la fumée*.”<sup>39</sup> (“I believe I have finally found the title that really expresses my idea: *The Glimmer and the Smoke*”). It is in his other letter to Houssaye, Noël 1861<sup>40</sup> that Baudelaire mentions two possible titles for the project prose poem: *Le Promeneur solitaire* or *Le Rôdeur parisien*. The first is reminiscent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Both Rousseau and Baudelaire were in some ways favored as writers, but finally they stood outside of the main stream of popularity. The two were eccentric. Rousseau had a precocious start to his career and professional associations with Diderot and Voltaire, but these relations soured when Rousseau published his estimation of the “natural man” that indicted his present generation with civilized corruption – antithetical notions for Diderot and Voltaire.<sup>41</sup> In the same way, Baudelaire struck a literary success early with his *Salons* and counted as his friends (or at least as correspondents) Théophile Gautier, Charles Sainte-Beuve, and even Hugo for a time. Just as Rousseau’s contrariness distanced him from the “Encyclopédistes,” Baudelaire’s tirades with his editors and often lugubrious poetry made him somewhat of an outcast. Thus one can imagine the two taking long solitary walks. The title *Le Promeneur solitaire* proposed by Baudelaire plays directly off of Rousseau’s final grand work *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. The two authors not only share titles but styles, as the lyrical and harmonious prose of Rousseau is cited as a antecedent to the prose poetry of Baudelaire (*Lagarde et Michard* 334).

The early titles retain the idea of the bleakness of living in Paris. From 1862 to 1864 the correspondence of Baudelaire suggests a partiality for *Petits Poèmes en prose* as the favored title. After

<sup>39</sup> *Corr. II* 197. Neither this letter nor the one in the following note is the “fameuse lettre programme” which appears not in the *Correspondence* but rather with the collected works.

<sup>40</sup> *Corr. II* 207. In this same letter Baudelaire expresses the difficulty of avoiding, seeming to show his plan for the project. Evidently he did not want to encumber Houssaye with a plan not yet realized.

<sup>41</sup> Rousseau’s *Émile*, a treatise encouraging the romantic education of man was burned in Paris and Geneva by Parliamentary decree (Cotentin-Rey 187).

1864 *Le Spleen de Paris* is mentioned most often as the preferred title; however Baudelaire died (1867) before title was decided and the collection published.

Up until writing his letter to Houssaye in December of 1861, Baudelaire foretells on several occasions his ideas for the prose poems. He mentions its adaptability to address elusive topics such as beauty and soul or qualities of irony, humor and sometimes coldness and violence. Buffoonery and raillery are mentioned as ingredients. These general guidelines, having come from several sources, are reorganized in the “lettre programme,” one of three letters he wrote to Arsène Houssaye in December. His letter dated 20 December refers to his unsuccessful candidacy for the Académie française as well as his preference for the title *La Lueur*. The letter dated simply “Noël, 1861” mentions *Le Rôdeur parisien* and *Le Promeneur solitaire* and his intention to dedicate the first collection of prose poems to Houssaye. And then there is the letter programme that never passed through the mail but was meant as a preface for his publication of prose poems.

In this letter, with his typical politeness, Baudelaire defines his genre as he sells Houssaye on his idea: “Considérez, je vous prie, quelles admirables commodités cette combinaison nous offre à tous, à vous, à moi et au lecteur.” (“I beg you to consider what admirable advantages this combination offers to everyone, to you, to me, and to the reader.”) He adds a hint of irony: “Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu’il n’a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement.” (“My dear friend, I’m sending you this little work of which it cannot be said, without injustice, that it has neither head nor tail, since, on the contrary, everything in it is both tail and head, alternately and reciprocally.”) And then Baudelaire asks a rhetorical question revealing artistic insight: “Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas, dans ses jours d’ambition, rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale, sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience?” (*OC* 273). (“Which of us has not, during his ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and choppy enough to fit the soul’s lyrical movements, the undulations of reverie, the jolts of consciousness?”)

Essentially Baudelaire proposes to his editor that he can continue to write poetry with the same power as his verse without attracting further censorship from the government. He will do this by shifting from verse to prose. He claims that suggestion, emotion and poetic force will persist, but there will be no rhyme. The music will continue in the form of measured prose: stanza-like paragraphs, anaphoric lead-ins, assonance and internal alliteration. He will not shy from controversial subjects however, as the city of Paris and all its sordid features will be addressed. What is appealing about his venture and his source-model Aloysius Bertrand, is that the proposed method is especially adept at conceiving and communicating mental states that are not normally subject to categorization: the soul, dream and conscience.

Houssaye and Baudelaire had been in contact since July 1854, when the poet asked the literary director for a loan (*Corr. I* 284). Houssaye was known for his work as managing editor of several publications: *l'Artiste* from 1830 to 1840, plus *La Revue des deux mondes* and *La Revue de Paris*. In 1861, when Baudelaire described his prose poem project, Houssaye was the director for *La Presse*. One can conceive of the motives behind the December letters. The “programme” letter outlines his theory of the prose poem. It is excellent publicity that entices with scenarios of mystery (à la fois queue et tête) and is also a guide to the personality of Baudelaire. The tones are shifting but there is evidence of humility, cleverness and authenticity. On the one hand Baudelaire was an established, if unpredictable poet. On the other, he was soon to be soundly rebuffed by the powers of the *Académie Française* and forced to withdraw his application for a seat among the “Immortals.”<sup>42</sup> Although Baudelaire was chagrined with his less than eager reception by the French literary establishment, he took the hints from his closest associates not to push too loudly his candidature. He desisted from his nomination without much fanfare and went ahead with his own projects, mostly from then on, the prose poems.

The main letter to Houssaye can be broken down into its five paragraphs in order to get a better picture of its contents and resulting definition of the prose poem. In the opening paragraph Baudelaire

<sup>42</sup> Moniker given to the members of *l'Académie Française*. His “désistement” took place February 1862.

plays the role of publicist as if he were selling his work to a target-audience, “le rédacteur et le lecteur.” In the second paragraph Baudelaire compares his modern effort with the original work of Aloysius Bertrand, which portrayed medieval scenes. In paragraph three he enumerates the qualities of the prose poem. Paragraph four emphasizes the urban objective for his prose, “des villes énormes” from which Baudelaire retrieves his plots. At the end of the letter Baudelaire dons again the hat of marketer. He confesses that he has not been up to the task of his predecessor Aloysius Bertrand: “Je crains que ma jalousie ne m’ait pas porté bonheur. Sitôt que j’eus commencé le travail, je m’aperçus que non seulement je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle, mais encore que je faisais quelque chose (si cela peut s’appeler *quelque chose*) de singulièrement différent” (OC 274). (“But, truth to tell, I fear that my jealousy has not brought me luck. As soon as I had begun the labor, I noticed that not only did I remain quite far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but more so that I was making *something* [if that can be called *some thing*] peculiarly different”). In this difference he intimates that his work may even outdo Bertrand’s.

The third paragraph of Houssaye’s letter addresses the stylistic detail of the prose poem. From Baudelaire’s point of view it should be constructed with “prose poétique, musicale sans rythme” (l. 25), a curious sentence – for what is musical without rhythm? One would think that music is innately rhythmic, a series of patterned sounds. What could possibly be non-rhythmic music? Bird’s songs, the sound of the wind, the beating of a wave or “the strident cry” (l. 32) of the human voice? The prose poem “Enivrez-vous” XXXIII suggests elements of nature that may fit with this unusual statement about musicality. The poet says: “Dans la solitude morne de votre chambre, vous vous réveillez, l’ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue, demandez au vent, à la vague, à l’étoile, à l’oiseau, à l’horloge [. . .] demandez quelle heure il est” (OC 330). (“In your room’s gloomy solitude, your intoxication already waning or gone, ask the wind, the waves, the stars, the birds, clocks [. . .] ask what time it is”). Nature’s phenomena, though mercurial, have certain rhythms: day and night, hot and cold, energy and fatigue. Peripeteia have, by definition, no

set rhythm. Prose poetry has as its content surprise and theatrical turnabouts – both interruptions of rhythm. A majority of the Baudelarian prose poems employ the unexpected. Rhythm ends up being a series of unexpected actions. In line 27 Baudelaire speaks of the “soul’s lyrical movements,” another not so rhythmic musical feature.

The letter sometimes refers to the collection as a whole and sometimes to individual poems. Baudelaire goes some distance to impress the notion that the fifty poems have a unity to them, but that the individual poems could be considered separately in any order, without losing their poetic effect. In line 5 he mentions “cette combinaison” – the multitude of ways that one could read the poems. In line 25 he talks of the “prose poétique, musicale,” a reference to the language employed, that stays constant throughout the fifty prose poems. In line 6: “Couper où nous voulons” suggests dividing the parts of the whole and implying that the quality of the poems will not suffer. Baudelaire desires that readers adopt the perspective that the individual poems are more important than the collection: each poem can be read for its own intriguing content, or particular structure. The six poems of the group *nocturne* deal with: 1) A cat and time 2) A woman’s hair 3) A journey 4) Parisian laborers 5) Society v. solitude and 6) The mind as means for escape. The themes of time, duality and pleasure are favored. All these poems are bracketed by the idea of spiritual force, but beyond that, they are distinct thematically and stylistically.

In the letter programme, Baudelaire assures that his new lengthier prose will not take away from his portrayal of more poetic feelings by “la volonté rétive” (“recalcitrant will”) or by the “fil interminable d’une intrigue superflue” (*OC* 273) (“the endless thread of a superfluous plot”). He thus enforces a brevity-standard for his prose poems. Baudelaire’s longest prose poem is four pages long.<sup>43</sup> The generally accepted upper limit of length for a prose poem is about eight pages as in Maurice de Guérin’s “Le Centaure” (Bernard 514).

<sup>43</sup> “Une Mort héroïque” XXVII is slightly under four pages long; “Portrait de Maîtresses” XLII is slightly over four pages.

Baudelaire wants Houssaye to appreciate the difference that these works will bring to literature. In this regard he employs an animal metaphor. This work “lives” as an animal: “Et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part ” (l. 12). (“And the two pieces of that tortuous fantasy will reunite without difficulty. Chop it up into many fragments, and you will find that each one can exist separately”). These “living” portions are the individual prose poems and each offers two levels of interpretation, that of individual story and that of stories taken together. For example, the entire collection could be considered a commentary on the mores of mid-century Paris. A group of three poems, say the first half of the nocturnes numbers XVI, XVII, and XVIII, treat time, space and dreams. The sub-group XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV (“Le Thyrsus,” “Enivrez-vous,” and “Déjà!”) deal with art, inspiration and time again. All of the poems are conversations between poet and audience, as the poet continually interrogates the reader; from “Le Thyrsus”: “Ne dirait-on pas que toutes ces corolles délicates, tous les calices, explosions de senteurs et de couleurs, exécutent un mystique fandango autour du bâton hiératique? (“Doesn’t it seem that all those delicate corollas, all those chalices, explosions of odors and colors, are executing a mystical fandango around the hieratic staff?”). From “Enivrez-vous”: “Il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. Mais de quoi? (“You must get high without respite. But on what?”). And from “Déjà!”: As a ship slowly returns its passengers to their home port, “Quand pourrons-nous digérer dans un fauteuil immobile? (“When can we digest in an immobile armchair?”). Themes that can be intertwined because of their universality include art and beauty symbolized by the Thyrsus; inspiration equalling intoxication; and security of the home port.

A main proposition in this setting is necessarily “modernity,” a topic of on-going debate and discussion in Baudelaire’s world. The second paragraph of the lettre programme retraces this theme: “A la description de la vie moderne, ou plutôt d’une vie moderne et plus abstraite.” (“To apply to the description of modern life, or rather of *one* modern and more abstract life”). The italicized indefinite article and its supplement, “plus abstraite” underline the importance that Baudelaire places on the intangible universe. “La vie moderne” refers to contemporary Paris – Haussmann’s renovation, the shifting politics, and a concern with the self recently privileged and manifested by “Dandyism,” of which

Baudelaire was a willing representative. However, *a* modern life points more toward human reason, a more durable value than fashion or mannerisms as the basis of existence. This intellectual movement, in which Baudelaire participated, was a continued permutation of the Age of Reason begun a century earlier. This eighteenth-century shift of values moved reason to the forefront, ahead of the former deference to religion or royalty. Now, as the political *Révolution du février 1848* attested, institutions were being pushed to adopt a modern way of thinking, that is, trusting the individual more and more. Roger Shattuck describes the evolution of thought at this time that carried into the twentieth century: “In the attempt to fuse art and life as a means of forging a new personality, nothing could be normal any longer in the old sense. [. . .] Oscar Wilde maintained that he devoted his talent to writing and his true genius to living. [...] (Baudelaire) evolved a combined ethics and aesthetics of individualism and an accompanying poetic principle of correspondence between the senses, the arts, and the entire universe” (Shattuck 39, 319).

In the letter to Houssaye, Baudelaire shifts his focus from “the” modern life, which is defined as the rise of the masses, to “a” modern and abstract life. Logically Baudelaire wanted to direct his prose poems towards the relative few (he mentions the limited number of Bertrand’s readers: “Connu de vous, de moi et de quelques-uns de nos amis” (“known to you, to me, and to some of our friends”)) who deal with the abstractions of daily life. Thus the philosophical messages are obtained from such unusual characters as a glass salesman or a retired acrobat. In “Le Mauvais Vitrier” IX, the poet speaks of the possibility of infinite pleasure. It just so happens that for this person infinite pleasure results from the launching of a flower pot onto the back of a well-meaning old glass salesman who angers the protagonist by not having among his wares “vitres qui fassent la vie en beau!” (“glass panes that make life beautiful!”). The story does not declare that those who have built up enough stress will have blissful moments of relief in violent acts. It is instead a confirmation of eternity and pleasure worthy of consideration and deliberation. The shades of colored glass are infinite and the customer lashed out at the salesman for not providing him with this dimension of life. The eternity of a second: “Dans une seconde l’infini de la jouissance” (for one second the infinity of pleasure?) emphasizes the elastic nature of time.



The secret is in the eye of the beholder. One who peers through colored glass may enjoy infinite pleasure, for a second.

Baudelaire's future literary plans hint at his definition of the prose poem. He kept a "list of things to do" for his poetic projects; in one of these lists he organizes his future poems into three categories: "choses parisiennes," "oneirocritée" (interpreting dreams), and "symboles et moralités" (*OC* 357). These groupings encapsulate several aspects of Baudelaire's prose poems: ethical writings that recount urban incidents, in a dreamlike atmosphere.

The main historical influence for Baudelaire's evolving thought towards a definition of the prose poem is from Aloysius Bertrand, whose "Gaspard de la nuit" echoes dream and mystery. In what many call Baudelaire's model, Bertrand's prose couplets evoke a poetic rhythm where the repeated introductory words tend to hypnotize:

Encore, – si ce n'était à minuit, – l'heure blasonnée de dragons et de diables! – que le gnome qui se soûle de l'huile de ma lampe!  
 ("But still – if it wasn't midnight – the hour populated with dragons and devils! – and only the dwarf who drinks dry the oil to my lamp!")

Si ce n'était que la nourrice qui berce avec un chant monotone, dans la cuirasse de mon père, un petit enfant mort-né!  
 ("If it was only the nurse who rocks with a calming lullaby inside my father's armor, a little still-born child!")

Si ce n'était que le squelette du lansquenet emprisonné dans la boiserie, et heurtant du front, du coude et du genou!  
 ("If it was only the skeleton of the mercenary trapped in the woodwork, and banging his head, his elbow and his knee!")

Si ce n'était que mon aïeul qui descend en pied de son cadre vermoulu, et trempe son gantelet dans l'eau bénite du bénitier!  
 ("If it was only my ancestor who comes on foot from his worm-eaten frame, and dips his glove into the sacred water of the font!")

Mais c'est Scarbo qui me mord au cou, et qui, pour cautériser ma blessure sanglante, y plonge son doigt de fer rougi à la fournaise!  
 ("Instead it's Scarbo who bites me on the neck, and who, in order to stanch my bloody wound, therein plunges his iron red-hot finger!")<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Bertrand, Aloysius. *Gaspard de la Nuit* – Book III part I *La Chambre gothique*.  
<http://cage.ugent.be/~dc/Literature/Gaspard/Gaspard3.html>

Baudelaire goes on to imitate Bertrand with these gothic, sometimes violent, occurrences. In his letter to Houssaye, Baudelaire seeks out a prose capable of portraying this cloudy, sometimes intense world of the mind – a prose able to delimit a number of abstract subjects. The poet depicts the soul in “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX, by physically bumping into the soulful Devil in the street!

Baudelaire speaks of the dream-state in “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” XVII: “Tes cheveux contiennent tout un rêve, plein de voilures et de mâtures [. . .] où l’atmosphère est parfumée par les fruits, par les feuilles et par la peau humaine” (OC 296). (“Your hair holds an entire dream [. . .] where the atmosphere is perfumed with fruits, foliage and human skin”). The prose poem is reputed by Baudelaire to be able to express “soubresauts de la conscience” that Kaplan translates as “jolts of consciousness” or “fits of conscience.” Consciousness can be jolted but only in a crude form – either we are conscious or unconscious; we are alert or not. Often though, we have dilemmas of conscience – a choice of degree, the choice between right and wrong, and it is to this level that the poem must refer. These moral dilemmas are frequently portrayed in the prose poems. In “La Fausse Monnaie” XXVIII, for example, there is an overt indictment of a man who gives a beggar a worthless token in the guise of helping him. The obvious or first-level meaning is not usually the end-all for Baudelaire. The right-wrong quandary goes further. How does the narrator treat a supposed acquaintance who stoops so low? Moral dilemmas are raised by the prose poems often related to abstractions such as personal character or solitude.

Baudelaire’s version of the prose poem maintains the characteristic, essentially poetic feature of density; a great deal is portrayed and suggested in little space. This lapidary quality was prevalent in the publications of the day. The industry of printing favored black and white with little illustration, except for occasional paintings and engravings. Given Baudelaire’s early exposure to art and his critiques of the major international art exhibitions,<sup>45</sup> one can understand why he consistently included the visual arts and

<sup>45</sup> *Salon de 1845, Salon de 1846, Exposition universelle 1855, Salon de 1859*; art criticism began at age 24.

artists among his favorite subjects as seen in these titles for prose poems: “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” III or “Le Désir de peindre” XXXVI. In “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” the elements of esthetic pleasure are enumerated. At a later date Barthes will do the same. A goal of the writer or painter is to portray that which is not obvious, in Baudelaire’s lexicon, the infinite. The poet characterises this experience as a feeling : “Il n’est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l’Infini” (*OC* 276). (“There is no sharper point than Infinity”). Barthes will also reiterate that pleasure is an affair of feeling and not logic. Baudelaire puts it this way: “Elles pensent mais musicalement et pittoresquement, sans arguties, sans syllogismes, sans déductions” (*OC* 276). (“They [melody, solitude, silence] think, but only musically and pictorially, without quibblings, without syllogisms, without deductions”). Baudelaire depicts sumptuous rooms of paintings in “L’Invitation au voyage” and he dedicates the poem “La Corde” XXX to the impressionist Édouard Manet. His poems, verse and prose evoke a consistent quest for beauty, truth and the eternal. Faced with mankind’s and his own weaknesses and failings the poet strives for something on which he can depend. Is it goodness, truth, beauty, honor or pleasure? Having tried to fill the gap with money, sex, drink and drugs, and after many years of working his poetry, Baudelaire decides that only art leaves room for hope. Consequently depictions of painters and paintings often occupy his poetic art. In productive or receptive phase, any art carries with it a portion of pleasure.

Among the 126 poems published in the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, there are three that are repeated in prose. These identically-titled works have sometimes dramatic differences in their content. They are “L’Horloge,” “L’Invitation au voyage,” and “Le Crépuscule du soir.” The two “L’Horloge” are almost identical in length, thirty-two verses for the poem and thirty-three lines for the prose poem. The prose version, though recounting a narrative, actually is more nuanced than the verse version. The rhymed poem ends with: “Meurs, vieux lâche! il est trop tard” (*OC* 151). (“Die, old coward! it is too late”). The

prose version's last line is tamer: "J'ai eu tant de plaisir à broder cette prétentieuse galanterie, que je ne vous demanderai rien en échange" (*OC* 296). ("I took such delight in elaborating this pretentious romance, that I will ask nothing of you in exchange"). The verse version is abrupt and forceful whereas the prose version is transient and evocative. The two "L'Invitation au voyage" are more similar in theme and effect, as they both conjure up a paradise of pleasure. The verse poem does this in about a hundred words and the prose version in about eighty-eight lines. The final two doublets,<sup>46</sup> "Le Crépuscule du soir," discuss dualisms where the evening brings rest and recuperation for some, but anxiety and crime for others. The good / evil contrast is constant in both of Baudelaire's most famous collections, *Les Fleurs du mal* and *Les Petits Poèmes en prose*.

The doublets or double versions (verse and prose) that share a same title offer insight into the intriguing phenomenon of like-titled, different-genre art works. The following chart shows how these works provoke questions: "Which work was written first? How does composing in rhyme or via prose differ? Do these doublets reveal insights into the functioning of the artist's mind?"

Table 3: Doublets

<u>Prose</u>	<u>Verse poem</u>	<u>Other variations</u>
"L'Invitation au voyage" August 1857	"L'Invitation au voyage" June 1855	
"Le Crépuscule du soir" June 1855	"Le Crépuscule du soir" Feb. 1852	"Le Crépuscule du matin" (verse) June 1857
"L'Horloge" August 1857	"L'Horloge" Oct. 1860	
"Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" August 1857	"La Chevelure" May 1859	
"Le Joujou du pauvre" September 1862		"Morale du joujou" (essay) April 1853

<sup>46</sup>*Le Petit Robert* defines "doublet" as words sharing the same etymology, having different forms and usages.

For two of the three doublets the publications in verse precede those in prose. In the case of “Le Crépuscule du soir” there is a three-year gap where the verse version comes first. After the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire orients his efforts towards the prose poems. His talent as a story teller, which included his customary wry understatement and the capacity for believably presenting far-fetched scenarios, probably confused government censors just enough to placate them. The verse versions of the doublets, due to their density often impact more forcefully than the prose works. For example, from the two versions of “L’Horloge” the rhymed work offers an example of what Baudelaire had called “la langue heurtée”: “Et j’ai pompé ta vie avec ma trompe immonde!” (OC 150). (“And I have sucked dry your life with my filthy proboscis!”). Whereas the prose version has as its most intense line: “Oui, je vois l’heure; il est l’Éternité!” (OC 296). (“Yes, I see the time; it is Eternity!”). One could also attribute this toning down to the maturing of the poet, as in 1857 he was entering his late thirties.

According to the last part of the programme letter, it is a pleasure to arrive at a set objective. Baudelaire has already admitted (l. 38) that he failed to achieve his goal. “Je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle” (OC 274). (“I remain quite far from my mysterious and brilliant”). But there is another source of pleasure, that of the imagination and the creation involved with a new art form. His goal to depict the dream, to translate feelings, to reconcile the nature of good and evil requires a new genre, one more supple than older forms. This is the prose poem as defined by Baudelaire. It becomes a new source of creative pleasure for him.

Baudelaire sought prose “sans rythme et sans rime” or in other words free verse. A flexible style avoids rigidity, thus supporting the use of a variety of figures and even equivocal terms. A forceful style incorporates audacious subjects and stark contrasts. When trying to describe in clear terms the soul, moods, or feelings, a concrete point of orientation is useful. Vigorous prose helps in this regard. The prose poem of Baudelaire treats for the most part, transcendent subjects, but often in a context of routine activities; take for example the door-to-door glass salesman assailed in a harangue about beauty and eternity. This definition allows for energetic sentences and rapid changes of direction. These elements hint at surprising plots for the prose poem.

The adjectives *souple* and *heurtée* offer clues to the Baudelaire's attitude. A supple language is necessarily more indeterminate, requiring more connotative interpretation. With this flexibility the Baudelarian prose poem treats the chimerical with supple linguistic construction. In "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" XVII the poet takes up the subject of memory, associating it by metaphor with a sensuous handkerchief that flutters through the air as would memories (if we could picture them).

The dream is a constant and powerful entity for Baudelaire but its shadowy and volatile existence prevents facile interpretation. In "Les Projets" XXIV Baudelaire "paints" the dream before actually representing it: "Au bord de la mer, une belle case en bois, enveloppée de tous ces arbres bizarres et luisants dont j'ai oublié les noms [. . .] dans l'atmosphère une odeur enivrante, indéfinissable [. . .], dans la case, un puissant parfum de rose et de musc [. . .], plus loin, derrière notre petit domaine, des bouts de mâts balancés par la houle [. . .], autour de nous, au delà de la chambre éclairée d'une lumière rose tamisée par les stores, décorées de nattes fraîches et de fleurs capiteuses"(OC 309). ("At the seashore, a lovely wooden cabin, shrouded by all those bizarre and shiny trees, whose names I've forgotten [. . .] in the atmosphere, an intoxicating, indefinable fragrance [. . .], in the cabin, a powerful scent of rose and musk [. . .], farther away, behind our little estate, tops of the masts rocked by the swell [. . .], around us, beyond the bedroom illumined with pink light filtering through the blinds, decorated with fresh mats and inebriating flowers"). He precedes the dream-like description with this statement: "Certainly, here is where we must dwell to cultivate the dream of my life" (Kaplan 55). Baudelaire composes the scene using a narrator who, while taking a walk, is attracted by an engraving in a window. The thoughts of the man are recounted. Baudelaire heightens the dream effect by the use of ellipsis, so that the dream proceeds, then stops, and then proceeds again. In a way the dream is painted; lines or colors set side by side or meshed together.

In *L'Invitation au voyage* XVIII we find these flexible words contrasted with concrete images: "Un vrai pays de Cocagne te dis-je, où tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine, comme une splendide orfèvrerie" (OC 298). ("A true land of Cockaigne, I insist, where everything is rich, tidy, and glossy, like a clean conscience, like a magnificent

array of kitchen utensils, like splendid silverware”). The term conscience exemplifies this flexible use of language as it can mean either a mental arbiter of right and wrong or simple awareness (that is more properly called consciousness). The conscience takes on a physical demeanor as some “clean and shining object,” that is categorized with kitchenware despite its abstract nature. Baudelaire’s ideas or objects are depicted with strong contrasts that set off their solidity. In this first line of “L’Invitation au voyage,” the country is named and related to the ephemeral (conscience) but also the palpable in paragraph 7 (batterie de cuisine, orfèvrerie). The mind oscillates between reality and dream, between waking and sleeping. It is a real place, as “un vrai pays” signals. But the “te dis-je” is less sure, more contingent. “Tout,” is categorical, without doubt, but then it is compared to “conscience,” hardly an object that one can see or measure. And at the end of the citation, we return to the solid and the palpable – kitchen cookware. In the prose poem, elements of the exotic are infiltrated by the ordinary. The effect of this “prose assez heurtée” is clarity or mental comfort, in other words, a version of pleasurable text.

Baudelaire says that the difference between his prose poem and that of his “mystérieux et brillant modèle” Bertrand is found in the opposition of their themes: Baudelaire treats the modern world of Paris mid-nineteenth century and Bertrand treats the old world of the Middle Ages. During Baudelaire’s life, Paris was undergoing Haussmann’s renovation, where entire blocks of the city were razed and demolition was the order of the day. Baudelaire lived in the middle of this destruction. Still, along with the dust and desolation, new cafés and businesses sprang up as modernity was taking hold in Paris. Tradition, of a slightly earlier era was exemplified by rhyming poetry (Hugo), classical novels (Balzac) and realistic paintings (Courbet). Haussmann’s new Paris symbolized a change, the dramatic modification of old forms. The urban surroundings form the backdrop of Baudelaire’s poetics. At the end of the first paragraph in the lettre programme he reiterates the coming pleasure of the text, which is, in fact, his stated goal: “Dans l’espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous *plaire* et vous amuser, j’ose vous dédier le serpent tout entier” (l. 13). (“In the hope that some of those segments will be lively enough to *please* and to divert you, I dare dedicate to you the entire serpent”).

In a curious juxtaposition, the prose poems dealing with the base aspects of life in the city, invariably include a philosophical dimension inserted by Baudelaire. In another pattern of supple prose “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” III places ruminations toward the end of one season and the beginning of another (“How penetrating are the ends of autumn days! Ah!”) – a temporal border between question and answer. The poet speaks of the impalpable: “celle de l’Infini, mélodie monotone de la houle, le moi se perd vite.” (“That of the Infinite, monotonous melody of the wave, the self is quickly lost”). From these allusions to the eternal, rhythm and a reduction of self, the reader finds clues to the pleasure of the text. The brevity and the force of the paragraph, announced by exclamation, and then by consummate adjectives: “Que les fins [ . . . ], Grand [ . . . ], Toutefois [ . . . ], Et [ . . . ],” promote a pleasurable read. So the Baudelairian prose poem announces and demonstrates at once the pleasure of the genre.

Based on the lettre programme to Arsène Houssaye, composed as a veiled manifesto, the Baudelairian prose poem integrates prose paragraphs, verse-like stanzas, with rhythmic constructions that remind of music. The plots, being relatively short, employ strong concepts and sudden turns of direction. The language is not fixed to one meaning but instead proposes and allows the reader to interpret. His prose poem is a work of pleasure. It treats abstraction and keeps its poetic force even though it has no meter or rhyme. The dream as content and as signifier plays a prominent role as do the soul and conscience. A strength of this writing is adjectival in the sense that Baudelaire exploits the adjective as a source of energy. Less visible is the binary layout of the works that compare or contrast via two elements or poles. The movement of the texts most often follows this oppositional structure, whether brisk or meditative. In the same manner as Lemaitre’s tripartite thematic for the prose poems, a new proposal has surfaced that keeps, but renames his three broad divisions: 1) a sweeping opening gesture, 2) a middle intervention by the poet and 3) a closing morality.

Built into the definition of the prose poem by Baudelaire is the will to pleasure for the text. His “prose poétique, musicale” engenders pleasure regardless of the theme. The supple yet contrastive style invites pleasurable contemplation of the work. From the author’s point of view, deliberation is a naturally pleasant activity and further “la rêverie” and “la conscience” stimulate inquiry into questions of right and



wrong, also pleasant for Baudelaire. The brevity of the little works respects the will of the reader, so as not to be fatigued by “une intrigue superflue.” Baudelaire’s definition of the prose poem is concentrated in the one lettre programme. Numerous sources contribute to the definition of Baudelaire’s pleasure of the text. Some ideas come from the definition of the prose poem, but most are mentioned in personal letters or other poems. In the lettre programme the dream is a source of pleasure and the questions of right and wrong stimulate the mind and keep it distanced from the mortal enemy, boredom or ennui. The next chapter will explore how the poet’s various allusions to pleasure can be formulated into a definition for the pleasure of the text.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT ACCORDING TO BAUDELAIRE

At the foundation of Baudelaire's art is his personal experience; he wrote of spleen because he was often ill and miserable from cold winter weather, running from creditors, or simply without hope. Many times he had to gather his meager belongings and flee to another residence. His reflection on this onerous existence was transmuted to the melancholic spleen depicted in his well-known *The Flowers of Evil*. Contrary to this reputation, he included striking visions of pleasure in his writings. These specific references, whether in poetry or correspondence, will be used to establish his definition of pleasure. This theory of the pleasure of the text outlined by Baudelaire and later by Barthes will form the basis for a commentary of the former's *poèmes nocturnes*, his first substantial publication of the new genre.

Peaceful allusions to tropical surroundings (memories of his trip at age 20 to the Indian Ocean) nourish Baudelaire's conception of pleasure. A definition of pleasure contains, inevitably, abstract material; for example, Baudelaire postulates the reduction of ego as a source of pleasure. Novelty also induces pleasure and is found in writings where he relates surprise or *étonnement*. Related to novelty and surprise, but more capable of producing tension between pleasure and displeasure is risk-taking. Along these lines the poet even mentions "the pleasure of anxiety" in prose poem IX. His cadenced poetry and regular use of musical terminology signal rhythm as a component of pleasure. Despite the two-generation gap between Baudelaire and Barthes, one writing before Freud and the other after, both writers laud the Freudian dream as a source of pleasure. The perception and manipulation of time is valued as pleasurable. The poet honors sensual pleasure, usually in the context of artistic beauty or simply as a contrast to his difficult life. This Baudelairian framework carries forward to that of Barthes who addresses the subject directly in his book *Le Plaisir du texte*.

Besides explicit mentions of pleasure in his works, one can glean insight into the poet's thought by considering his lifestyle. As a young man, Baudelaire spent as lavishly as he could on paintings,

engravings and books. He frequented, as his funds allowed, Parisian theater. He maintained close associations with a handful of women and a large number of literary figures. His reputation as a fearless experimenter with intoxicants is true, but not on an extended basis. Baudelaire's interest in this "route to the muse" proves more theoretical than practical. Standing in opposition to every known painting or photograph of the stern poet is his examination into "laughter," a study that resulted in a twenty-page essay that has certain affinities with to pleasure.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the only philosopher that Baudelaire cites with any regularity in his works is Emmanuel Swedenborg.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand he constantly reflects on his own "tripartite" philosophical objectives: good, beauty and truth. Baudelaire praised the imagination and consequently a definition of pleasure must include a look at what he called the "queen of faculties" (*OC* 764). Thirty out of fifty of his prose poems employ some form of the word *plaire*. These activities and associations, peripheral to his actual writing, offer insight into what he valued and how a concept of literary pleasure might issue forth. In the following chapter, a similar sort of inquiry will be made into the work of Roland Barthes resulting in two contrasted theories.

Others including Socrates (as reported by Plato), Kant, and Freud have commented, at least tangentially on pleasure. These great thinkers, representing three different epochs, can put into perspective our authors' pleasure of the text. Plato's Socrates defined pleasure in opposition to pain. Kant placed pleasure in the context of beauty and goodness. Freud advanced pleasure as the basic motivator of human action.

Socrates was in prison awaiting his execution, conversing with Phædo and Cebes, when he began to rub his leg: "How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other [. . .] as I find in my own case pleasure comes following

<sup>47</sup> "De L'Essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques" (*OC* 702)

<sup>48</sup> Swedenborg is mentioned in the last prose poem "Les Bons Chiens," the thirty-page short story "La Fanfarlo," "Le Poème du Haschisch," "Réflexions sur quelque-uns de mes contemporains," and the essay "Fusées."

after the pain in my leg, which was caused by the chain” (Eliot 48). Socrates initiates this dialogue with his pupils by talking of the physical aspect of the pleasure / pain dichotomy. His point is that the two are closely related. If pain arrives one day, pleasure cannot be far behind.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), investigates contrast among ideas of good, beauty and pleasure. He examines the close relationship of pleasure with beauty (Adams 379). Even before dealing with good, beauty and truth he defines concept as the collaboration of understanding and intuition, where both faculties are directed toward an object. This is the unavoidable activity of the mind. The mind turned toward a sunset it calls beautiful, does not refer to a concept, yet it claims the viewing as universally satisfying. The mind judges beauty esthetically and not cognitively. Pleasure, in the basic judgment of beauty, is independent of interest. However pleasure associated with concepts (such as the good), is colored by interest. Thus a major contrast is developed between the ideas of esthetic taste (beauty) versus the pleasurable. Kant puts it this way: “The beautiful pleases man; the agreeable (the pleasant) gratifies man; and the good deserves man’s esteem.” Only taste is not free to form opinions about objects and their production of pleasure. The object of taste is not influenced by interest and is called the beautiful (Adams 380).

According to Kant it would be absurd to say: “This concert is beautiful to me,” because it is wrong to use the word beautiful when it is really pleasure that is being felt by an individual. If an object is qualified as beautiful, it is because it is assumed this would be the same evaluation for everyone. “This flower is beautiful” is neither opinion nor consensus. The dilemma is that the evaluator denies others’ taste even as he personally claims to demonstrate taste in general. We cannot say that every individual has his own taste as this would simply that good taste does not exist. This is not to say that esthetic judgements are absolutely divorced from interest. In many instances they appear to be guided by some purpose. “Purposiveness” is a Kantian term which means that a thing has no outward purpose, but that it will maintain an inward purpose or purposiveness. The judgment of beauty has no final goal, only a formal goal; that is to say, it is purposiveness without a goal. It is independent of the concept of the good

(which supposes an objective purpose). Purposiveness is either external (utilitarian) or internal (perfection).

In summary, Kant says that pleasure is desire in search of internal satisfaction. That which gratifies man is the reception of pleasure. Beauty, intimately linked with pleasure, does not relate to this standard of measure, but is generated by its own rule. Much as Kant affirmed the pleasurable contemplation of the mind searching for answers, Freud posited “pleasure” as the inevitable goal of the human psyche and a “pleasure principle” as its primary mode of action: seeking pleasure, avoiding non-pleasure (Freud 1). The two men emphasize comparable motivations in the life of the intellect, though Kant focused on the intellectual action of the mind and Freud spoke of unconscious urges.

While science has come up with discrete measures of length, width, height, temperature etc. it has not yet established one for pleasure. Freud placed pleasure at the foundation of our psychic reality. He writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “The course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle [. . .] the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of tension – that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure” (Freud 1). Having no philosophical pretensions Freud measures pleasure and unpleasure by the “quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is not in any way bound.” “Unpleasure” corresponds to a decrease in excitation. Freud borrows from G. T. Fechner, a scientist of the late nineteenth century who had proposed that “every psycho-physical motion rising above the threshold of consciousness is attended by pleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it approximates to complete stability, and is attended by unpleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it deviates from complete stability; while between the two limits, which may be described as qualitative thresholds of pleasure and unpleasure, there is a certain margin of esthetic indifference” (Freud 2).

The late nineteenth-century pioneers of psychology encountered obstacles in expressing unseen, unheard phenomena, as did Baudelaire and other poets of a slightly earlier time. Psychologists correlated movement (“every psycho-physical motion rising above the threshold of consciousness”) with moods,

and feelings. Unlike scientists, poets have more varied, literary vocabulary at their disposal when addressing abstractions such as pleasure or happiness while Freud points to hypnosis (where the mind attempts to maintain as little excitation as possible) as further proof of his pleasure principle. According to Freud's theory the two basic motivators of human behavior are first, the automatic seeking after pleasure and recreation, and second the desire (equally instinctual) to return to a steady state of existence, a state of equanimity. Baudelaire's thought on experiencing pleasure is most akin to Freud's second corollary – the return to a steady state. The poet uses terms such as “le port,” “l'infini” or “l'éternel” to express this pleasurable destination, this serenity. More specifically the “reduction of the self” foreshadows, a half-century later the Freudian concept “reduction of ego”.

“Pleasure is found in whatever acts we repeat” is a corollary of the pleasure principle. Freud cites as motivation for this the power of imitation – where persons act out their desire to be in control of their environment.<sup>49</sup> A not-so-pleasurable visit to the doctor will soon have a child reenacting on his mates, what the doctor did to him, not to remember the disagreeable time, but to allow a “transfer” of displeasing feeling to others, and thus to master the situation by experience. Sometimes what seems to be unpleasurable behavior is precisely this drive for mastery. “Repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure” (Freud 30). The consequence of these actions for literary discussions is that pleasure is a basic goal of literature where both novelty and repetition fill important functions in its development.

Baudelaire was a solitary figure. He never married. He did enjoy a cadre of literary friends: Charles Asselineau (1820-1874) his first biographer, Arsène Houssaye, a close publishing friend, and Sainte-Beuve, perhaps the most respected writer who remained consistently in Baudelaire's support. As a younger man he enjoyed treating his friends to readings of his poetry. His superiority complex caused him problems, as his poverty never allowed him really to climb the social ranks that he admired and criticized.

<sup>49</sup> This propensity to “repeat” or to “imitate” was cited by Aristotle as a foundation, and a pleasurable one, for the formation of rhyme and rhythm in poetry (Adams 50).

In the prose poem *Les Foules* XII the poet seems to speak of himself when he writes: “Le promeneur solitaire et pensif tire une singulière ivresse de cette universelle communion” (OC 288). (“The solitary and thoughtful stroller draws a unique intoxication from this universal communion”). Biographical information shows how his solitary life directly engendered the concepts of spleen and pleasure in his writing.

Pleasure was a corollary for the doctrine of Dandyism, a shift of societal thinking led by avant-garde artists of the day including Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). These “Dandys” considered themselves works of art as much as their artworks. Thus, the artist’s duty was to exhibit personal style and beauty with clothes and polished mannerisms. Todorov finds Wilde and Baudelaire at the forefront of a profound cultural change in ethical and esthetic values. These men not only transformed themselves into “works of art,” but they also consecrated their lives to the production of art (Todorov, *Replacement* 4). Beauty, style, and confidence were bywords for the younger Baudelaire. This philosophy of pleasure, made visible in art, clothes and behavior influenced his poetry. Barthes, incidentally, was also known for his urbane polish.

A discussion of the “pleasure of the text” seems at first difficult to reconcile with Baudelaire’s most famous theme, “Spleen.” In *Les Fleurs du mal* he gave four of his verse poems this same title – “Spleen.” These poems are grouped toward the end of the 85-piece section called *Spleen et Idéal*. The first “Spleen” LXXV begins: “Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière.” (“The month of drizzle, the whole town annoying”). The next “Spleen” LXXVI, starts: “J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans.” (“I’ve more memories than if I were a thousand years old”). The third “Spleen” LXXVII announces: “Je suis comme le roi d’un pays pluvieux, / Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très-vieux.” (“I am like the king of a rainy country, rich but powerless, young and yet very old”). And finally, “Spleen” LXXVIII evokes the most sinister feeling: “Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle / Sur l’esprit gémissant.” (“When the sky, low and heavy, weighs like a lid on the groaning spirit”). Spleen is a melancholic condition, one of weakness and depression, the duration differing from ordinary “low

periods” by its persistence. Real spleen is an unrelenting sadness.<sup>50</sup> Baudelaire’s emotional condition seems closely tied to his financial affairs. His Dandyism was in visible contrast to his persistent poverty. His letters reveal an almost daily attempt to round up a few francs here on a loan or a few hundred there from a couple of poems to be published. This constant effort to survive financially provoked repeated humiliations at the hands of his creditors, the antithesis of his desire for distinction.

A few excerpts from Baudelaire’s correspondence will suggest the depth of this distress and the consequent intensity of, and desire for pleasure. In prose poem IX “Le Mauvais Vitrier” he closes the poem with this line: “Mais qu’importe l’éternité de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l’infini de la jouissance?” (“But what does an eternity of damnation matter to someone who has experienced for one second the infinity of delight?”). Despondency is perhaps too frivolous a term to describe a 32 year-old poet who demands money from his mother in a seven-page letter dated 26 March 1853: “Envoie-moi le maximum d’argent, c’est-à-dire le plus que tu pourras, sans que cela te gêne, car au total il est bien juste que je souffre.” (“Send me as much money as you can, that is, the most that you can without it being a bother, because in the final analysis it is only right that I suffer”).

On 6 February 1854 he beseeches his mother: “Ma chère mère, sans discussion aucune, il me faut à tout prix – à tout prix – entends-tu bien? à tout prix – aujourd’hui même, la somme de deux cents francs; je viens de la demander à M. Ancelle;<sup>51</sup> il ne s’agissait pas de l’hypothéquer sur toi, il s’agissait de la lui faire rembourser par un journal à la fin du mois. [ . . . ] Si je n’ai pas cet argent, j’ignore absolument ce que je vais devenir, je n’ai qu’à brûler tous mes livres, ne plus m’occuper de rien, et à fermer les yeux sur les conséquences”(Baudelaire’s emphasis). (“My dear mother, no discussion please, I must have at all costs – all costs – do you understand? all costs, – even today, the amount of two hundred francs; I have just asked M. Ancelle; it’s not a matter of using you to guarantee the loan, it’s about reimbursing him at the end of

<sup>50</sup> Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs du mal*. (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1999) 155. “Le Cycle du spleen.”

<sup>51</sup> Narcisse-Désiré Ancelle (1801-1888), legal assistant in Neuilly-sur-Seine before becoming its mayor in 1851. He was legally responsible for issuing Baudelaire’s monthly payout from François Baudelaire’s legacy.



this month [ . . . ] If I don't get this money I absolutely refuse to take responsibility for my actions, I have only to burn my books, and nothing else will matter as I will close my eyes to the consequences”).

Perhaps not so desperate but equally insistent in revealing Baudelaire's monetary situation are two letters written in June of 1859, one to his mother where he was paying back some money and the next to Paul Meurice, an author and disciple of Hugo, asking for some. In the letter to his mother: “J'ai déjà tourmenté violemment Ancelle pour qu'il t'envoyât à la date précise au moins 160 francs; je vais te mettre à la poste 68 francs en dehors, et je te rapporterai moi-même de l'argent. Maintenant, je peux te dire que la vraie raison pour laquelle je voulais que tu eusses cet argent le 29, c'est que j'ai à payer le 30 ou le premier 160 francs à M. Malassis, qu'on viendra demander à Honfleur.” (“I have already violently harassed Ancelle so that he will send you precisely on the date without fail at least 160 francs; I'm going to mail you 68 more and I will bring some to you in person. Now I can tell you the real reason for my desire that you have this money on the 29<sup>th</sup> it is because I must pay on the 30<sup>th</sup> or the first 160 francs to Mr. Malassis, which he will be demanding in Honfleur”).

In the letter to Meurice July 1859, Baudelaire seems to have exhausted his usual sources of money (his mother, Ancelle, his editors) so that he is forced, with humiliation, to reach out to other acquaintances for sustenance. “Mon cher Meurice, Je suis profondément honteux et désolé de faire ce matin avec vous comme notre ami Morel.<sup>52</sup> Un libraire absent, un avoué absent, des amis absents, et la nécessité de trouver un peu d'argent pour les attendre! Si vous pouvez vous dépouiller de 50 francs ou même de moins pour quatre ou cinq jours, ce serait un bien grand service.” (“My Dear Meurice, I am deeply embarrassed and sorry to come to you this morning as I do to Morel. An absent book seller, an absent supporter, absent friends, and the necessity of finding a little money while awaiting them! If you would be able to free up 50 francs or so for at least four or five days, this would be a great help”).

<sup>52</sup> Jean Morel, head of *La Revue Française* and friend of Baudelaire.

These two letters, preoccupied with money as they are, were written two years after Baudelaire's publication, *Les Fleurs du mal* and despite future readers greatly appreciating *Les Fleurs*, the work did little at the time to assuage his persistent lack of means. His dream of escape to a land without these problems inspires his poetry. His poverty and its contrast to his poetic brilliance are the prime moving forces in his art. We would not have the *Spleens*, *les Poèmes nocturnes*, or *Les Fleurs du mal* had it not been for the intensity of his despair.

Baudelaire writes of spleen as a reflection of his troubled mental and pecuniary condition. His letters describe his moods. He sometimes complains of his inability to work due to "malaise" or another "miserable" depression. His "Jekyll-and-Hyde" personality coincided with mood swings that left him exhausted for weeks without the capacity to work. A psychological middle ground, "la mesure" in his moods, seemed unattainable to him. He had experienced enough moments of happiness to seek ardently after a more normal state of affairs, but despair would resurface to plague his rare positive moments. In modern terms he exhibited "a manic-depressive personality" characteristic of the person who cannot avoid dramatic mood swings from happiness to helplessness. He briefly touches on his mercurial personality in the letter to his mother dated 27 February 1858: "J'ai eu trois jours d'une belle joie, c'est toujours cela de gagné, la joie est si rare." ("I've had three great, joyous days, one must always treasure this, joy is so rare").

In the letter dated 29 March 1862, in the context of again recounting his money problems, he describes life as a long struggle punctuated by periodic hope: "Comme il faut des années de fatigue et de châtement pour apprendre les vérités les plus simples, par exemple que le travail, cette chose si désagréable, est l'unique manière de ne pas souffrir, ou de moins souffrir de la vie!" ("It takes years of blood and sweat to learn the simplest truths, for example that work, that so disagreeable thing, is the only way not to suffer, or at least to put up with life!")

Syphilis eventually killed Baudelaire in 1867, its effects becoming more evident and deleterious during his last five years. In one of his *Journaux intimes*, entitled "Fusées" (*OC I* Pichois 668), he writes with terrible foresight of a disturbing experience: "J'ai cultivé mon hystérie avec jouissance et terreur.

Aujourd'hui 23 janvier 1862, j'ai subi un singulier avertissement, j'ai senti passer sur moi le vent de l'aile de l'imbécilité." ("I have cultivated my hysteria with joy and terror. Today 23 January 1862, I experienced a strange warning, I felt pass over my body the wind of the wing of imbecility.") Four years later and not yet 45 years old, 4 February 1866, while visiting a church in Namur, Belgium, Baudelaire tumbled to the floor in what was in all likelihood a stroke, as he suffered partial paralysis on one side and trouble speaking after this time. Six months later, still unable to speak, he was admitted into a treatment center in Paris.

A particularly unpleasant manifestation of spleen for Baudelaire was the feeling of falling down, a physical impression that he describes in a letter of 3 June 1863: "Comment suis-je tombé si bas, à ce point que j'ai cru que je ne saurais plus me relever, comment me suis-je relevé, et ai-je su cautériser tout d'un coup ma maladie par un travail furibond, sans répit, sans fatigue, je n'en sais absolument rien. L'oisiveté est devenue une si violente douleur, l'idée folle de mon impuissance littéraire m'a tellement effrayé que je me suis précipité dans le travail." ("How could I have fallen so low, to the point where I believed that I would never rise again; how could I get back up and find a way to cauterize at once this sickness by furious work, without rest, without fatigue, I have absolutely no idea. Idleness has become such a violent pain, the crazy idea of my literary impotence has so frightened me that I raced straight to work").

His distress continues as his illness advances. In a letter of 31 December 1863 : "Tout ce que je vais faire, ou tout ce que j'espère faire cette année (1864), j'aurais dû et j'aurais pu le faire dans celle qui vient d'écouler. Mais je suis attaqué d'une effroyable maladie; qui ne m'a jamais tant ravagé que cette année, je veux dire la rêverie, le marasme, le découragement et l'indécision [. . .] Mais comment guérir? Comment avec la désespérance faire de l'espoir; avec la lâcheté faire de la volonté? Cette maladie, est-elle imaginaire ou réelle? [. . .] Je n'en sais rien; ce que je sais, c'est que j'éprouve un dégoût complet de toutes choses et surtout de tout plaisir (ce n'est pas un mal), et que le seul sentiment par lequel je me sente encore vivre, est un vague désir de célébrité, de vengeance et de fortune" (*Corr. II* 342). ("All that I am going to do or all that I hope to do this year (1864), I should have accomplished and I could have

accomplished in the year just passed. But I was attacked by a frightening illness; one that has never so seriously ravaged me as this year, I mean reverie, apathy, discouragement and indecision [. . .]. But how can I get better? How can one turn desperation into hope; make indolence change to resolution? This illness is it in my mind or is it real [. . .] I have no idea; what I do know is that I experience an utter disgust for all things and especially all things pleasurable (that's not necessarily all bad), and that the only feeling by which I sense myself still alive, is a vague desire for fame, for vengeance and for success").

These letters of despair indicate the intensity with which the author would seek pleasure given the opportunity. Even in the introductory poem to *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Bénédiction," the poet includes a respite from "disgust, monstrosity, hate and plague": "Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé, / Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes / Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié" (OC 81). ("The Poet turns up in this world of ennui, / His mother appalled, ready to blaspheme, / Shakes her fist at God, who does pity her"). At the end of this piece the poet's privileged ranking is recognized: "Car il ne sera fait que de pure lumière, / Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs, / Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière, / Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs!" (OC 83). ("For it will be made altogether of light, / Drawn from the sacred source of primeval beams, / of which mortal eyes, in their full splendor, / Are but mirrors, dim and fretful"). The poet has the power to glimpse the godlike beyond most others and has the responsibility to communicate this sublimity for the earthbound. The poet passes along pleasure to others.

With this darkness as background it may surprise that Baudelaire attests to pleasure in so many different contexts. The first idea that surfaces in the collection of prose poems ("Le Confiteur de l'artiste" III) is "losing the ego" as a means of finding pleasure. Novelty in the form of surprise is one of "pleasure's most delicate forms" says the poet in "Une Mort héroïque" XXVII. Amplified novelty transforms into pleasurable risk. The element of rhythm is a classic component of pleasure. The dream, as a vehicle of pleasure or as a window into the nature of pleasure, is called on eight times in "La Chambre double" V. Corollary to this core group of ideas is the notion of Dandyism that treats clothes and mannerisms as pleasurable art. Illness and the inability to work convinced Baudelaire that one of life's

pleasures is simply, work. He maintains the infinite as a pleasurable objective. Finally, it is the poet's duty to delve into the eternal or the infinite either as source or destination for pleasure.

In "Le Confiteur de l'artiste" III the poet expresses ambiguity between pleasure and pain: "Que les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes! Ah! pénétrantes jusqu'à la douleur! car il est de certaines sensations délicieuses dont le vague n'exclut pas l'intensité; et il n'est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l'Infini (*OC* 276). ("How penetrating are the ends of autumn days! Ah! penetrating to the verge of pain! For there are certain delicious sensations whose vagueness does not exclude intensity; and there is no sharper point than Infinity." Autumn connotes the beginning of the end of an endeavor and since the poem concerns an artist's confession one can infer that the endeavor is an artwork. Contemplating art or engaging the infinite is an agreeable proposition: "Ah! faut-il éternellement souffrir, ou fuir éternellement le beau?" (*OC* 276). ("Ah! must we suffer eternally, or else eternally flee the beautiful?"). Most of these sensations, the poet admits, are vague emotions like timidity or courage, energy or malaise – yet they are just as real as physical pleasure or discomfort. His final reference in the passage points out the most penetrating of all the pleasures and pains – the Infinite. So none of the artist's other goals (telling a tale, instructing, informing etc.) are as important as pushing action to the limit.

As the allusions in "Le Confiteur de l'artiste" are oblique, line 6 also applies, not only to producer but to receiver of the work of art. "Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer!" ("Sheer delight to drown one's gaze in the immensity of sky and sea!"). According to Baudelaire, there is pleasure in contemplating the infinite here symbolized by sky and sea. A key part of this passage is the claim that there exists a relation between beauty and the eternal and that pleasure (sensations délicieuses) is found in losing the self (*OC* 276). "Car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le moi se perd vite!" ("For in the grandeur of reverie the self is quickly lost"). Although he seems to make this claim just in passing, the poet underscores the loss of self as a grand phenomenon. Pleasure is conventionally considered a personal state of satisfaction, but since the Stoics at least, philosophers have made the opposite claim. Instead of asserting that pleasure comes from personal satisfaction (of ego), they

believe that pleasure results from the diminution of the self's need for contentment. The first tenet of Baudelaire's definition of pleasure is thus diminishing the self.

Freud not only baptised the self as ego, but he was categorical in his claim that newness is a condition of pleasure: "Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment" he says in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 29). The psychologist almost uses Baudelaire's terminology verbatim, though half a century later when addressing these mental phenomena. Baudelaire employs these terms in reference to his literary characters and as a reflection of human nature. Freud uses them in connection with the inner workings of the mind.

In "Portraits de maîtresses" XLII, four average men are introduced: "ni jeunes ni vieux ni beaux ni laids." ("not exactly young, nor old, nor handsome, nor ugly"). Still they are worthy of attention as they have "fortement vécu" ("lived intensely") and are distinguished in some as yet unannounced way. Two ironic currents are underscored: the tragedy of their loneliness and the unreality of their situation. The mistresses of the four men are stereotyped: intellectual, servant, consumer, and perfect-devoted woman. The outcome of the first protagonist's story remains in doubt; his mistress is too intelligent for him. The second fellow's woman leaves him for another to have a large family. The third woman seems insatiably hungry or thirsty. The fourth man recounts matter-of-factly the drowning death of his mistress as she became too much for him. In the end they all continue to drink in an effort "to kill some time" and to resuscitate the good times. The four protagonists desire stories that allow pleasurable escape. The self lost in another's tale is a pleasurable experience.

In this prose poem is an example of Baudelaire's second idea for pleasure in the text, the element of novelty or surprise. The violent death of the fourth mistress whose partner "got rid of her out of respect" seems incongruous in the context of the poem's easy tone. The four distinguished gentlemen complete their round-up of tales only to consider the elasticity of time. "Ensuite on fit apporter de nouvelles bouteilles, pour tuer le Temps qui a la vie si dure, et accélérer la Vie qui coule si lentement" (OC 341). ("Then they sent for more bottles, to kill Time which has such a resistant life, and to speed up Life, which flows so slowly"). The men sent for more bottles, not to extend the disagreeable tale, but to

show control over the passage of time. More bottles would slow their perception of time passing or make their lives appear fuller and satisfying.

Novelty comes in a variety of forms: a change of scene, surprise, even risk is one form of novelty. Baudelaire speaks of these concepts as a byproduct of his creative efforts. In the prose poem “Une Mort héroïque” XXVII, the narrator says: “(Le Prince est) assez indifférent relativement aux hommes et à la morale, véritable artiste lui-même, il ne connaissait d’ennemi dangereux que l’Ennui, et les efforts bizarres qu’il faisait pour fuir ou pour vaincre ce tyran du monde lui auraient certainement attiré, de la part d’un historien sévère, l’épithète de ‘monstre,’ s’il avait été permis, dans ses domaines, d’écrire quoi que ce fût qui ne tendît pas uniquement au plaisir ou à l’étonnement, qui est une des formes les plus délicates du plaisir ” (OC 314). (“Himself a true artist, rather indifferent toward people and morality, he recognized but one dangerous enemy, Ennui, and the weird efforts he made to flee or to conquer that tyrant of the world would certainly have won him, from a severe historian, the epithet of ‘monster,’ had he been allowed to write anything whatever, on such matters, not exclusively associated with pleasure or astonishment, which is one of pleasure’s most delicate forms”). It is difficult not to see Baudelaire’s personality refashioned in *Le Prince*. By subtly substituting the Prince for himself, Baudelaire safely proposes ramifications for his alter ego’s behavior. In the final analysis the Prince is scorned by history even though he supported the arts and wrote of pleasurable and surprising creations. In acquiescing to popular demand, the Prince (and Baudelaire) would be forsaking their true selves in hopes of procuring a positive historical endorsement. Baudelaire indicted “ennui” (as does the Prince), or its aggravated form “spleen,” as his worst enemy and finds an escape from it in “l’étonnement.”

Baudelaire values novelty whether producing it in real-life or in his literature. A prime example occurred when he surprised the literary world with the image of the flower of evil title for his collected verse poems. At the end of “L’Horloge” XVI the narrator turns from gazing into the eyes of the beautify “Felina” to addressing, what surprisingly seems to be a second Madam. The references to Pascal and La Bruyère at the end of “La Solitude” XXIII pleasurably surprise the reader. But how does risk become pleasure? Risk is dreading surprise and then experiencing relief when the apprehension does not come to

pass. Taking a chance builds up tension fueled by the flow of adrenaline and if danger is avoided, the release of this tension diffuses a unique brand of pleasure.<sup>53</sup> Various versions of pleasure are illustrated in the series of three prose poems: “Une Mort héroïque” XXVII, “La Fausse Monnaie” XXVIII, and “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX. In “Une Mort” pleasure is linked to astonishment. From “La Fausse Monnaie”: “Vous avez raison; après le plaisir d’être étonné, il n’en est pas de plus grand que celui de causer une surprise.” (“You’re right. After the pleasure of being astonished, there’s none greater than causing a surprise”). Or in the poem XXIX: “Cependant le jeu, ce plaisir surhumain, avait coupé à divers intervalles nos fréquentes libations.” (“Gambling, however, that superhuman pleasure had, at different intervals interrupted our frequent libations”). In these sequential poems Baudelaire orders these variants of pleasure: novelty, surprise then risk.

Surprise, when placed in the context of chance, is an energy-filled pleasure. In “Le Joueur généreux” a wager takes place in a face-to-face encounter with the Devil. The narrator calls the risky business of bargaining with “Son Altesse” a “plaisir surhumain.” In this poem the risk of gambling with the soul brings on great pleasure as illustrated in the extravagant scene depicted by the Poet: “Mon hôte et moi, nous étions déjà, en nous asseyant, de vieux et parfaits amis. Nous mangeâmes, nous bûmes outre mesure de toutes sortes de vins extraordinaires, et, chose non moins extraordinaire, il me semblait, après plusieurs heures, que je n’étais pas plus ivre que lui. Cependant le jeu, ce plaisir surhumain, avait coupé à divers intervalles nos fréquentes libations, et je dois dire que j’avais joué et perdu mon âme, en partie liée, avec une insouciance et une légèreté héroïques” (OC 319). (“My host and I, by the time we sat down, had already become familiar and fast friends. We ate, we drank immoderately all sorts of extraordinary wines, and, what was no less extraordinary, after several hours it seemed that I was no more drunk than he. Gambling, however, that superhuman pleasure, at different intervals interrupted our frequent libations,

<sup>53</sup> In Malraux’s *La Condition humaine* Clappique describes his gambling addiction as “The frenzy of losing” and “Suicide without death.” André Malraux. *La Condition humaine*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1946) 205-06.



and I admit that I gambled and lost my soul, winner take all, with heroic carelessness and frivolity”).

Another concept – after loss of ego and surprise – is added to Baudelaire’s theory of pleasure: risk.

Baudelaire’s prose poetry separates itself from normal prose by its musical rhythms. Music and the prose poem share melody and harmony (agreement between signifier and signified). An element of the pleasurable text highlighted by both Baudelaire and Barthes is rhythm. Baudelaire’s *lettre programme* exhibits an elastic double-meaning in the expression: “musical without rhythm.” The technical definition of rhythm is meter<sup>54</sup> which the prose poem does not exhibit. The new prose poetry will not have a specified meter or rhyme with which to form a cadence, but it will still be rhythmic. The verse poem “L’Invitation au voyage” is a good example of the simple but elegant rhythm that the prose version retains: “Les soleils couchants / Revêtent les champs, / Les canaux, la ville entière, / D’hyacinthe et d’or; / Le monde s’endort / Dans une chaude lumière” (*OC* 125). (“Setting suns / reclothe the fields, / The canals, the whole town, / In hyacinth and gold; / The world falling asleep / In a warm light”). The odd meter of the verse (5, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7) slides the reader’s attention from the public “Les soleils couchants” to the private “d’hyacinthe et d’or” in four lines. The effect is almost breathless but nonetheless finishes with a pleasurable at home, for rest sentiment.

Comparing the rhythm of the prose version: “Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes ou par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en nombreux compartiments (*OC* 298). (“The setting suns, so richly tinting the dining room or the salon, sift through beautiful fabrics or through tall crafted windows divided into many leaded panes”). The unrhymed rhythm is effectuated by the quasi-equal syllabic groups that imitate meter: “Les soleils couchants” (5 syllables), “qui colorent si richement” (6), “la salle à manger” (5), “ou le salon” (4), “sont tamisées par” (5), etc. Alliteration of /s/, /j/ and /z/ insists on the sun shining in on ordinary rooms: “Les soleils couchant, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon sont tamisées par de belles

<sup>54</sup> From *Poèmes, Pièces, Prose: Introduction à l’analyse de textes français*, rhythm is defined as the length or duration of a verse as required by meter or poetic convention. Specifically, the syllables are counted in groups called *feet* and depending on the stress applied to certain syllables the result is rhythmic.

étoffes et par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées [. . .]”. The assonance of the open vowels /ɔ/, /u/, /ã/, /õ/, and /a/ reinforce a calming effect. Rhythm, without meter or rhyme, is the next Baudelairian criterion for the pleasure of the text.

Another example of this “prose poétique, musicale” comes from the prose poem “Le Port” XLI: “Les formes élancées des navires, au grément compliqué, auxquels la houle imprime des oscillations harmonieuses, servent à entretenir dans l’âme le goût du rythme et de la beauté. Et puis, surtout, il y a une sorte de plaisir mystérieux et aristocratique pour celui qui n’a plus ni curiosité ni ambition, à contempler, couché dans le belvédère ou accoudé sur le môle, tous ces mouvements de ceux qui partent et de ceux qui reviennent, de ceux qui ont encore la force de vouloir, le désir de voyager ou de s’enrichir ” (*OC* 337). (“The slender shapes of boats with their complicated rigging, to which the swell imparts harmonious rocking, help maintain the soul’s craving for rhythm and beauty. And then especially there is a sort of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure for someone no longer curious or ambitious enough to contemplate, lying in the belvedere or leaning on the pier, all the movements of those who depart and those who return, of those who still have the strength to will, the desire to travel or to grow rich”).

“Le Port” profiles the pleasure of rhythm in two ways, by the regular movement depicted in the images and by the rhythmic form. In fifteen lines this poem recounts practically the same content (lacking only the personal influences) as the eighty-eight line “L’Invitation au voyage.” First, the images fluctuate rhythmically: the clouds are ordered but floating, the sea’s colors are shifting and the light from the phares sparkles in its beam. The poet underscores the stillness and peace of contemplating the harbor. He speaks of peacefully viewing: “tous ces mouvements de ceux qui partent et de ceux qui reviennent” (“all the movements of those who depart and those who return”). The four sentences have a gentle increasing duration: short, medium, medium, long. The vocabulary signifies the pleasure of rhythm available to the reader: “Il y a une sorte de plaisir mystérieux et aristocratique pour celui qui n’a plus ni curiosité ni ambition.” (“There is a sort of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure for someone no longer curious or ambitious”). The poet gives instructions on how to experience pleasure— one needs to diminish desire and

ambition to paradoxically have it all and be at peace with what is available – amusement for the eyes, beauty for the soul and strength for the will. Baudelaire repeated the same philosophy of reducing the ego in the poem “Le Confiteur de l’artiste”: “Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard” (*OC* 276). (“Sheer delight to drown one’s gaze”), that is, to lose oneself in thought. Baudelaire synthesizes natural instincts (the soul’s craving) with the physical world (the swell imparts harmonious rocking) such that the rhythm goes on all around – whether in the urge to travel, or in changing moods.

Baudelaire and Barthes both signal rhythm as a textual pleasure and mention additionally the dream as a path to pleasure. In his *lettre programme* Baudelaire posits rhythm as characteristic of the prose poem and the dream as especially susceptible to its expressive power – “pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie” (“to fit the soul’s lyrical movements, the undulations of reverie”). Barthes claims extraordinary force in dreams to produce pleasure. Precisely, it is from dreams that subtle, personal feelings and relations are explored and sanctioned (*Pleasure* 59).

The dream is a source of poetic inspiration and vision and consequently, pleasure. In his book on intoxicants, *Les Paradis artificiels* (1860), Baudelaire expresses belief in the reality of the unseen: “Le bon sens nous dit que les choses de la terre n’existent que bien peu, et que la vraie réalité n’est que dans les rêves” (*OC* 427). (“Good sense tells us that things of the earth exist but slightly, and that true reality is only in dreams”). One connotation of the verb rêver is a search for pleasure: “She dreams of a new life.” In “L’Invitation au voyage,” happiness is experienced by dreaming of distant Cocagne. One can access this Shangri-la through an imaginative painting or via a dream. The description of the setting of this marvelous country suggests that it is found in the dream: “Noyé dans les brumes de notre nord” (“Drowned in the mists of our North”) that is, deep in a dream, “Oui, c’est dans cette atmosphère qu’il ferait bon vivre, là-bas où les heures plus lentes contiennent plus de pensées.” (“Yes, it would be fine to live in that atmosphere – far away, where the slower hours contain more thoughts”). For Baudelaire the pleasure of the text includes the dream to which he attributes a double value: the dream as pleasure itself and the dream-text as a pleasurable work of art. As the citation indicates (qu’il ferait bon vivre) (l. 28) the

dream alters the march of time. Writing prose poems gave Baudelaire control of the narrative and the time frame of his works, a pleasure that escaped him in real life.

There are two prose poems where the “dream” occurs repeatedly; these are “La Chambre double” V and “L’Invitation au voyage” XVIII. From the first poem “dream” figures eight times in two pages:

1) “Une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement spirituelle;” (“A room that resembles a reverie, a truly spiritual room”). 2) “Un rêve de volupté pendant une éclipse;” (“A dream of voluptuous pleasure during an eclipse”). 3) “Les meubles ont l’air de rêver;” (“The furniture seems to be dreaming”). 4) “Relativement au rêve pur, à l’impression non analysée, l’art défini;” (“Compared to pure dream, to non-analyzed impressions, a precise art”). 5) and 6) “Sur ce lit est couchée l’Idole, la souveraine des rêves;” “Qui l’a amenée? quel pouvoir magique l’a installée sur ce trône de rêverie et de volupté?;” (“On this bed lies the Idol, the sovereign queen of dreams. But how did she get here? Who brought her? What magic power set her on this throne of reverie and voluptuousness?”).

7) “Mais un coup terrible, lourd, a retenti à la porte, et, comme dans les rêves infernaux, il m’a semblé que je recevais un coup de pioche dans l’estomac;” (“But then an awful, heavy knock resounded on the door, and, just like in a bedeviled dream, I felt a pickaxe strike me in the stomach”). 8) “La chambre paradisiaque, l’idole, la souveraine des rêves, la *Sylphide*.” (“The paradisiacal room, the idol, the sovereign queen of dreams, the *Sylphid*”).

The first citation from “La Chambre” echoes the lines from “L’Invitation au voyage”: “Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon” (OC 298). (“The setting suns, so richly tinting the dining room or the salon”). In both poems Baudelaire attributes an aesthetic dimension to the rooms of a house. From “La Chambre” the poet cites the dream’s power to escape from time: “Non! il n’est plus de minutes, il n’est plus de secondes! Le temps a disparu; c’est L’Éternité qui règne, une éternité de délices! (OC 278). (“No! There are no more minutes, there are no more seconds! Time has disappeared. Eternity now reigns, an eternity of delights!”). The pleasure of the poet is in finding the “lightly tinged,” “perfumed” room with forms of “languid” furniture covered with fabrics “like flowers, skies and setting suns.” The pleasure for the reader is in relating the images with the higher order ideas:

beauty, the infinite, soul. How does this happen? In “La Chambre” the “soul takes a bath of laziness,” the infinite is symbolized by the flowers, skies and setting suns and beauty is found in the “pure dream.” However where beauty is analyzed it is like concrete art, “a blasphemy” (Kaplan 6).

The second allusion to dreams comes in the form of an eclipse. An eclipse traditionally evokes cosmic or metaphysical reverberations and in that sense adds an air of mystery to the prose. An eclipse endows the dream with extra clarity and / or a pathway to the unseen, the metaphysical. It is during the eclipse that “un rêve de volupté,” (“a dream of voluptuous pleasure”) takes place. Thus the dream is portrayed as an extraordinary pleasure even rising to extreme pleasure.

In the first part of “La Chambre double” all is dream – even the furniture; if not in the dream then as dreamers: “Les meubles ont l’air de rêver. (“The furniture seems to be dreaming”). Just as in “L’Invitation au voyage” we see “les soleils couchants” (l.12 here, l. 35 in “L’Invitation”). The poet describes a room with paintings for which the ideal is “rêve pur.” The antithesis of the pure dream is analysis, definition, or logic. Art produced under these strictures is suspect, notes the poet. The dream, thus continues to express an ideal for the poet matched with the woman pointed out earlier. She is “la souveraine des rêves” (“the sovereign queen of dreams”) placed on her “trône de rêverie” by the search for knowledge and pleasure: “Qu’importe? la voilà! je la reconnais” (OC 278). (“What difference does it make? Here she is and I know her!”)

The turning point in the poem is signaled by “un coup terrible, lourd, a retenti à la porte, et comme dans les rêves infernaux” (line 43 out of 88). (“An awful, heavy knock resounded on the door, and just like in a bedeviled dream”). The poet makes a willful gesture toward the positive as these bad dreams are plural and limited while the earlier dream and its definite article represent the timeless, ideal dream. But this is the pivot point and after acknowledging for the last time “la souveraine des rêves, la *Sylphide*” (l. 51) all turns to worry, dirty furniture, a cold fireplace, nasty rain, and other kinds of distress: “de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d’Angoisses, de Cauchemars, de Colères et de Névroses” (l. 73). (“Regrets, Spasms, Fears, Anxiety, Nightmares, Rages and Neuroses”). As the first half of poem flourished in pleasurable surroundings, the latter half smells of claustrophobia, animality and force,

culminated by the final exclamation: “Eh hue donc! bourrique! Sue donc, esclave! Vis donc, damné!” (OC 279). (“Hoa, then! ass! Sweat it out then slave! Live then, damned!”).

Baudelaire summarizes his philosophy in a letter of 8 February 1859 to Alphonse de Calonne: “Je pourrais ici renouveler mon éternelle thèse tripartite: La morale cherche le bien – la science, le vrai – la poésie et quelquefois le roman, ne cherchent que le beau” (Corr. I 537). (“I can here restate my eternal three-part thesis: Morality seeks what is good – knowledge, truth – poetry and sometimes the novel, pursue only beauty”). Good is a question of morality. Knowledge is a question of truth. Poetry (representing art in general) is a question of beauty. Morality, truth and beauty are paths toward pleasure; the pleasure of goodness, knowledge and art. Baudelaire links the infinite with beauty and then beauty with pleasure, “car il est de certaines sensations délicieuses dont la vague n’exclut pas l’intensité; et il n’est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l’Infini.”<sup>55</sup> (“For there are certain delicious sensations whose vagueness does not exclude intensity; and there is no sharper point than Infinity”). Undoubtedly “delicious” feelings meant pleasure for Baudelaire. Daily life was by and large a misery for him; so if he could remove himself via his imagination and his poetry, he felt pleasure. Moving on from old to new was also a pleasure. A change from the sonnet to a new poetic pattern brought pleasure. Pleasure comes from the satisfaction of a desire whether to shift from pain to relief, from old to new, from stress to relaxation, from boredom to energy, from doubt to certainty; in short, pleasure results from a satisfactory psychological shift.

Baudelaire’s most effective tool in his poetic pursuit is the imagination. In his article “La Reine des facultés”<sup>56</sup> Baudelaire says: “L’artiste, le vrai artiste, le vrai poète, ne doit peindre que selon qu’il voit et qu’il sent. Il doit être réellement fidèle à sa propre nature” (OC 765). (“An artist, the real artist, the true poet, must not portray except according to what he sees and feels. He must be extremely faithful to his own nature”). As an *a priori* condition for artistry and as implement for poetic composition, Baudelaire

<sup>55</sup> From “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” III where the poet speaks of the pleasure of the infinite.

<sup>56</sup> Part III of the *Salon de 1859*.

ranked the faculty of imagination first. From his *Salon de 1859*: “L’imagination est la reine du vrai, et le possible est une des provinces du vrai. Elle est positivement apparentée avec l’infini” (OC 766).

(“Imagination is the queen of truth, and the possible is one of the subcategories of the truth. It is positively related to the Infinite”). In the same essay, Baudelaire ranks the imagination above fancy calling it “a much higher function [and] given that man is made in the likeness of God, bears a distant relation to that sublime power by which the Creator projects, creates, and upholds his universe” (OC 768).<sup>57</sup>

An active imagination is an important source of pleasure for the artist: “Comme l’imagination a créé le monde, elle le gouverne” says Baudelaire (“Le Gouvernement de l’imagination,” 1859). Use of the imagination directs Baudelaire from ennui to energy. Ennui changed, by the imagination to sensory delight brings pleasure. How this imagination manifests itself, and for what pleasure, may be seen in this line from the prose poem “L’Invitation au voyage”: “Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d’opium naturel, incessamment sécrétée et renouvelée, et, de la naissance à la mort, combien comptons-nous d’heures remplies par la jouissance positive, par l’action réussie et décidée?” (OC 299). (“Each of us carries within a dose of natural opium, ceaselessly secreted and renewed; and from birth to death, how many hours can we count filled with concrete delight, with well-executed and resolute action?”) This quantity of natural opium, energizes and releases the flow of ideas. Creative activity, painting, writing a poem etc. is positive joy. Baudelaire emphasizes that imagination carries with it a chronological element: how many hours do we count on; and one of confidence: well-executed and resolute action.

In his work Baudelaire imagines and creates two worlds: one of pleasure – “Où tout est beau, riche, tranquille, honnête, où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l’ordre ” (OC 297) (“Where everything is beautiful, rich, calm, decent; where excess takes pleasure in mirroring itself in uniformity”) and one of

<sup>57</sup> Baudelaire is quoting a British author “Mrs. Catherine Crowe” (1800-1876) with whom he is so impressed that he cites her in English. He goes on to temper his enthusiasm for her evident religiosity but maintains his general agreement with her appreciation of imagination.

melancholy –“Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle / Sur l’esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis ” (“Spleen” LXXVIII *OC* 144). (“When the sky, low and heavy, weighs like a lid on the groaning spirit / prey to long ennui.”) His famous dichotomy of good and evil comes to the fore in these citations, yet in either case the functioning of the imagination is a pleasure.

Kant’s description of the workings of pleasure say that the mind is persistently stimulated by the interaction of the cognitive faculty, language and soul. Baudelaire’s concept of the imagination equates with Kant’s notion of understanding as both receive and process input. Pleasure for Baudelaire remains closely associated with beauty and the extension of time, or as he puts it, the quest for l’éternel. In “La Chambre double” V, he describes an environment that surpasses even paradise by its liberation from onerous time: “Le temps a disparu; c’est l’Éternité qui règne, une éternité de délices!” (*OC* 278). (“Time has disappeared. Eternity now reigns, an eternity of delights!”).

Artists seek a variety of pleasurable inspirations to stimulate the imagination. Certainly the experience of intoxication has forever attracted the artist who wonders how the creative process is affected by alcohol, hashish, opium, or other drugs. The subtitle for Baudelaire’s essay “Du Vin et du haschisch” is *Comparés comme moyens de multiplication de l’individualité*. (“Compared as methods for the multiplication of the personality”). Baudelaire took on the study of the effects of intoxication with an academic rather than recreational attitude. In 1851 he published his first essay on how alcohol and hashish affect the poetic eye. In 1860, under the title *Les Paradis artificiels*, he again reported on hashish and this time added opium as a topic of inquiry. A later translation from Thomas De Quincey, entitled *Un Mangeur d’opium* included a chapter called “Voluptés de l’opium” followed by its opposite, “Tortures de l’opium.” On the last page of Baudelaire’s earlier essay he admits that his search for pleasure, insight or expansion of artistic confidence via intoxicants had not been fruitful: “Je ne comprends pas pourquoi l’homme rationnel et spirituel se sert de moyens artificiels pour arriver à la béatitude poétique, puisque l’enthousiasme et la volonté suffisent pour l’élever à une existence supra-naturelle” (*OC* 423). (I do not



understand why a sensible and thoughtful man uses artificial means to arrive at poetic bliss, since enthusiasm and will are enough to raise one up to a higher existence”).

Baudelaire’s search for pleasure ruled out intoxicants; they could not match poetry for inspiration. Still syphilis and anxiety oppressed him and hid the pleasure he longed for in his dreams or practiced in his art. The duality pleasure/pain can be observed in the series of five verse poems grouped under the rubric “Le Vin,” situated toward the end of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In the number CIV “L’Ame du vin,” wine is an elixir of comfort: “Dans le gosier d’un homme usé par ses travaux.” (“In the throat of a man worn by his labors”). In the third poem of the same section, “Le Vin de l’assassin” CVI le vin is used in nefarious circumstances: “Ma femme est morte, je suis libre! / Je puis donc boire tout mon soûl. / Lorsque je rentrais sans un sou, / Ses cris me déchiraient la fibre.” (“My wife is dead! I’m free! so I can drink to total drunk. When I came home penniless, her cries tore me apart”). The poet’s commentary on alcohol retains an other-worldly resonance. From “Le Vin du solitaire” CVII: “Le regard singulier d’une femme galante / Qui se glisse vers nous comme le rayon blanc” (OC 177). (“The odd glance of a woman of the town / That slides towards one as the vague moon sends a pale ray”). This representation endows the scene with a supernatural aura before delving into the more earthly aspects of wine. Still in the last line, “Les baumes pénétrants” have resulted in a transcendent feeling: “Qui nous rendent triomphants et semblables aux Dieux!” (“Which makes us victorious and like unto Gods!”) The good and evil aspects of wine are expressed with pleasurable twists.

As his three-part philosophical résumé above attests Baudelaire composed poems as a form of inquiry into beauty and as art endowed with it. The prose poem “La Belle Dorothée” XXV celebrates the natural beauty of Dorothée “qui est si prodigieusement coquette que le plaisir d’être admirée l’emporte chez elle sur l’orgueil de l’affranchie ” (OC 311). (“Since Dorothy is so enormously alluring, her pleasure at being admired prevails over her pride at being a freed slave”). Dorothée shows the same desire to be admired as the Dandy or its female version, the “midinette” of the mid-1800’s. She adopts self as a work of art and as an instrument of beauty: “Où elle prend tant de plaisir à se peigner, à fumer, à se faire éventer ou à se regarder ” (OC 311). (“Where she takes such pleasure combing herself, smoking, being

fanned or looking at herself in the mirror”). This same prose poem is set in a scene of tropical heat where the midday tradition is “Une sieste qui est une espèce de mort savoureuse où le dormeur, à demi éveillé, goûte les voluptés de son anéantissement” (*OC* 310). (“A siesta which is a sort of delectable death where the sleeper, half-awake, relishes the voluptuous pleasures of his annihilation”). In describing the noon-time siesta the poet predicts with great accuracy the second part of Freud’s life-force theory, ironically called the death instinct.<sup>58</sup> Along with the seeking of pleasure, as in procreation, humans instinctually try to attain a steady-state for their lives. The pleasure principle leads to recreation and continuation of the species while the death instinct leads to a return to the inanimate state (Nirvana). The “Nirvana Principle” says that humans are motivated by a desire for ultimate peace – “les voluptés de son anéantissement.” The poetic Baudelaire precedes by some fifty years the more “quantifying” Freud in highlighting the calm steady state as a pleasurable goal.<sup>59</sup>

Baudelaire includes risk-taking as one of his pleasure principles. The Devil or devils are featured in prose poems XXI “Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la Gloire”<sup>60</sup> as well as XXIX “Le Joueur généreux.” The Devil comes across as almost happy-go-lucky, albeit with an unctuous and fearful character. Whenever facing off with the Devil, man is represented as a weakling. From poem XXI we read about dealings with “Deux superbes Satans et une Diablesse:” “Si tu veux, si tu veux, je te ferai le Seigneur des âmes, et tu seras le maître de la matière vivante, plus encore que le sculpteur peut l’être de l’argile; et tu connaîtras le plaisir, sans cesse renaissant, de sortir de toi-même pour t’oublier dans autrui, et d’attirer les autres âmes jusqu’à les confondre avec la tienne” (*OC* 304). (“If you want, if you want, I will make you the Lord of souls, and you will be the master of living matter, even more than the sculptor masters clay. And you will experience the pleasure, ceaselessly reborn, of leaving yourself so as to forget

<sup>58</sup> Freud included the same terminology as Baudelaire to describe this longing for peace, calling it a “death instinct,” a “pleasure principle” and an “annihilation of the self.”

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lacan, a neo-Freudian, pointed out that the satisfaction one feels at the recognition of a *trompe-l’oeil* is explained as the restoration of one’s sense of mastery (Scott 115). These corollaries fit evenly with Freud’s “desire for mastery” and Baudelaire’s “voluptés de l’anéantissement.”

<sup>60</sup> Latin terms for three principal forms of temptation: of the flesh, of wealth, and for Glory.

yourself in others, and of attracting other souls until you absorb them into yours”). Here, with what seems childlike eagerness (If you want, if you want), one of the devils reiterates the first point of Baudelairian pleasure, reducing the ego. The dual nature of pleasure, its counterpart being ennui, is intimated in the citation as the Devil does not offer plain and permanent pleasure, but pleasure that will always return even if arrested by pain.

The idea of freeing oneself from all weakness and imperfection (the self) is also recognized by Barthes as a source of pleasure. In section 6 of *Le Plaisir du texte* entitled: “Clivage,” he writes: “Or c’est un sujet anachronique, celui qui tient les deux textes dans son champ et dans sa main les rênes du plaisir et de la jouissance, car il participe en même temps et contradictoirement à l’hédonisme profond de toute culture (qui entre en lui paisiblement sous le couvert d’un art de vivre dont font partie les livres anciens) et à la destruction de cette culture: il jouit de la consistance de son moi (c’est son plaisir) et recherche sa perte (c’est sa jouissance) (*Plaisir* 26). (“Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss is an anachronistic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture [which permeates him quietly under the cover of an art de vivre shared by the old books] and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood [that is his pleasure] and seeks its loss [that is his bliss].”) Barthes refines the dilemma of serving or denying the self when he says that promoting the ego is indeed pleasurable, but losing the ego is bliss.

From the prose poem “La Fausse Monnaie” XXVIII, one draws the overt conclusion that well-to-do persons are just as cruel as anyone. The narrator’s “gentleman” friend fleeces a beggar by giving him a false coin under the pretense of being generous. The narrator silently berates his erstwhile companion, but the text reveals that there is more to the story than this moral observation. Baudelaire reports, via the narrator, that additional meaning is available from the poem: “Je vis alors clairement qu’il avait voulu faire à la fois la charité et une bonne affaire; gagner quarante sols et le cœur de Dieu; emporter le paradis économiquement; enfin attraper gratis un brevet d’homme charitable.” (“Then I understood clearly that he had tried at one and the same time to accomplish an act of charity and a good deal; to earn forty pennies

and God's heart; to carry off paradise economically; finally, to snatch gratis his certificate as a charitable man.”). This quotation expresses surface meaning, whereas the narrator follows up with a supplementary musing: “Je lui aurais presque pardonné de la criminelle jouissance dont je le supposais tout à l’heure capable; j’aurais trouvé curieux, singulier, qu’il s’amusât à compromettre les pauvres; mais je ne lui pardonnerai jamais l’ineptie de son calcul .” (“I might almost have forgotten his desire for the criminal delight of which I had assumed him capable. I might have found it curious, unique, that he enjoys compromising poor people; but I will never forgive him for the incompetence of his calculation.”)

First, the supposition of man's dark desire for criminal delight disturbs. “Le Mauvais Vitrier” IX makes the similar remark that surface goodness in everyone is in reality, only so deep. In the story, only the eyes of the swindler give him away, a fact that reinforces the narrator's knowledge of human nature. The con man actually felt he was performing two good deeds, when in fact, he had committed wrong by his ineptness. The narrator's acquaintance could have deceived the beggar with his skill at manipulating money. This would have been cruelly amusing says the narrator. But by the look in his eyes the narrator divines the truth that his partner felt uplifted by giving a poor man false money and believing that the truth will not be discerned. In the hierarchy of wrongs committed by the friend: willfully cheating the less-fortunate, compromising the Truth, or being an imbecile – combining the last two, lying with stupidity, is the worst. These tales of morality imply the poet's search for good and a recognition of human error. Even though pleasure seems separated from weighty subjects of good and evil, it is included in the search for ultimate values. In this poem the crime lies simply in wanting to experience pleasure, albeit disturbed pleasure.

Another way of getting more pleasure from any of the prose poems is to take Baudelaire's advice from his *lettre programme*: “Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture [ . . . ] Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part” (*OC* 273). (“We can cut wherever we want, I my reverie, you the manuscript, the reader his reading [ . . . ] Remove one vertebra, and the two pieces of that tortuous fantasy will reunite without difficulty”). The

series of poems: “Une Mort héroïque” XXVII, “La Fausse Monnaie” XXVIII and “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX offer such an opportunity that can shed light on what he incorporated in the pleasurable text.

The three works have on the surface, harsh themes of darkness: conspiracy, sudden death, meanness, foolishness, and consorting with the Devil. In XXVII *Fanciullo*, the Prince’s favorite actor/buffoon, is struck dead in the middle of his greatest performance. Number XXVIII is the story of cruelty to the poor or worse, cruelty engendered by stupidity. “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX is about the prince of darkness, the Devil. However all three texts leave room for pleasure, even entertainment. The heroic death of *Fanciullo* is prefaced by a dramatic performance for the ages – (“*Fancioulle fut, ce soir-là, une parfaite vivante, possible, réelle. [ . . . ] Ma plume tremble et des larmes d’une émotion toujours présente me montent aux yeux pendant que je cherche à vous décrire cette inoubliable soirée*”) (OC 315). (“That evening, *Fanciullo* was a perfect idealization, impossible not to imagine as living, possible, real. [ . . . ] My pen trembles, and tears of a still present emotion fill my eyes as I try to describe the unforgettable evening”). “*La Fausse Monnaie*” makes ironic the presentation of the narrator’s friend who is so careful with the disposition of his money, yet the same meticulous friend is unaware of the cruelty of deceiving a person who already lacks means. “*Le Joueur généreux*” presents the Devil as a “*bon vivant*,” but still capable of absconding with another’s soul.

The three prose poems have in common the examination of the unseen; all three sound out the soul or the inner spirit of humans. From “*Une Mort*”: “[ . . . ] Invisible pour tous, mais visible pour moi, et où se mêlaient, dans un étrange amalgame, les rayons de l’Art et la Gloire du Martyre.” (“[ . . . ] Invisible to everyone, but visible to me, and in which were blended, in a strange amalgam, the rays of Art and the glory of Martyrdom”). From “*La Fausse Monnaie*”: “Et ainsi ma fantaisie allait son train, prêtant des ailes à l’esprit de mon ami et tirant toutes les déductions possibles de toutes hypothèses possibles.” (And thus my fancy went its way, lending its wings to my friend’s mind and drawing all possible deductions from all possible hypotheses”). And in the third case: “L’âme est une chose si impalpable, si souvent inutile et quelquefois si gênante, que je n’éprouvai, quant à cette perte, qu’un peu moins d’émotion que si j’avais égaré, dans une promenade, ma carte de visite.” (“The soul is such an impalpable thing, so often

useless and sometimes such a nuisance, that I experienced only a little less fright at the loss, than as if, during a walk, I had misplaced my calling card”). Unaware, the poet makes a deal in exchange for his soul, but it does not seem to bother him. From the group, the question arises: Are we not all, at one time or another in the position of cruel pettiness, tragic misfortune, or selling our souls for something or someone unworthy?

The majority of Baudelaire’s fifty prose poems are touched by humor, either by the entertaining incongruity of plots or by the entertaining congruity of the language itself, or both. “Une Mort héroïque” is a fanciful tale situated in the time of princes and courtly spectacles, perhaps during the Renaissance. There is a plot against the Prince and one of the conspirators is identified as his favorite actor. The reader is held in interest until the final act, eager to learn the fate of the participants. In “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” III, the final philosophical reversal is amusing: “L’étude du beau est un duel où l’artiste crie de frayeur avant d’être vaincu” (*OC* 276). (“Studying the beautiful is a duel in which the artist shrieks with fright before being defeated”). The artist seeks to convey the beautiful. He conceives of various natural displays (the sky’s depth, the sea’s insensitivity) as harmful to him (“with dismay, exasperates me, suffer eternally”), perhaps because he falls short of these ideals. Nature strikes back, frightening and then defeating the poet, which suggests that the artist does not, and / or cannot do justice to Nature with his imitations. The shriek of the poet is amusingly absurd, How can man wrestle with Nature?

From Dandy, to art critic, to prose poet, Baudelaire is in search of beauty. Nature holds beauty – “Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l’immensité du ciel et de la mer!” (“Sheer delight to drown one’s gaze in the imensity of sky and sea”). From Baudelaire’s evident pleasure in contemplation and evaluation of art emerged an 18-page essay that addresses the most physical sign of pleasure, the laugh. In his title “De l’Essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques,” (*OC* 702) he explores the synthesis of humor (which may begin with the tongue-in-cheek overlong title). It is not too far a leap to consider the relation of laughter and caricature on the same plane as the relation pleasure and

text.<sup>61</sup> Baudelaire surmises that laughter is evoked by the art of caricature, an art form that has precisely the laugh in mind. A good laugh has a physical component, a trembling of the body. This trembling, he proposes, is caused by the subject physically needing to laugh but attempting to forestall the outburst as it would be considered vulgar, uncivilized or anti-Christian (*OC* 704). Baudelaire is quick to define the laugh as “diabolique” but in the sense of being akin to our lower (physical) nature, “absolument primitive.” Other emotional states that go hand in hand with laughter are “la folie” and “la colère.” Violent feelings are thus equated with the trembling of laughter. In summary Baudelaire writes: “Le rire est satanique, il est donc profondément humain. Il est dans l’homme la conséquence de l’idée de sa propre supériorité; et en effet, comme le rire est essentiellement humain, il est essentiellement contradictoire” (*OC* 708). (Laughter is satanic, and thus, profoundly human. It surfaces from his feeling of superiority; this feeling like laughter is essentially human, and essentially contradictory”). It is evident that humanity is faulty by nature, a condition that diminishes potential. The laugh is an expression of this weakness and of a diabolical or base nature.

A quotation from the verse poem “La Destruction” CIX recalls this nature of consistent error: “Sans cesse à mes côtés s’agite le Démon; / Il nage autour de moi comme un air impalpable; / Je l’avale et le sens qui brûle mon poumon / Et l’emplit d’un désir éternel et coupable” (*OC* 179). (“Always the Demon stirs at my side; / He floats about me like the impalpable air; / I breathe him in and the sensation burns my lungs / fills them with an eternal guilty desire”). Later in his discussion Baudelaire compares joy with laughter where joy has a number of manifestations, sometimes smiles or tears; whereas laughter is a physical act, one that causes near convulsions. In a classic Baudelairian bifurcation he divides the *comic* into the *comique absolu* (serious, deep, excessive) and the *comique significatif* (based on individual situation, practical.) Also typically for Baudelaire the theme does not venture far from depravity, as he proposes absolute comedy as being made possible by humanity’s ultimate demise. He later jabs at the

<sup>61</sup> Baudelaire brings up the idea of the essay with his mother as early as 1847; a version entitled *Physiologie du Rire* appeared in the magazine *la Revue de Paris* in 1852.

English by identifying the distinctive sign of “la comédie anglaise” as violence. The absolute comic, the essence of comedy, is a feeling of superiority over oneself and over nature. According to Baudelaire, the reader or observer of caricature, an art form in vogue in the middle of the nineteenth century, realizes that the comic figure holds the power to persuade.

The whole essay “De l’Essence du rire” intimates that Baudelaire has his tongue firmly lodged in cheek as he deftly demonstrates his own caricature of the “theorist.” Baudelaire pokes fun at this genre of criticism by bringing to bear his own array of specialists, proofs and vocabulary (*phanérogamiques*) to support the argument that “laughter is a serious sign of man’s damnation.” At the end of section V of the essay Baudelaire says that a defense against his theory of laughter is useless: “[. . .] cela n’argue pas contre sa valeur; c’est une question de rapidité d’analyse” (*OC* 712). (“This does not change its value; it’s just the effect of a rapid analysis”). “De l’Essence du rire” reminds that art can comment upon itself.

A classic source of pleasure is the production or contemplation of art. Early in his career Baudelaire directed his talents mostly toward the evaluation of painting as is documented in his publications: “Les Salons” of 1845, 1846, 1859 and the similar l’Exposition universelle in 1855. In the first salon, when he was 24 years-old, the novice critic observes: “Hâtons-nous de dire, pour corriger ce que cette phrase a d’exagéré, que jamais imitation ne fut mieux dissimulée ni plus savante – il est bien permis, il est louable d’imiter ainsi. Franchement – malgré tout le plaisir qu’on a à lire dans les œuvres d’un artiste les diverses transformations de son art et les préoccupations successives de son esprit, nous regrettons un peu l’ancien Decamps” (*OC* 566). (“Let’s hurry to add, so as to correct this exaggerated statement, that never has imitation been so cleverly disguised – it is permitted, even laudable to imitate in this way. Clearly – in spite of the pleasure that one obtains by reading into an artist’s works the various transformations of the art and the successive preoccupations of the artist’s mind, we miss a bit the experienced Decamps”). Here the painter uses “diverses transformations” revealing their subjects (*préoccupations successives*) to a delighted audience (*OC* 558). Further Baudelaire remarks: “Henriquel



Dupont nous a procuré le plaisir de contempler une seconde fois le magnifique portrait de M. Bertin, par M. Ingres, le seul homme en France qui fasse vraiment des portraits” (OC 584). (“Henriquel Dupont has offered us the pleasure of contemplating for the second time the magnificent portrait of M. Bertin, by M. Ingres, the only man in France who really paints portraits”).

In the *Salon de 1846* Baudelaire describes the method of Delacroix: “Des montagnes bleues ceintes de bois font un horizon à souhait pour le plaisir des yeux ”(OC 619). (“The blue mountains rimmed by woods make for a horizon not to be missed, and a pleasure for the eyes”). The young critic is not satisfied to attribute the pleasure as only soothing the eyes, he points out the desire engendered by the works that underscores the pleasure of the painting. Baudelaire employs contrast to accentuate the pleasure of two entities: “Plaisir et douleur mêlés, amertume dont la lèvre a toujours soif! – Le plaisir est de voir représenté sous toutes ses formes le sentiment le plus important de la nature, – et la colère, de le trouver souvent si mal imité ou si sottement calomnié ” (OC 623). (“Pleasure and pain together, bitterness for which the tongue is always thirsty! – Pleasure comes from seeing the representation in its most important and natural feeling in all of its manifestations – and anger, from seeing it so poorly portrayed or so foolishly misrepresented”). The duality of pleasure mixed with pain remains part of his theory.

Baudelaire posits that from the abstraction of beauty, everyone extracts suitable portions to incorporate in their own ideal of beauty (OC 635). In his essay “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (OC 873) he speaks of a constituent of beauty, an “élément éternel, invariable” complemented by an “élément relatif à la mode, à la morale et à la passion” (OC 875). (“element related to fashion, mood, and passion”). He says that the beautiful is “souvent bizarre, violent, excessif, mais toujours poétique” (OC 912). (“often strange, violent, excessive, but always poetic”). Writing for the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire places limits on absolute beauty: “La Beauté absolue n’existe pas quoiqu’il y ait une portion éternelle et [ . . . ] transitoire.” (“Absolute beauty does not exist even though part of it is eternal and [ . . . ] transitory”). However, he puts more emphasis on the eternal portion in his verse poem, “La Beauté” (OC 94): “Car j’ai, pour fasciner ces dociles amants, / De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles: / Mes yeux,

mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles!” (“Since, to fascinate such tractable lovers / I’ve pure mirrors to make everything more beautiful / These my eyes, my eyes wide with eternal clarities!”).

Binary distinction characterizes Baudelaire’s appreciation of les Beaux-arts: “Vous voyez, mon cher ami, que je ne puis jamais considérer le choix du sujet comme indifférent, et que, malgré l’amour nécessaire qui doit féconder le plus humble morceau, je crois que le sujet fait pour l’artiste une partie du génie, et pour moi, barbare malgré tout, une partie du plaisir” (*OC* 812).<sup>62</sup> (“You see, my dear friend, that I can never consider indifferently the choice of the subject, and that, in spite of the necessary adoration that embellishes this most humble piece, I believe that the subject for the artist is a part of his genius, and for me, barbarous in spite of everything, a part of pleasure”). He judged the art works, not only on their execution but also on their subject matter. Thus for Baudelaire in the experience of art, the contents of the work count, but less than for the eternal elements included by the artist, one of which is the pleasure engendered by the choice and disposition of the subject.

The prose poem is akin to painting as both are pieced together with lines, swirls, colors for painting; letters, spaces, sentences for text. The painting is then “consumed” in one observation, whereas the text is only arrived at sentence by sentence. This is the main difference between the painting and the prose poem. It is a difference of duration of reception. Still the prose poem imitates the unified projection of the painting’s message. The typically brief prose poems are best consumed as would be a painting. For the consumer, the painting is spatial but the prose poem is temporal. The reader of prose poetry, as the viewer of a painting, but unlike the reader of a prose paragraph, is encouraged to interpret more than what is composed in the sentences. These affinities with the beaux arts adds to the pleasure of prose poems. The prose poem has evolved as a written genre able to imitate the message of painting and to a lesser extent, that of music.

Given that the prose poems of Baudelaire resemble paintings in their delivery of information, a comparison of the functioning of the signifier, signified and sign reiterates from another angle, the

<sup>62</sup> *Salon de 1859* part VIII, “Le Paysage.”

pleasure of the text. The prose poem and painting are both suggestive works unlike ordinary prose that recounts and delineates without “evoking” and “suggesting” which is the province of painting and poetry. Since language is an aspect of the brain’s primary function, understanding, it is inevitably a pleasant activity to conceive, understand and communicate. The prose poem taps into this model and adds the additional innate pleasure that one likewise perceives in viewing a painting, the more direct, visceral pleasure making both arts prone to pleasure.

Productive pleasure meant for Baudelaire working steadily and arriving at a finished product. He repeats this at the end of his *lettre programme*: “Mais qui ne peut qu’humilier profondément un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d’accomplir juste ce qu’il a projeté de faire?” (“But which can only deeply humiliate a mind that considers as the poet’s greatest honor to execute exactly what he planned to do?”) The pleasure for Baudelaire was accomplishing a project without his manic swoons or long periods of lassitude. The product should show signs of subjective and eternal beauty. The prose poem group *nocturne* is exemplary in this regard. Their form and content, suspension of self, surprise, risk, rhythm, and reverie serve Baudelaire’s definition of the pleasure of the text.

Plato’s Socrates noted that pleasure is only experienced as a reaction to pain (or to boredom or to some other displeasure). Kant said that beauty pleases; pleasure gratifies; goodness brings approval. For Baudelaire, the inheritor of this framework, imagination was the key to his art and to his pleasure. He highlighted the duality of pleasure and pain. In his definition of pleasure he acknowledged the pleasure of working his craft day to day. He felt that the path to achieving this pleasure was not via drugs or intoxicants but via solitude, the dream and the search for beauty. His experience led him indirectly to his definitions of the prose poem and for the pleasure of the text. Roland Barthes goes directly on his quest to describe what causes pleasure for the reader of a text.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT ACCORDING TO BARTHES

While Barthes rarely mentions Baudelaire explicitly in his writings<sup>63</sup> a parallel reading of the prose poems and *Le Plaisir du texte* reveals a theoretical and esthetic convergence between the two authors. Baudelaire exposes his criteria for pleasure in his correspondence and his literary works. Barthes addresses the subject directly in a book. Baudelaire has enumerated his principal points of pleasure, both personal and literary, which will intersect in some instances Barthes's ideas. Baudelaire and Barthes concur that a diminution of the ego is a path to pleasure. The *étonnement* and *jeu* indicated by Baudelaire are analogous to brisk turns in grammatical structure announced by Barthes. Both authors find pleasure in a text's rhythm and music – concepts that pertain to the sound and the timing of written composition. Somewhat curiously, both writers extoll the dream as being a special pathway toward the pleasure of the text. More paradoxically Barthes speaks of a text that desires the reader and finds this too pleasurable. He discusses in detail the pleasure at the margins and the edges of the text. And then there is simply writing aloud that produces pleasure. Barthes calls his investigation a compilation of subtle human facets, sayings, trial balloons and nudges in search of an invisible design.<sup>64</sup>

Barthes makes the distinction (that he continues to elaborate) plaisir / jouissance on the second page of his book. His text as textile metaphor is useful in visualizing the terms he uses to locate pleasure in the text, at the: “edge, seam, fault, flaw, cut, deflation, dissolve” are common to his discussion. In addition to the dichotomy plaisir / jouissance, Barthes promotes other dualities: the writerly / readerly

<sup>63</sup> In *Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture* Barthes comments on Théophile Gautier, a close friend of Baudelaire, and remarks: “Cette admirable poésie en prose de Baudelaire tenait dans une extraordinaire forme travaillée située sans doute hors du programme de pragmatisme de l'activité bourgeoise” (*Degré* 57). (“Baudelaire's admirable prose poetry always consisted of an extraordinary formal precision and situated itself doubtless, outside of practical bourgeois activity”).

<sup>64</sup> From Richard Howard's introduction to Richard Miller's translation of *Le Plaisir du texte*.

texts and the *nouveau roman* versus the classical text are two. The term pleasure naturally evokes sensual or erotic connotations that should be considered. Barthes never completely cut his early structuralist roots, so echoes of Saussure and Kristeva remain to be heard in any discussion of Barthes. Baudelaire's prose poems are used as examples to illustrate the Barthesian pleasurable points. All of these mentions will lead towards a list of Barthes's features of a pleasurable text.

The format of Roland Barthes's 105-page *Le Plaisir du texte* published in 1973 is like much of Baudelaire's poetry: enigmatic. There are no chapter headings inside the book, yet 46 sections are named in the Table in quasi-alphabetical order. The body of the text itself signals section breaks with only this diacritical sign \*

\* \*

Scanning the titles of the sections we find: Affirmation, Bords, Émotion, Guerre, Nihilisme, Quotidien, Rêve, Voix, among others. It is difficult to guess what logic Barthes uses in ordering his thought alphabetically or nearly so, as the headings are dominated by affective terms such as Émotion (13), Ennui (14), or Peur (32); political ones as in Communauté (7), Droite (12), or Résistances (39) and self-referential ones as in Commentaire (9), Dire (11), or Phrase (33). But other categories are also used, and even the apparent alphabetical order is inexact, for Commentaire follows Communauté and Corps.

A fruitful place to begin studying Barthes's ideas is with the back cover of the edition. Here an inscrutable voice launches the reasoning for writing *Le Plaisir du texte*: "Que jouissons-nous du texte? Cette question, il faut la poser, ne serait-ce que pour une raison tactique: il faut affirmer le plaisir du texte contre les indifférences de la science et le puritanisme de l'analyse idéologique; il faut affirmer la jouissance du texte contre l'aplatissement de la littérature à son simple agrément." ("What do we enjoy about the text? We must ask this question, even if for only a tactical reason: we must affirm the pleasure

of the text against the indifference of science and self-righteous ideological analysis; we must affirm the joy of the text against the reduction of literature to simple fondness”).<sup>65</sup>

A dictionary reminds that pleasure is “an agreeable feeling of satisfaction.” Socrates signaled the necessary duality of pleasure – that which follows or is in contrast to some onerous or painful situation. Freud proposed the pleasure principle where human behavior is generated from the desire for comfort and pleasure or from a need to avoid displeasure. He later supplemented this theory with the death drive, which, though it seems to be the exact opposite, actually works with the pleasure principle to explain human behavior. Beyond Socrates and Freud, Barthes offers his take on what we do when we enjoy a literary work and he shows how this joy may be extended. He does not present these ideas outright but hints, alludes, intimates and suggests the tenets and their basis. He investigates texts and their nuances closely while ferreting out and proposing his criteria.

Barthes sees in the text a variety of patterns that bring pleasure. In the opening pages of his book he warns that the quest to define “the pleasure of the text” will not function in a logical, rational fashion, because logic and reason are not productive of pleasure. The objective of explaining what we do when we enjoy a text is enveloped in feeling and emotion. He begins with this denial of rationalism: “Le plaisir du texte: tel le simulateur de Bacon, il peut dire: *ne jamais s’excuser, ne jamais s’expliquer*. Il ne nie jamais rien: ‘Je détournerai mon regard, ce sera désormais ma seule négation.’” (“The pleasure of the text: like Bacon’s simulator, it can say: *never apologize, never explain*. It never denies anything: ‘I shall look away, that will henceforth be my sole negation’”) (*Plaisir* 9). Pleasure (an estimation of value) cannot count on logic (an estimation of truth).

Understanding a text is for most, if not for everyone, the first criterion for pleasure. Barthes, however, does not mention *compréhension* in the entire book and only at section 42 does *Signifiance* appear; this section is all of two lines in length. Translated by Miller as “significance,” it is nonetheless

<sup>65</sup> The quotation is not to be found in the body of the text, yet is attributed to Barthes by the editors of *Seuil* for its original *édition brochée*. It disappeared in subsequent printings but remains a good summary of the theme.

the only section that approaches this ground-zero for pleasure. “What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced” (*Pleasure* 61). Understanding is not first on Barthes’s list because it not only depends on logic; it is logic. Just prior to discriminating plaisir / jouissance, Barthes calls the pleasurable text, “a sanctioned Babel,” (*Pleasure* 4) or a community of languages working side by side. Barthes gives us an opening nudge toward the framing idea of community as important to the pleasure of the text.

In following Barthes’s exploration, the idea of the text as woven cloth supposes various strands of a work criss-crossing one another: words, sentences, paragraphs, figures of speech, accelerations, pauses, exclamation, tonal variations and so forth. The fashion in which these threads interlace determine meaning, still important if sensually produced. The textual fabric is thus a coordinated maze of threads. To interpret it Barthes speaks of folding the text upon itself, an act that places new forms and new functions in contact, even if these vary from the original unfolded text. Unlike a finished piece of cloth the textual model of literature is the subject of continued analysis, re-sizing and re-weaving; simply put, an infinitely modifiable cloth. Neologism represents one way that language can be newly woven into a work.

Texts are printed in the middle of the page typically with blank margins surrounding. If printed on “rag” paper a close-up view reveals the threads of the text upon which the words are applied. In section four of *Le Plaisir du text*, entitled “Bords” (Edges), Barthes describes the margin of the text as a locus of pleasure: it is the “lieu d’une perte, la faille, la coupure, la déflation, le fading qui saisit le sujet au cœur de la jouissance” (*Plaisir* 15). (“The site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the center of bliss”). When a text is folded certain sentences are blocked off from others even as new patterns develop.

With the fabric folded and edges emphasizing signifiers, the difference between the two opposing faces is accentuated and becomes a source of pleasure. In *S/Z* Barthes described “fading” (similar to the just-mentioned dissolve) as a consequence of the plurality of the text (Mortimer 62) that is, a narrative voice fades in and out of a text and as the reader’s attention moves with this fading he is forced to search

for changing anchors of interest. The search for this voice and concurrent points of concentration is pleasurable for the mind, as its natural function is to explore and explain.

The reader passes from one voice to another and in so doing adds new interpretations to the mix: “L’alternance est celle de deux plaisirs en état de surenchérissement; l’autre bord, c’est l’autre bonheur” (*Plaisir* 17). (“The alternation is that of two pleasures in a state of competition; the other edge is the other delight”). Mental notes made in the margin by a reader offer a way to rewrite the text, a pleasurable activity. A close-up view reveals exquisite detail and a hierarchical organization, while a more distant view shows a cloth that can adapt to a variety of folds but can also be the source of images on its surface that tell some story. From a distance the text looks smooth, coordinated, and chronological. The understanding available from the distant view is pleasurable. The bliss of a more close-up view is unusual; it is a pleasure of the writing and not entirely of the story. Moving closer to the text (fabric) we perceive figures of speech, emotions, rhythms or patterns of words, even aural components. So the feel and the view of the pleasurable text reveals itself from a complementary point of departure, not from addressing the text but from the text addressing the reader.

The producer, the weaver of the text must seek the reader (*Plaisir* 11). The writer must “seduce” (“draguer” is the French verb used) him, “sans savoir où il est.” “Ce n’est pas la ‘personne’ de l’autre qui m’est nécessaire, c’est l’espace: la possibilité d’une dialectique du désir, d’une imprévision de la jouissance. (“It is not the person of the other that I need, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectic of desire, an unpredictability of bliss”). Barthes clarifies that it is not the writer seeking to seduce the reader (*Plaisir* 10) but it is the attitude of pleasure created in the writer who adopts an attitude of seeking to please an unknown reader who will partake of the writing – the resulting literary discussion will induce a pleasurable space. The more intense bliss of the text is experienced within the text’s internal actions: elaborating mystery, explaining intrigue; using a present participle here, a gerund there; introduce this idea here, subtract one there. The opportunity of participating in this “dialectic of desire” is why a text carries pleasure. A text that desires the reader is not the same as a text about desire. As human nature includes hope, here the chance of pleasurable literary discourse guarantees Barthes’s pleasure.



Barthes's subversiveness appears with his critique of the traditional novel and his appreciation of sardonic writers like Sade. For Barthes, the reading of Sade reveals the pleasure of the text as would a work of needlepoint. Underneath the woven area is a mass of jumbled, criss-crossed yarns (the salacious tales); but on top, is the unified work, a neatly formed image (the exquisite prose of Sade). Some readers of Sade get tangled in the sex and depravity, but others (Barthes) take pleasure in the elegant writing. "Le plaisir de la lecture vient évidemment de certaines ruptures (ou de certaines collisions): des codes antipathiques [le noble et le trivial, par exemple] entrent en contact" (*Plaisir* 14). ("The pleasure of reading him clearly proceeds from certain breaks: antipathetic codes [the noble and the trivial, for example] enter into contact"). For example, in collisions of pornographic messages written with *Bon Usage* styling (as with Sade) two normally incongruous partners get together, a phenomenon Barthes calls "redistribution of the language." He defines forceful contrasts in a text as sites of pleasure, just as Baudelaire did with his "prose assez heurtée." Pleasure-producing figures of speech can be experienced in modern writing such as Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie*. Here the author uses tmesis in the form of a cinematic imposture that helps describe settings. Each change of scene is simply marked by: "Maintenant [ . . . ]," analogous to a stage director's commands of: "Take one!" or "Quiet on the set!" The changes of scene take on new tenor when it is learned that the story is arranged as a film production and that the author is not only a novelist but a screen-writer.

Another author cited by Barthes as a model for the modern, and thus pleasurable text, is his longtime associate, Philippe Sollers and specifically his translation of Severo Sarduy's *Cobra* (1972): "La langue se reconstruit ailleurs par le flux pressé de tous les plaisirs de langage [ . . . ] tous les signifiants sont là et chacun fait mouche" (*Plaisir* 17). ("Language reconstructs itself elsewhere under the teeming flux of every kind of linguistic pleasure [ . . . ] all the signifiers are here and each scores a hit"). In Sollers's own ostensible history of law, *Lois* (1972) the signifiers come in astonishing variety: "a cubic structure; appearances by Rabelais, Joyce, Shakespeare, Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Roland; other poets, dialecticians, and revolutionaries; numerous passages written in decasyllable in an attempt to evoke the ambiance of *la chanson de geste*; neologism such as *unifrèsitaires* and *cacadémiciens*; a long list of

contemporaries; and passages in Spanish, Greek, Italian, Chinese, Latin, English and German” (Cagnon 671). These are examples of how a modern text produces pleasure; as long as the reader approaches it, as Cagnon cautions, with a knowing abstract expectation.

In the same vein as Sollers, Robbe-Grillet produces writerly novels where plot often lacks, description abounds, and puzzles invite.<sup>66</sup> Barthes says that the text of bliss reveals structuration instead of structure. The logical, chronological plot that is expected of readerly texts does not exist in the *nouveau roman*. The pleasure is in the use of detailed imagery. Robbe-Grillet may devote three pages to a description of the layout of furniture in a room, the angles of incoming light or how insects appear on the walls, instead of investing the time on the plot of character intentions. The emphasis is on language instead of plot. In a like manner impressionistic paintings and their modern successors call for a writerly approach, as it is up to the viewer to add context and background in order to interpret the still image. The post-impressionist painting *Luxe, calme, et volupté* by Matisse (1869-1954) (Appendix C) invites the viewer to create and interpret the swirls, lines, and colors in the same manner as reading a writerly text.

Barthes writes: “Le plaisir de texte n’est pas forcément celui qui relate des plaisirs, le texte de jouissance n’est jamais celui qui raconte une jouissance [. . .] la faille des deux bords, l’interstice de la jouissance, se produit dans le volume des langages, dans l’énonciation, non dans la suite des énoncés (*Plaisir* 88, 23). (“The text of pleasure is not necessarily the text that recounts pleasures; the text of bliss is never the text that recounts the kind of bliss afforded literally by an ejaculation [. . .] the seam of two edges, the interstice of bliss, occurs in the volume of the languages, in the uttering, not in the sequence of utterances”). The keys here are the primal “utterances” and the “volume” of the languages. The basic sounds of language are joyful: Barthes is ecstatic to hear the language in action. The word “volume” signifies the intensity of sound, the number of languages and also the space “from the inside” of the

<sup>66</sup> As in the novel *Djinn* where the sonorities of *Jean*, *Jeanne* and *Djinn* depend on the language of orientation.

language. Pleasure lies in the workings (the sounds and the functioning) of the language, rather than the story told.

The path to pleasure is not sure. Even as the miracle of language evokes pleasurable sensations the amount of uncertainty associated with any given textual encounter works against the pleasure innate in the fabric. Still, there is proof claims Barthes, that the text desires the reader; it is the writing itself: “L’écriture est ceci: la science des jouissances du langage, son kâmasūtra (de cette science, il n’y a qu’un traité: l’écriture elle-même) (*Plaisir* 14).” (“Writing is: the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra [this science has but one treatise: writing itself]”). Writing is based on the human capacity to communicate. This desire is analogous to permanent curiosity; we feel pleasure in the *a priori* state that communication is possible. “The knowledge of language bliss” is partly learned but partly innate.

Barthes separates two intensities of pleasure, *plaisir* and *jouissance*. Richard Howard, who wrote the preface to the translation, notes that French language possesses a vocabulary that denotes intense pleasure, whereas English uses metaphor taken from other fields. “Climax, coming, rapture, bliss” are among the terms English hijacks to deal with what the French simply call *jouissance*. Whatever the terms used, Barthes proposes two distinct degrees of pleasure. Here are some of his contrasts:

Table 4: Plaisir v. Jouissance

<u>page</u>	<u>plaisir</u>	<u>jouissance</u>
17	receptive	productive
25	the pleasurable text <i>contents</i>	the text of <i>jouissance</i> <i>disturbs</i>
26	pleasure finds “ego”	<i>jouissance</i> loses “ego”
33	happiness	dizziness from bliss
36	describable	indescribable
65	reading of the classics	reading of the <i>nouveau roman</i>
99	cultural	non-cultural

Barthes argues to consider *plaisir* as typical pleasure – a state of being, and *jouissance* as rapture – an action (though the term bliss is often used). In his preface to the English version of *Le Plaisir du texte*, Howard recalls terms used by previous cultures struggling to adequately express the concept. A

Bible translated by Miller called it “knowing;” the Stuarts labeled it “dying;” the Victorians dubbed it “spending;” and we call it “coming” (*Pleasure* vi). Even though the two terms are of the same substance they remain in a push-pull relationship, in itself a precursor to the pleasure of the text. A receptive text exemplifies the readerly text, where once written, it is read for what is there and no more. Its opposite, is the writerly or productive text, where once written, it demands to be modified by the reader to produce new meanings. Sollers has composed many a writerly text where he invents new terms, practically painting with words without attempting to develop a plot. He leaves the work open for input, in which case the reader has room to define and incorporate the new terms as wished.

Pleasurable reading is contented while *jouissance* upsets the status quo (the being / action split). A traditional text may well tell an enjoyable story, a text of bliss jolts the reader into new awareness. Baudelaire mentions in his list of pleasure’s causal factors, the reduction of ego. Barthes agrees that the satisfied ego is pleasurable, but further claims that reduction of all-consuming ego can open the door to bliss. Thus, happiness is pleasant, but bliss makes one dizzy and as Table 4 adds, bliss is inexpressible. In opposing “cultural” to “non-cultural” Barthes implies that *plaisir* is a necessary thread in perpetuating society while *jouissance* is symbolic of invention and deviation. *Jouissance* is thus the source of social upheaval that precedes progress.

Excepting the opposition *plaisir* / *jouissance*, Barthes’s approach to literary pleasure is mostly outlined from the receptive point of view. In other words, he discusses how the reader receives pleasure but not how a writer produces it; (though this other framework is not ignored). Following the order in *Le Plaisir du texte*, one of Barthes early aphorisms is: “Le vieux mythe biblique se retourne, la confusion des langues n’est plus une punition, le sujet accède à la jouissance par la cohabitation des langages, qui travaillent côte à côte: le texte de plaisir.” (*Plaisir* 10). (“Thus the Biblical myth is reversed, the confusion of tongues is no longer a punishment, the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages working side by side: the text of pleasure”). The pleasure of the text should be a communal art; the conception, composing, and interpretation should all have group or plural input.

The effort to make sense of a text is motivated by pleasure. According to Nietzsche (as quoted by Barthes): “C’est l’interprétation elle-même, forme de la volonté de puissance, qui existe (non comme un “être,” mais comme un processus, un devenir), en tant que passion (*Plaisir* 98). (“It is the interpretation itself, a form of the will to power, which exists [not as ‘being’ but as a process, a becoming], as passion”). Thus according to Nietzsche, one of Barthes’s favorite sources, it is not exclusively understanding of a text that brings pleasure but the exercise, the on-going process of interpreting. This concept “will-to-power,” though not normally considered an emotion has emotional resonance just like happiness, sadness, or anger in that it is not the result of being, but an on-going effort to be. Nietzsche and Barthes say that reading, a most sacred intellectual task, contains a significant emotional determinant; logic met with emotion results in pleasure.

Flaubert further developed the theory of pleasure from textual rupture that Barthes highlights on the sentence-level: “Avec Flaubert, la rupture n’est plus exceptionnelle, sporadique, brillante, sertie dans la matière vile d’un énoncé courant: il n’y a plus de langue en deçà de ces figures [ce qui veut dire, en un autre sens: il n’y a plus que la langue]; une asyndète généralisée saisit toute l’énonciation, en sorte que ce discours très lisible est en sous main l’un des plus fous qu’on puisse imaginer” (*Plaisir* 18). (“With Flaubert, the rupture is no longer exceptional, sporadic, brilliant, encrusted in the vile way of a modern phrase: there is no more language on this side of the figures [or, in another way: all that’s there is the language]: a generalized asyndeton seizes every expression so that this very readable discourse is hidden in one of the wildest ways you could imagine”). Flaubert was the first important writer to manipulate the text in the modern fashion that pleases Barthes. His stories are constructed with generalized asyndeton, where breaks are not at the sentence-level but at the narrative-level. In his masterwork *Madame Bovary* the story is actually very traditional – impetuosity, adultery, tragedy. But as Barthes says: “All that’s there is language,” in asyndetonic form. At the narrative level the conjunctive items are missing, that would normally have attached Homais’s story with Emma’s. This absence of conjunctive links attracts the mind into reflection. For Barthes, just as leaving out conjunctions in sentences projects a forceful

description, so does Flaubert leaving out expected liaisons between elements of the story, forcing the reader to supply them, thereby creating a pleasurable read.

Barthes cites Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, as a model of pleasurable description, a hallmark of the modern text. He finds pleasure in sentences such as: "Des nappes, des draps, des serviettes pendaient verticalement, attachés par des fiches de bois à des cordes tendues" (*Plaisir* 44). ("Cloths, sheets, napkins were hanging vertically, attached by wooden clothespins to taut lines"). This is not just a product of Flaubert's editorial precision, but a changing of codes; codes that for Barthes come from many directions: historical, connotative, ideological, and corporal. Like various weavers approaching their work, the codes angle toward the text. Any message can employ multiple codes in order to express varied meanings. A speaker uses language, gesture, intonation, visuals, even attire in sending messages.

In defining the prose poem Baudelaire posits writing that is "assez souple et assez heurtée" (flexible and contrastive) evoking the same effect for the text as ruptures do for Barthes. Supple and contrastive language provoke, in contrasting fashion, pleasure in the text. This type of creative usage is what Barthes calls for at the margins of the text. The mind must entertain this novelty and posit relations.

According to Barthes readerly texts use tropes of pleasure in weakened form: "Pourtant le récit le plus classique, un roman de Zola, de Balzac, de Dickens, de Tolstoï porte en lui une sorte de tmèse affaiblie" (*Plaisir* 20) ("Yet the most classical narrative [a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy] bears within it a sort of diluted tmesis"). Barthes explains that tmesis opposes what is necessary knowledge of the story to what is unnecessary. Now, by folding over the text the reader brings new portions of the composition into contact with each other creating weakened tmesis. Barthes notes the same passages of a novel are never read the second or third time around, but those parts that are perceived in an *a priori* fashion as *ennuyeux*, are skipped (*Plaisir* 21). Such episodic reading produces an anodyne tmesis. Since we do not read every word for comprehension anyway, the juxtaposition of varying patterns should not harm, and may in fact add to the enjoyment of the text. The source of pleasure is not in the content read, but in the breaks that stimulate the reader's attention. Since the author cannot possibly

describe every detail of reality, artistry lies in choosing what is left out of the text – these generalized parataxes.

In Baudelaire's "Le Joueur généreux" XXIX one finds an example of a pleasant textual break. The narrator brushes up against one of many people in the crowded streets. This "Être" is capitalized presumably because of elevated status. The Being, described as "mystérieux," is nonetheless someone whom the narrator has forever desired to know, and moreover the narrator already recognizes Him. This sort of peripeteia calls the reader to attention. Pleasure results from not knowing details and letting the imagination fill in gaps as the poem unfolds. The imagination performs its natural activity of creation and the intellect performs its natural activity of matching "input with categories," as Kant calls it.

The first prose poem in Baudelaire's collection, "L'Étranger" exemplifies asyndeton by phrases that lacks connectors. "Dis? ton père, ta mère, ta sœur, ou ton frère [. . .] J'aime les nuages ... les nuages qui passent ... là-bas ... là-bas ... les merveilleux nuages!" (Say? your father, your mother, your sister, or your brother? [. . .] I love clouds...drifting clouds...there...over there...marvelous clouds"). These intervals resemble those of spoken language and thus are perceived as more lively than strictly grammatical sentences as spoken language offers a pleasurable ease of expression.

Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage" XVIII exhibits anacoluthon or an abrupt shift from one grammatical construction to another. The last part of the second paragraph closes off with: "[. . .] où le bonheur est marié au silence; où la cuisine elle-même est poétique, grasse et excitante à la fois; où tout vous ressemble, mon cher ange." ("[. . .] where happiness is wedded to silence; where even cooking is poetic, both luxurious and arousing; where everything resembles you, my dear angel"). The opening sentence of the third paragraph continues: "*Tu* connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s'empare de nous dans les froides misères, cette nostalgie du pays qu'on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité?" ("Do you feel that feverish ailment seizing us in our stark affliction, that longing for unheard-of realms, that anguish of curiosity?").

In the first sentence the poet's "cher ange" is *vous*, in the second it is *Tu*. This figure strikes the reader through a sharp turn away from expected usage, in fact an error in grammatical terms. The

circumstance seeks explanation. In Claude Pichois's view the poet is citing his own reading of a poem by Théophile Gautier, "La Chanson de Mignon"<sup>67</sup> where there is a line: "Ah! si tu étais le poète, et si j'étais ta Mignon, aimée et protégée toujours tendre, toujours soumise, mais toujours rêveuse et désireuse, je te dirais, à toi, mon poète et mon ami: 'Tu connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s'empare de nous dans les froides misères [. . .]'" Baudelaire's narrator addresses his partner as *vous* and then recites the line from Gautier which produces an abrupt "tutoiement."<sup>68</sup> The poet adopts this familiar address as shown in the last paragraph (11) of the poem. The remainder of the poem employs the familiar form. This little internal mystery provokes the reader to slow down and reflect on the situation, a formula for pleasure according to Barthes.

This excerpt from the prose poem "Les Projets" XXIV, the last of the *poèmes nocturnes*, offers an example of the "edge" of a folded text.

Et en rentrant seul chez lui, à cette heure où les conseils de la Sagesse ne sont plus étouffés par les bourdonnements de la vie extérieur, il se dit: "J'ai eu aujourd'hui, en rêve, trois domiciles où j'ai trouvé un égal plaisir. Pourquoi contraindre mon corps à changer de place, puisque mon âme voyage si lestement? Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?" (OC 310).

And returning home alone, at that hour when Wisdom's advice is no longer stifled by the buzzings of the exterior life, he said to himself, "Today, in dream, I had three domiciles where I found equal pleasure. Why force my body to change location, when my soul travels so nimbly? And what good is it to carry out plans, since planning itself is a sufficient delight?"

This excerpt is made up of one declarative sentence then two successive questions. The pleasure of the text becomes accessible in the *faille* of the fabric when it is folded together, that is, when the reader produces other interpretations. Folding the text changes the order of the three elements (first question to

<sup>67</sup> [http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/La\\_Chanson\\_de\\_Mignon](http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/La_Chanson_de_Mignon)

<sup>68</sup> According to Henri Lemaitre, Baudelaire used the reference to "Mignon" in the 1857 and 1861 versions of the poem before dropping it in 1862, leaving us with the "vous"–"tu" dichotomy.



lead position, for example) and offers a new emphasis: question, statement, question. In general, anacoluthon manifests itself in extreme brevity and sharpness, while asyndeton profiles the beginning and ending of an announcement. Tmesis has the tendency to form new terms, pleasurable ones. The pleasure of this text is found in exploring this newly revealed detail when it is folded upon itself. Asyndeton, anacoluthon and tmesis do not change meaning but are ways of adding emotion, energy or other non-signifying pleasures to the text. Asyndeton produces force in expression; anacoluthon imitates natural pauses that occur in conversation as does tmesis where we often reorder and insert words unexpectedly.

Barthes's treatment of adjectives as purveyors of pleasure is ambiguous says Mortimer, "partly because Barthes has written as two words, *la mainmise*, the taking of power or domination" (Mortimer 74). Barthes's unusual construction signifies a singular (*la main*) somehow orchestrated (*mise*) into action by adjectives: "Adjectifs – qui sont ces portes du langage par où l'idéologie et l'imaginaire pénètrent à grands flots" (*Plaisir* 25). ("Adjectives – which are those doors of language through which the ideological and the imaginary come flowing in"). These adjectival doors act to limit flow into the text of the imaginary or ideological. Typically Barthes expresses disdain when using the term ideology, especially if related to *doxa*, but to allow measured "idéologique et imaginaire" entry into the text would, on balance be a positive occurrence. The pleasurable employment of adjectives rests on Barthes own definition of language's multiplicity. The writerly text invites multiple interpretations. The following linguistic features are not, according to Barthes, stable and straight-forward: the monad (a spiritual element passing into the material); a word having one fixed meaning; the learned relations language builds for us. These constructs of language are no more solid than the imagination. Our ordained subject / object form is only a construct (*Plaisir* 55). All of this implies that Barthes's particular orthography of *la main mise* signifies adjectives as producing pleasure in the text just as they can alternately halt pleasure by politicizing nouns or ranging beyond description.

On the side of ideological usage, sometimes adjectives are employed as pat phrases such as: maniac driver, party girl, or old man where the adjectives get stuck in *doxa* and lose their imaginative

power. Manipulation of adjectives that not only describe, but represent creative or imagined elements add to pleasure. “New” writing (le nouveau roman) emphasized by Barthes, releases the imaginary to come flowing into the text. Here is a passage from *Le Voyeur* de Robbe-Grillet: “La scène, un long moment, demeure inanimée et silencieuse. Puis on entend de nouveau les mots: ‘Tu dors’? prononcés par la voix grave et profonde, un peu chantante, qui semble cacher on ne sait quelle menace”(Robbe-Grillet 95). (“For a long moment the scene remained inanimate and quiet. Then again one hears the words: ‘Are you asleep’?” pronounced by a serious and deep voice, a bit sing-songy, that seems to hide it’s impossible to say what threat”). The bedtime scene is simple, without much action, yet the imaginary is free to work on what is said in the brief citation. A “serious” and “deep” voice seems incongruous with “sing-songy,” – incongruity is pleasurable for the reader who questions the motives of this “voice.” And the narrator states explicitly that in this same voice there is some veiled threat, “on ne sait quelle menace.” The “portes du language” limit the quantity but augment the force of what they qualify.

Given that Robbe-Grillet exemplifies the pleasurable modern text emphasized by Barthes it is intriguing to note the stylistic similarity between Robbe-Grillet and Baudelaire. The first excerpt is from Baudelaire (“L’Invitation au voyage”): “Les meubles sont vastes, curieux, bizarres, armés de serrures et de secrets comme des âmes raffinées. Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoffes, l’orfèvrerie, la faïence y jouent pour les yeux une symphonie muette et mystérieuse; et de toutes choses, de tous les coins, des fissures des tiroirs et des plis des étoffes s’échappe un parfum singulier, un revenez-y de Sumatra” (OC 306). (The furniture is huge, unusual, weird, armed with locks and hiding places like refined souls. The mirrors, the metals, the fabrics, the silver, and the porcelain play a silent and secretive symphony for the eyes. And a remarkable aroma escapes from everything, from every corner, from the splits in drawers and the creases of fabrics, a fragrant spirit from Sumatra”).

Compare this excerpt with one from Robbe-Grillet’s *Le Voyeur*: “Mathias se souvint alors qu’une vieille habitude de l’île consistait à mettre des carreaux, et non du plancher, aux pièces les plus belles de la maison – plutôt d’ailleurs pour la salle à manger, ou le salon, que dans une chambre à coucher. Celle-ci, pourtant, ne laissait aucun doute sur la destination: un lit vaste et bas occupait un des angles, son grand

côté disposé le long du mur faisait face à la porte” (R-G 81). (“Mathias then remembered that an old island custom consisted of flooring with tiles instead of with regular wood, the prettiest rooms of the house, and the same applied to the breakfast room and living room, as for the bedrooms. However this room, left no doubt about its purpose: a huge, low bed occupied one of the corners, its longer side occupying the wall facing the doorway”).

Both authors share an intimate approach to description. Both authors move the reader from a room-size view to a zoomed-in, interior perspective. Baudelaire speaks of locks hiding secrets, cloths, and silver, reducing the point of view in the last sentence to the very cracks in the drawers and the folds in the cloths. What starts as an intimate perspective of a room ends up at magnifying-glass level. Robbe-Grillet reduces his perspective in a similar manner, starting at room-level, but instead of reducing the objects viewed, he details exactly their physical disposition with a sort of designer’s acumen. The movement of the two texts is the same: broad becomes precise, panorama becomes detail, large becomes small; mid-twentieth imitates mid-nineteenth century. Flaubert sets up an outdoor scene with similar structure for the opening of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881): “Au delà du canal, entre les maisons que séparent des chantiers le grand ciel pur se découpait en plaques d’outremer, et sous la réverbération du soleil, les façades blanches, les toits d’ardoises, les quais de granit éblouissaient.” (“Beyond the canal, between the houses and the work yard the enormous pure sky set itself off like exotic overseas settings, and under this intense sunshine, the white walls, the roof tiles, the granite river walk gleamed”). Flaubert and Robbe-Grillet, models for Barthes’s pleasure of the text, write with striking similarity, lines that echo Baudelaire’s “L’Invitation au voyage.”

Art imitates reality but also surpasses it says the poet in “L’Invitation au voyage”: “supérieur aux autres, comme l’art est à la nature” (“superior to others, as Art is to Nature”). Baudelaire’s descriptions outperform reality: “Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes et par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en de nombreux compartiments” (OC 298), (“The setting suns, so richly tinting the dining room or the salon, sift through beautiful fabrics or through tall crafted windows divided into many leaded panes”). For Robbe-Grillet the

artifact of pleasure is describing in detail, specifying the ordinary: “Plutôt d’ailleurs pour la salle à manger, ou le salon, que dans une chambre à coucher” (“And the same applied to the breakfast room, and the living room, as for the bedrooms”). Robbe-Grillet’s description is more narrative and less poetic: “lit vaste et bas occupait un des angles, [. . .] le long du mur faisait face à la porte” speaks in geometric terms leading to a meticulous yet scientific or technical effect. Baudelaire’s description speaks in terms beyond the intellect: “des âmes raffinées [...] une symphonie muette [...] un parfum singulier,” thus effecting a dreamlike, sensual atmosphere. Together with Flaubert, all three writers exploit Barthes’s concept of the “artefact lexicographique” (*Plaisir* 45) (“the artifact of making meaning”) by the reproduction of artistic pleasure. It is not this particular description that Barthes prefers but the overall impression one can expect from the new, based on this artifact. An artifact is a small sample or remnant of a larger structure. The artifact (this change of code) allows the reader the pleasure of manipulating shifting codes.

Baudelaire is especially adept with his handling of adjectives. Among all of his stylistic tools, the choice and placement of adjectives stands out for him. This line from “L’Invitation au voyage” exemplifies his adjectival brio: “Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia, c’est là, n’est-ce pas, dans ce beau pays si calme et si rêveur, qu’il faudrait aller vivre et fleurir?” (*OC* 298). (“Incomparable flower, rediscovered tulip, allegorical dahlia, isn’t it there, to that beautiful land, so quiet and so dreamy, that we must go to live and flourish?”). Any enumeration insists that the reader mentally hold on to the items because a list necessarily associates its members. In the citation all the items have linguistic connotations: *incomparable* with simile, *retrouvée* with knowledge, and *allégorique* with allegory. The adjective-noun bond is strengthened when each adjective repeats a prominent sound found in the preceding word, *r* and *r*, *t* and *t*, then *a* and *a*. As Barthes points out, this judicious placement of adjectives opens up the imagination.

Barthes’s theory of adjectives as, “doors of the language by which pass ideology and imagination,” affect other myths, beliefs, or imaginative ideas. Baudelaire’s placement of adjectives has a pleasurable, rhythmic effect. Barthes is straight-forward in supporting this pleasure: “la répétition engendrait elle-même la jouissance” (*Plaisir* 67) (“repetition itself creates bliss”). In Baudelairian verse

both rhyme and meter necessarily repeat. The verses have a set number of syllables and an ordered rhyme pattern. From the verse poem “Parfum exotique” XXII: “Quand les deux yeux fermés, en un soir chaud d’automne, / Je respire l’odeur de ton sein chaleureux, / Je vois se dérouler des rivages heureux / Qu’éblouissent les feux d’un soleil monotone.” (“When both eyes shut, a mild autumn evening, I inhale the scent of your warm breast, I see happy beaches unfold in the dazzling fires of a steadfast sun”). Being a traditional sonnet the poem consists of fourteen verses all of which are divided into two hémistiches. The pattern of rhyme *a b b a* persists into the second stanza. Thus repetitious meter and rhyme are pleasurable attributes. In prose poetry, the regularities of repetition are less evident. Barthes composes an eclectic list of life’s rhythmic sounds; he calls them “ethnographic examples”: “obsessive rhythms, incantatory music, litanies, rites, and Buddhist nembutsu.” However, Barthes warns that endless repetition is to “enter into loss, into the zero of the signified” (*Pleasure* 41). The nembutsu Barthes mentions pertains to the height and breadth of Buddhist meditation and a balance between the two dimensions. Just as moderation in repetition brings joy to the text, overdone repetition eliminates the signified.

The pleasure of music and the pleasure of the reading voice are related, as both are auditory. In his final section *Voix* (46) Barthes employs the phrase: l’écriture à haute voix, (“writing aloud”) a concept used in antique theater for communicating nuances of the performance. This is a natural evolution from the time when language meant “tongue.” At this historical juncture, phonological communication, with all of its nuances, was contrasted to the written word. So the ancients wrote what would be heard, and incorporated nuances of voice, gesture, pause, and breathing in their presentations. Barthes cautions that meaning is not expressed by acting gestures or by varying tones of the voice but by the grain of the voice. He defines this under-voice as a mix of “erotic timbre, language, and diction” (*Pleasure* 66). He declares, “On ne la pratique pas.”

Ancient rhetoric included the portion called *actio* (everything involved with taking an inward text to outward expression, Barthes calls it extériorisation corporelle). Gesture was used for the phéno-texte (grammatical function) (*Plaisir* 30, 104), but the géno-texte (carrier of significance) was manifested by the “grain de la voix, qui est un mixte érotique de timbre et de langage, et peut donc être lui aussi, à l’égal

de la diction, la matière d'un art" (*Plaisir* 104). ("The grain of the voice, which is an erotic mix of timbre and language, and can also be, along with diction, the substance of an art"). The sound of the reader's voice can evoke a primal pleasure much as a visual work of art can please or reject on first glance. Barthes reiterates: "L'écriture à haute voix n'est pas phonologique, mais phonétique" (*Plaisir* 105). ("Writing aloud is not phonological but phonetic"). "Phonological" pertains specifically to the sounds of a language, whereas "phonetic" addresses the sounds specific to a language, that is to say, the function of the sound is not as important as the phoneme, as it is only sounds arranged phonemically that carry meaning. The reader can hear the "grain du gosier, la patine des consonnes, la volupté des voyelles, toute une stéréophonie de la chair profonde: l'articulation du corps" (*Plaisir* 105). ("The grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of the vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body"). Barthes appreciates the physical connection with the pleasure of sound, closely related to the pleasure of music.

Like the body for Barthes, the unconscious also demands expression. Section 40 of *Le Plaisir du texte* talks of dreams where Barthes writes: "Bref le rêve fait parler tout ce qui en moi n'est pas étrange, étranger: C'est une anecdote incivile faite avec des sentiments très civilisés (le rêve serait civilisateur)" (*Plaisir* 94). ("In short, dreaming makes everything in me which is not strange, foreign, speak: the dream is an uncivilized anecdote made up of very civilized sentiments [the dream is civilizing]"). Both Barthes and Baudelaire value the dream as a vector of clairvoyance and a vehicle of pleasure. Barthes praises it: "Le rêve permet, soutient, détient, met en pleine lumière une extrême finesse de sentiments moraux, parfois même métaphysiques, le sens le plus subtil des rapports humains, des différences raffinées, un savoir de la plus haute civilisation, bref une logique consciente, articulée avec une délicatesse inouïe, que seul un travail de veille intense devrait pouvoir obtenir" (*Plaisir* 94). ("Dreaming allows for, supports, releases, brings to light an extreme delicacy of moral, sometimes even metaphysical, sentiments, the subtlest sense of human relations, refined differences, a learning of the highest civilization, in short a conscious logic, articulated with an extraordinary finesse, which only an intense waking labor would be able to achieve"). These declarations imply pleasure in several forms: subtle feelings, insight into social

relations, reasons for difference among people, refinement of behaviors and alert logic. The unifying value here is societal and it is expressed in two phrases: “human relations” and “highest civilization.” Despite the particular nature of dreams, Barthes imbues this section with a communal repercussion. Like the pleasure of the text; it is an individual but not subjective affair.

He culminates his section on the dream with: “Le texte de jouissance met souvent en scène ce différentiel (Poe); mais il peut aussi donner la figure contraire (quoique tout aussi scindée): une anecdote très lisible avec ses sentiments impossibles (*Mme Edwarda*, de Bataille)” (*Plaisir* 95). (“The text of bliss often stages this differential (Poe); but it can also produce the contrary figure (albeit just as divided): a very readable anecdote with impossible sentiments”). First, the dream reveals right and wrong. Second, it contrasts physical human relations with feelings. Third, the dream embodies civilization’s highest values. Poe, Baudelaire and Barthes are all linked. Finally it is admitted that the dream is impossible to decipher completely.

“Les Fenêtres,” prose poem XXXV, suggests itself as a window on the strange but clairvoyant universe of sleep. Baudelaire says that the person looking through the closed window from the outside sees or learns more than the person looking through an open window. The closed window mimics the closed eye and suggests sleep; while the open window implies consciousness. The adjectives used by Baudelaire also intimate a sleep-state: “profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant” (*OC* 332). “Deeper, more mysterious, more fertile, more obscure, more dazzling” describes well sleep and dreams. Do dreams intensify the pleasure of understanding? Here Baudelaire says: “Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie.” (“Life lives, life dreams, life suffers in that black or luminous hole”). The closed window, metaphor for the dream as Barthes says, is much better, for clairvoyance, for seeing what really matters. The closed window symbolizes poetry – short, dense suggestive but more vital than simple prose. The open window, is just that, literature that is too open, too crude, less interesting than the closed window.

Baudelaire employs asyndeton as he starts to explain the dream phenomenon. “Black and luminous” suggests the mind – where life takes place; and this is what can be discerned by looking

through the window, that is, looking through the dream. The aged woman in the poem could represent the dream's access to time or to feelings, as the poet "weeps" at this vision. As elusive as Barthes's explanation of the dream is, Baudelaire's representation in "Les Fenêtres" is just as mysterious: "Si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?" ("If it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and what I am?") Consequently, Barthes and Baudelaire see the dream as a tool of literary insight and pleasure.

Essential elements for the pleasure of the text for both men are in place: loss of ego, surprise, risk, rhythm, and the dream for Baudelaire; a text that desires, pleasure at the margins, adjectives as gatekeepers, music and the dream for Barthes. Both authors cite the taming of time and artistic interpretation as productive of pleasure.

Contrast between Baudelaire and Barthes is useful in categorizing the pleasures of the prose poem. Such binary organization has historical precedent. Duality is proclaimed in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. Barthes points out dichotomies such as *plaisir* and *jouissance*. For Baudelaire we oppose rhyme with prose and for Barthes writerly versus readerly. In *Le Plaisir du texte* Barthes makes ongoing reference to the modern versus classic texts; modern being of the type he promoted in his writings: *le nouveau roman* à la Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Sollers compared to classical authors, such as Balzac, Zola, Proust.

In the *section* entitled "Échange" (13) Barthes examines the notion of modernity and its character "improductif et cependant alimenté." In the arena of the arts, "modernity" defines the nineteenth-century shift from confidence and trust in religion and king to a belief that the individual is capable of directing society in what becomes an increasingly mercantile environment. This immanent liberty in society is mirrored by suppleness in the arts, where poetry is less restrained by rhyme, and painting shifts from realism to impressionism and beyond. "La modernité fait un effort incessant pour déborder l'échange: elle veut résister au marché des œuvres, [. . .] au signe par l'exemption du sens, par la folie [. . .]" (*Plaisir* 40). ("Our modernity makes a constant effort to defeat the exchange: it tries to resist the market for works, [. . .] the sign by exemption from meaning, by madness [. . .]"). As two cultures clash, traditional and novel, the newer more powerful wave resists allowing any old ideas into the new regime. The market still finds



gratuitous verbal display reasonable and supports it. Barthes's theory at this point echoes Freud's death drive. Barthes says that the modern text splits between the useful and the impractical, where what is impractical does not promote survival. The only escape for the writer is the cessation of his art. "Il n'y aurait de gratuit que sa propre destruction: ne pas, ne plus écrire, sauf à être toujours récupéré (*Plaisir* 41). ("For the text, nothing is gratuitous except its own destruction: not to write, not to write again, except to be eternally retrieved"). This was one of the two poles of Freud's pleasure principle where man seeks to repeat, even unpleasant experiences in an attempt to gain control over them in a regression toward a steady-state, the ultimate point being death or as Barthes calls it "its own destruction [. . .] not to write, not to write again" (*Pleasure* 24).

In the section titled "Moderne" (27), Barthes says: "Je lis à longueur de soirées du Zola, du Proust, du Verne, *Monte-Cristo*, *les Mémoires d'un touriste*, et même parfois du Julien Green. Ceci est mon plaisir, mais non ma jouissance: celle-ci n'a pas de chance de venir qu'avec le nouveau absolu" (*Plaisir* 65). ("I read during long evenings Zola, Proust, Verne, *Mont-Cristo*, *les Mémoires d'un touriste*, and sometimes even Julien Green, and it's all pleasure, but not bliss: bliss may come only with the absolutely new"). He receives pleasure from the works of classic authors like Zola, Proust or Verne but not the bliss or jouissance. In his day Baudelaire praised imagination as the source of new and creative ideas. As Barthes put it, creation is bliss "La règle, c'est l'abus, l'exception, c'est la jouissance" (*Plaisir* 67). ("The Rule is abuse, its opposite is bliss").

In the section "Guerre" (20), Barthes maintains a combative stance and thus communicates little catharsis or pleasure with his proposition. He declares that fiction striving for control is nothing other than ideological fiction: "Nous sommes tous pris dans la vérité des langages, c'est-à-dire dans leur régionalité, entraînés dans la formidable rivalité qui règle leur voisinage. Car chaque parler (chaque fiction) combat pour l'hégémonie; s'il a le pouvoir pour lui, il s'étend partout dans le courant et le quotidien de la vie sociale, il devient doxa, nature: c'est le parler prétendument apolitique des hommes politiques, des agents de l'Etat, c'est celui de la presse, de la radio, de la télévision, c'est celui de la conversation" (*Plaisir* 47). ("We are all caught up in the truth of languages, that is, in their regionality, drawn into the formidable

rivalry which controls their proximity. For each jargon (each fiction) fights for hegemony; if power is on its side, it spreads everywhere in the general and daily occurrences of social life, it becomes doxa, nature: this is the supposedly apolitical jargon of politicians, of agents of the State, of the media of conversation”).

As Barthes has stated elsewhere, (*Système de la mode*, 1967) fashion and jargon are rapid and powerful propagators for culture. Baudelaire uses a fashionable jargon, that of the prose poem, in producing pleasure even as he treats the sordidness of Parisian life. Barthes affirms: “Entre deux escarmouches, on vide aussi bien son pot de bière [. . .] le plaisir du texte est toujours possible, non comme un délassement, mais comme le passage incongru – dissocié – d’un autre langage, comme l’exercice d’une physiologie différente” (*Plaisir* 49). (“Between two skirmishes, there is always time to down a mug of beer [. . .] the pleasure of the text is always possible, not as a respite, but as an incongruous passage – disassociated – passage from another language, like the exercise of a different physiology”). The war, referred to, is the war of dialects, that go on continually and everywhere. Barthes proclaims: “new is better,” “modern is civilized and intellectual,” and “understanding is not a prerequisite for enjoying the modern text.” Baudelaire’s modernity – theory and practice – made his prose poem an anticipation of Barthes’s.

Barthes continues in the section *Guerre*: “Ce qui est débordé, cassé, c’est l’unité morale que la société exige de tout produit humain” (*Plaisir* 52). (“What is overcome, split, is the moral unity that society demands of every human product”). Pleasure is a societal motivator and this radicalism serves an important societal need, the need to innovate, to do things differently even as it breaks from societal unity. Pleasure, says Barthes, is an idea of value, which motivates society’s progress. The artist is at the vanguard of civilization’s progress as it breaks the mold of the ordinary. The artist is often considered subversive (Sade, Fourier and Loyola are Barthes’s examples), and the pleasure of their texts is part of their subversion. Baudelaire had his share of disputes with established tradition and found in the prose poem a literary vehicle that effectively portrayed the *jouissance* of dreams, time, and conscience.

Reading, according to Barthes carries a disappointed trait (*Plaisir* 64). Barthes says that literature is “écrite par un groupe socialement déçu ou impuissant, hors du combat par situation historique, économique, politique; la littérature serait l’expression de cette déception.” (“Written by a socially disappointed or powerless group, beyond the battle because of its historical, economic, political situation; literature is the expression of this disappointment”). This citation is part of the section “Mandarinat” (26), the name he ascribes to the elite, intelligentsia of his time. However, these professional commentators, according to him, forget the “formidable underside of writing: bliss: bliss that can erupt, across the centuries, out of certain texts that were nonetheless written to the glory of the dreariest, of the most sinister philosophy” (*Plaisir* 64). Pleasure is not the product, much less the reflection of the mandarinat mentality.

Pleasure stands in contrast to desire which as a concept enjoys epistemic validation to an extent that our society has not offered bliss. Eroticism in literature is represented as the wait, the mounting of the unavoidable disappointment. We cannot put pleasure in the same position as other objects like a good meal, pretty flowers, or an agreeable moment of the day. “Le plaisir du texte est une revendication justement dirigée contre la séparation du texte; ce que le texte dit, à travers la particularité de son nom, c’est l’ubiquité du plaisir” (*Plaisir* 93). (“The pleasure of the text is just that: claim lodged against the separation of the text; for what the text says, through the particularity of its name, is the ubiquity of pleasure”). Barthes says that the pleasure of the text (the woven fabric) is in the space between the threads – between and amongst all the possible authorial combinations and writerly conceptions. In practice, Barthes claims that the space (the pleasure) is ubiquitous, like a society without borders.

Pleasure has an undeniable sensual dimension: the pleasant aroma, the agreeable melody, even sudden comprehension – but a glimpse of flesh is more sensual than full exhibition, because the pleasure is in the expectation of it and not so much in the full comprehension of it. Like the zones *érogènes*, textual pleasure arrives via hide-and-seek. An example of the intermittence (*Plaisir* 19) mentioned by Barthes, can be seen in Baudelaire’s “Le Port” XLI where he combines the security of “returning to the home port” with a panoply of sensual pleasures. For example: “Les colorations changeantes de la mer, le

scintillement des phares, sont un prisme merveilleusement propre à amuser les yeux sans jamais les lasser [. . .] Il y a une sorte de plaisir mystérieux et aristocratique.” (“The sea’s shimmering colorations, the sparkling of lighthouses, are a prism marvelously suited to entertain the eyes without ever tiring [. . .] There is a sort of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure”). Pleasure comes and goes like the light reflecting off a rocking boat or like the scent of roses in a variable wind. The constant factor in these images is the subtle changes that bring pleasure. A light that glimmers is constantly changing in tiny proportions, as is the aroma of flowers, or contemplating a fire burning in a fireplace. These experiences glimpse the infinite, an inherently pleasurable act.

Barthes sees a difference between figuration (which Barbara Johnson discusses)<sup>69</sup> and representation. “*Figuration* is the way in which the erotic body appears [. . .] in the profile of the text” (*Pleasure* 56). The erotic body thus referenced comes in many nuanced shapes according to what version produces desire. Just as Robbe-Grillet’s text can itself be erotic, the figurative text is pleasurable. On the other hand, *representation* would embrace meanings other than that of desire, and classic texts are in this category. However, representation can also imitate the object of desire itself, but this restricted desire never escapes its chains. “Ce destinataire reste intérieur à la fiction.” (*Plaisir* 90). (“This recipient remains interior to the fiction”). The figurative is where pleasure lies. The representative can speak of pleasure, but is not made of it. Barthes lists three entries of la figuration into the text: the author enters the text, but not biographically; one can say the soul of the author is present. Secondly, desire for a character is figurative. Thirdly, the text itself forms a figurative (and pleasurable) space. Representation is, notes Barthes, an encumbered figuration, classically a case where the language describes and then attaches a moral addendum. Graphology as an indicator of personality is representation. The two concepts mark degrees of pleasure, the first for representation, the second for figuration.

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, Barbara. *Défigurations du langage poétique: la seconde révolution baudelairienne*. Paris: Flammarion, 1979.

The illusion of controlling time produces an elemental pleasure. Towards the end of his book Barthes reiterates the essential timelessness of pleasure: “Pleasure’s force of *suspension* can never be overstated [. . .] pleasure suspends the signified value – the (good cause) [. . .] the pleasure of the text: value shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier” (*Pleasure* 65). Suspension implies the stoppage of time; the term *époché* also signifies the cessation of all action. Pleasure results from the slowing of the perception of passing time.

The fine points of biography, psychology or society define individual pleasure, individual but not subjective, Barthes is careful to point out. Subjectivity is peripheral to the individual and the pleasure of the text is not due to a whim of subjectivity but to will, a deeper trait: “C’est mon corps de jouissance que je retrouve. Et ce corps de jouissance est aussi mon sujet historique” (*Plaisir* 99). (“It is my body of bliss I encounter. And this body of bliss is also my historical subject”). This body by Barthes is contrasted to his language. His language is intelligent and scrupulous; his body is impulsive and elemental. This historic body of experience is *anachronique, en dérive* (“time reversing, wandering”). The act of reading allows one to regulate time.

In Baudelaire’s day photography was a new technique and the horse was still the main mode of transportation. By the time of Barthes, the automobile, television and movies had radically changed the world of communication and transport. Sound, as a criterion of textual pleasure crosses the generations. Barthes writes in *Le Plaisir du texte* of the cacophony typical of a boisterous bar (*Plaisir* 79) “En moi passaient les mots, les menus syntagmes, les bouts de formules, et *aucune phrase ne se formait*, comme si c’eût été la loi de ce langage-là.” (“Through me passed words, tiny syntagms, bits of formulae, and no sentence formed, as though that were the law of such a language.”) In one way language is the mark of human achievement, the difference between animal and human. Nathalie Sarraute (1900-1999) used the term *tropisme* to express the practically indefinable consciousness of speakers just before they articulate. Before the sentence, the *tropisme*, the pre-consciousness, precedes speech, still “éternellement, superbement, hors de la phrase” (“forever, superbly, outside of the sentence”). But civilization is not based on predicative syntax, according to Barthes, “Nous sommes livrés à la phrase et de là: à la

phraséologie” (*Plaisir* 80). (“We are delivered to the sentence, to the phrase as we call it in French (and hence: to phraseology”).

Barthes calls the text of bliss: *absolument intransitif* (*Plaisir* 83) which is to say: “In no need of objects to complete its meaning.” But Barthes brings up what he calls *finalités* that mark the difference between intense and ordinary pleasure. These are prestige, ostentation, rivalry, lecturing, self-serving – (*Plaisir* 83) characteristics of perversion, outlandishness, play. A single prose poem by Baudelaire, “Portraits de Maîtresses” XLII, contains most of these elements. Prestige? “A un élégant tripot, quatre hommes fumaient et buvaient” qui avaient “fortement vécu.” (“In a man’s boudoir, that is, in a smoking room adjoining a fashionable dive, four men were smoking and drinking, who had intensely lived.”) Ostentation? “On écoute alors celui qui parle comme on écouterait de la musique de danse.” (“So they listen to the one talking, as they would listen to dance music.”) Rivalité? “Les autres se mirent à rire, et un troisième dit à son tour.” (“The others began to laugh, and a third one said in turn”). Lecturing? “Messieurs, j’ai connu des jouissances que vous avez peut-être négligées.” (“Gentlemen, I’ve known delights you have perhaps overlooked”). Self-serving? “Je me fais gloire d’être arrivé, depuis longtemps, à l’époque climactérique du troisième degré où la beauté elle-même ne suffit plus, si elle n’est assaisonnée par le parfum, la parure” (*OC* 337). (“As for me gentlemen, I’m proud that, already a long time ago, I reached the climacteric age of the third step, when even beauty is not enough if it is not seasoned with perfume, finery”). This prose poem possesses exactly those outlandish qualities that Barthes says produces pleasure.

The pensive quality of the prose poem has been associated with the act of viewing a work of art. What happens to the viewer of art that may resemble the reading of a prose poem and how do these acts relate to the dream state? These three acts – viewing a painting, reading a prose poem and dreaming – rely more on feeling than on mental analysis, though questioning the content of these experiences broadens the appreciation of them. All three phenomena convey a message, but the message is more impressionistic than logical. If we refer to the Saussurean apparatus of signifier, signified and sign, dreams and paintings do not require an intermediate deciphering of linguistic symbols in order to communicate their message.

A dream, despite its intricacy, is essentially felt, in the same way as a painting, whereas a text passes by the words and letters as the mind makes sense of its morphemes. Perhaps it is a more direct link – from word to signified – that distinguishes the prose poem from other prose works such as short stories, novels or free verse.

A clearer comparison can be made with the other codes or forms of communication: painting, music, dance, theater. How do the signifier, signified, and sign act differently with the various arts? And does one of the other arts (or several) embody the same communicative approach as the prose poem? The signifiers of the messages for the various arts function differently. For painting the message is carried by colors, swirls, delineations, shades, an instant time frame and resemblances to *a priori* ideas. Music sends aural signifiers in the form of changing tones of various durations, signified by different beats. Dance signifies by movement, speed, gesture and duration. A text signifies by ink on paper or pixels on a screen. All these media have their own chronological necessities: the painting takes time to execute and to observe. Music unfolds over a few minutes for popular songs or several minutes for some symphonies. Dance follows closely the duration of music for they are almost always seen and heard in concert. The prose poem shares with music, the density of presentation and the pleasure of the result.

In the section titled “Dérive” (10) Barthes explains the pleasure of literature that transcends time and space: “Mon plaisir peut très bien prendre la forme d’une dérive. La dérive advient chaque fois que je ne respecte pas le tout,” which is to say that the reader lets down the strict requirement of reality, “[. . .] et qu’à force de paraître emporté ici et là au gré des illusions, séductions et intimidations de langage, tel un bouchon sur la vague, je reste immobile pivotant sur la jouissance intraitable qui me lie au texte (au monde) (*Plaisir* 32). (“My pleasure can very well take the form of a drift. Drifting occurs whenever I do not respect the whole,[. . .] and by dint of seeming driven about by languages’s illusions, seductions and intimidations of the language, like a cork on the waves, I stay motionless, pivoting on the untreatable bliss that binds me to the text”).

For both Baudelaire and Barthes, novelty is a source of bliss. As an example Barthes cites Edgar Allan Poe (also a paragon for Baudelaire) and Poe’s character of “Monsieur Valdemar,” who is

hypnotized at the moment of his anticipated death, and is then kept alive for seven months by simply responding to questions. Repeated language, repeated questions maintain his life. But at what price? He is cataleptic, hardly an existence, but “To die” supposes the elimination of language and of all bliss. On the other hand, death by bliss presents “cette impossibilité nauséuse de mourir” (*Plaisir* 70). (“The stereotype is this nauseating impossibility of dying”). Textual novelty prolongs bliss, and with it, life.

The Baudelaire – Barthes connection is manifest in the verse poem “Réversibilité” XLIV, a title opposed to “L’Irréparable,” verse poem LIV. “Réversibilité” makes use of the opposition of good and evil with pairs of adjectives that describe and then interrogate his “ange de gaieté, de bonté, de santé, de beauté.” These positive meanings are set against “l’angoisse, la haine, les Fièvres” and “les rides.” It seems that every known evil is enumerated in the next verses: “La honte, les remords, les sanglots, les ennuis, / Et les vagues terreurs de ces affreuses nuits / Qui compriment le cœur comme un papier qu’on froisse?” (“Shame, remorse, sobs, worries, / And the indistinct horrors of frightful nights / That fold the heart like a crumpled paper?”). This citation from “Réversibilité” anticipates Barthes’s admonition to “ne pas manifester une structure mais plutôt produire une structuration” (*S/Z* 27). (“Not to formulate a structure but instead to produce a structuring”). In other words, the structure of the poem is not as important as the theory that organizes the work. Baudelaire’s anaphoric pairs of verses insist that someone intervene on behalf of the poet and he beseeches his “ange” in the same manner as one prays to God. The final stanza ceases to question, but instead posits the *femme aimée* as a source of redemption. The poet boldly employs biblical-type references to pay homage to the woman.

The term “réversibilité” denotes a backward movement. In terms of language and literature, this is the quality that insures plurality of a text so essential to Barthes. *Réversibilité* for Baudelaire is the opportunity to turn spleen into *idéal*. The poet finds his angel in the midst of chaos, “l’angoisse, la haine” etc. “Mais de toi je n’implore, ange, que tes prières” (“But from you I beg only for your prayers”). As Baudelaire suggests in the verse version of “L’Invitation au voyage” redemption can be found in the arts, even during distress: “Mon enfant, ma sœur, / Songe à la douceur / D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble! / Aimer à loisir, / Aimer et mourir” (*OC* 125). (“My child, my sister, / Think of the rapture / of living together



there! / Of loving at will, Of loving till death”).<sup>70</sup> At the limits of contemplation is the absolute; at the limits of art is reversibility or redemption.

Baudelaire’s prose poetry seeks to please the reader, encounter the ephemeral (especially the dream), in a musical, flexible, poetic form. His work returns to concepts that define his idea of pleasure: loss of ego, newness, chance, rhythm and beauty. These ideas he rendered into imaginative style by his prose poems. Writing was his pleasure; the text was his pleasure. Barthes goes much deeper in elaborating the pleasure of the text. His main tenets do not deviate from Baudelaire’s ideas but augment them. Barthes saw reading of a pleasurable text as preponderantly the reading modern, non-classical prose. His features of pleasure include tmesis, parataxis, asyndeton and anacoluthon. Both men agreed that there is pleasure in the rhythm and musicality of a text. Barthes also sides with Baudelaire in asserting the text’s ability to slow down the onslaught of time and its capacity to deal effectively with what is often considered unattainable: dreams, the invisible, the mystical.

The final paragraph of “L’Invitation au voyage” symbolizes the genre prose poem and more specifically represents the group from which it comes, the *poèmes nocturnes*, as they portray the pleasure of the text from all points of view: producer, participant and receiver. The poet weaves a fabric with several folds and edges to examine. The participant in the narration seeks the same feeling and uses the same terminology as Barthes: *plaisir* and *jouissance*. The reader looks at the *bords* and the *failles* or ruptures of the text to discern the sources of pleasure and the deciphering of layers of meaning. At the end of the poem questions tend to resurface, placing the mind in the same posture as when it comes across a question or puzzle; there is always another question, always another puzzle to solve – pleurably, because reflection is the work of the mind.

<sup>70</sup> Translation by William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil* (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954).

## CHAPTER 5

## PLEASURE &amp; THE POÈMES NOCTURNES

Baudelaire published the *poèmes nocturnes* as a group in Houssaye's literary magazine, *La Presse* in August 1857. This title and their independent publication suggest a special consideration for these six poems: "L'Horloge," "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure," "L'Invitation au voyage," "Le Crépuscule du soir," "La Solitude" and "Les Projets." They are among the most lyrical of the fifty *Petits Poèmes en prose* and they exhibit what Baudelaire and Barthes highlight as features of the pleasure of the text. This chapter shows how the *poèmes nocturnes* manifest Baudelaire's and Barthes's criteria for the pleasure of the text. We recall that Baudelaire alludes to the pleasure-producing notions of "forgetting self," "novelty," "risk," "rhythm," and "dreams." Barthes's factors for literary pleasure can be subsumed under the rubrics of "the text that desires the reader," "pleasure in the margins," "adjectives as gatekeepers of imagination," "musicality," and again, "dreams." Each poem will be considered in the order in which it was published in 1857 and turned first toward the theory of Baudelaire and next toward Barthes. The two writers' theories converge, as seen above in their shared criteria such as rhythm and dreams as inspiration for pleasure. Despite a separation of almost a hundred years, Barthes offers new ways to enjoy Baudelaire's prose poetry.

The poet's ideas for pleasure are gathered from life experience and are most clearly spelled out in his poems and correspondence. The value of "forgetting the self" is formulated in the prose poem "Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la gloire" (*OC* 303): "Et tu connaîtras le plaisir, sans cesse renaissant, de sortir de toi-même pour t'oublier dans autrui" (*OC* 304). ("And you will experience the pleasure, ceaselessly reborn, of leaving yourself so as to forget yourself in others"). He touts novelty, in its guise of "surprise" in "Une Mort héroïque" (*OC* 313): "L'étonnement, qui est une des formes les plus délicates du plaisir." ("Astonishment, which is one of pleasure's most delicate forms"). "Risk" – intensified surprise, occurs when the poet encounters "le mauvais vitrier" in poem IX: "[. . .] pour faire le joueur, pour

connaître les plaisirs de l’anxiété” (OC 282). (“[. . .] to play the gambler, to experience the pleasures of anxiety”). “Rhythm” is embedded in Baudelaire’s style and can be heard specifically extolled in the lettre programme of 1861: “Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas, dans ses jours d’ambition, rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime” (OC 273). (“ Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme”). Lastly the “dream” is considered, in the nocturne “L’Invitation au voyage,” a privileged conduit to pleasure: “Comme l’Art l’est à la Nature, où celle-ci est réformée par le rêve” (OC 298). (“As Art is to Nature, where dream refashions Nature”). Each of these ideas finds explicit mention in the *poèmes nocturnes*.

Barthes’s criteria for pleasure are enumerated in one volume and are so abundant that it is favorable to concentrate on the five most prominent items. He speaks first of the text desiring the reader: “M’assure-t-il—moi, écrivain—du plaisir de mon lecteur? [. . .] Il faut que je le cherche, (que je le drague) sans savoir où il est. Un espace de la jouissance est alors crée” (*Plaisir* 11). (“Guarantee me, the writer – My reader’s pleasure? [. . .] I must seek out this reader (must “cruise” him) without knowing where he is. A site of bliss is then created” (*Pleasure* 4). This apparent chiasma implies that the reader somehow participates in the textual pleasure.

Pleasure is further found in the margins of a text; Barthes adds: “La faille des deux bords, l’interstice de la jouissance, se produit dans le volume des langages, dans l’énonciation, non dans la suite des énoncés” (*Plaisir* 23). (“The seam of the two edges, the interstice of bliss, occurs in the volume of the languages, in the uttering, not in the sequence of utterances”) (*Pleasure* 13). There is thus pleasure in the simple enunciation of language for Barthes and such aural pleasure is found outside of story, in the margins of the work.

Adjectives are also a gateway to pleasure: “Le brio du texte (sans quoi, en somme, il n’y a pas de texte), ce serait sa volonté de jouissance: [. . .] de forcer la main mise des adjectifs—qui sont les portes du langage par où l’idéologie et l’imaginaire pénètrent à grands flots” (*Plaisir* 25). (“The brio of the text [without which after all, there is no text] is its *will to bliss*: [. . .] to break through the constraint of

adjectives – which are those doors of language through which the ideological and the imaginary come flowing in”) (*Pleasure* 14). When adjectives relax their constrictive hold on nouns, pleasure occurs.

Barthes’s use of the musical term “brio” hints at a principle of musicality (like Baudelaire’s *rhythm*) in the pleasure of the text: “Cependant, on peut prétendre tout le contraire [. . .] la répétition engendrerait elle-même la jouissance (*Plaisir* 67). (“Yet one can make a claim for precisely the opposite: [. . .] repetition itself creates bliss”) (*Pleasure* 41).

As earlier outlined Barthes agrees with Baudelaire that dreams produce pleasure: “Le rêve permet [. . .] un savoir de la plus haute civilisation, bref une logique consciente (*Plaisir* 94). (“Dreaming allows for [. . .] a learning of the highest civilization, in short a conscious logic”) (*Pleasure* 59). Both authors consider the passage of time as an aspect of pleasure where he who controls time, experiences pleasure.

The history of the publication of Baudelaire’s prose poems is marked by appearances in a substantial variety of Parisian literary magazines and by an impressive number of proposed titles that never made it to the kiosk at all. The first two prose poems published in June 1855, were called: “petits poèmes en prose.” A second group of six from August 1857, used the title: *poèmes nocturnes*, while a third sizable group, from November 1861, were simply called: “poèmes en prose.” Baudelaire hardly clears up the nomenclature issue in December 1861 when his lettre programme to Houssaye mentions yet two more possibilities: “prose poétique” and “prose lyrique,” but not “poème en prose.” The generally accepted title for the genre was employed with the publication of fourteen of these “poèmes en prose,” in August 1862. In February 1864 six poems were gathered under the title: “Le Spleen de Paris,” while in June 1866 Baudelaire used yet another title: “Petits poèmes lycanthropes” or “little werewolf poems.” In the month following Baudelaire’s death in August 1867 the term “poème en prose” was once again accentuated, and the first complete works of Baudelaire collected by Michel Lévy employed “Petits poèmes en prose” for that section of Baudelaire’s writings. Typically, modern collections of Baudelaire’s prose poems utilize either the title *Le Spleen de Paris* or *Petits poèmes en prose* or both (as did Lemaitre). As the titles varied by time and inspiration, the composition of the poems themselves seemed to come in spurts for Baudelaire. He scrutinized the various editions and readily edits them in an effort to hone a

desired effect. The following table demonstrates the episodic nature of the publication of these works as well as Baudelaire's more general, shifting emphasis from verse to prose.

Table 5: Chronology of Baudelaire's Prose Poems

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
Autumn 1842	publication by Aloÿsius Bertrand of "Gaspard de la nuit" later to inspire Baudelaire's prose poems.
April 1853	"Morale du Joujou" (essay) in <i>L'Art romantique</i> , a precursor of the prose poem "Le Joujou du pauvre" XIX. published in 1862.
June 1855	On the first, a verse version of "L'Invitation au voyage" is published in <i>La Revue des deux mondes</i> along with seventeen other " <i>Fleurs</i> " to be. A day later two prose poems, "Le Crépuscule du soir" XXII and "La Solitude" XXIII are published in the collection <i>Fontainebleau</i> , edited by Gautier in honor of Monsieur C. F. Denecourt, a champion and benefactor of the forest at Fontainebleau.
June 1857	<i>Les Fleurs du mal</i> are published, 25 June.
August 1857	<i>Poèmes nocturnes</i> : "L'Horloge" XVI, "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" XVII, "L'Invitation au voyage" XVIII, "Le Crépuscule du soir" XXII, "La Solitude" XXIII, "Les Projets" XXIV appear in <i>Le Présent</i> , a literary periodical.
February 1861	The second edition of <i>Les Fleurs du mal</i> , augmented by 35 new poems, is announced in the <i>Journal de la Librairie</i> .
Nov. 1861	<i>La Revue fantaisiste</i> , a pamphlet of sixty some-odd pages, edited by Catulle Mendès, publishes nine prose poems, but not together: "Le Crépuscule du soir" XXII, "La Solitude" XXIII, "Les Projets" XXIV, "L'Horloge" XVI, "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" XVII, "L'Invitation au voyage" XVIII, "Les Foules" XII, "Les Veuves" XIII, "Le Vieux Saltimbanque" XIV.
Christmas 1861	Baudelaire communicates to Houssaye, then the director of <i>La Presse</i> (with Paul Saint-Victor), that his objective is to gather together some prose poems, even though he continues to use the terms "prose poétique" and "prose lyrique" instead of "poème en prose."
August 1862	<i>La Presse</i> publishes the first fourteen prose poems chosen by Auguste Poulet-Malassis and Arsène Houssaye.
Sept. 1862	<i>La Presse</i> publishes the prose poems later numbered XV to XX.
10 June 1863	<i>La Revue nationale et étrangère</i> announces two more prose poems: "Les Tentations, ou Éros, Plutus et la gloire" XXI and "La Belle Dorothée" XXV.
14 June 1863	<i>Le Boulevard</i> publishes the prose poems "Les Bienfaits de la lune" and "Laquelle est la vraie?" later to be numbered XXXVII and XXXVIII.

- 10 Oct. 1863 Two other prose poems appear in *La Revue nationale et étrangère*: “Une Mort héroïque” and “Le Désire de peindre” (XXVII and XXXVI).
- 10 Dec. 1863 Three prose poems: “Le Thyse” XXXII, “Les Fenêtres” XXXV and “Déjà!” XXXIV are published in the *Revue nationale et étrangère*.
- 7 Feb. 1864 For the first time under the title *Le Spleen de Paris* appear six prose poems: “La Corde” XXX, “Le Crépuscule du soir” XXII, “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX and “Enivrez-vous” XXXIII; one week later: “Les Vocations” XXXI and “Un Cheval de Race” XXXIX.
- 2 July 1864 The prose poem “Les Yeux des pauvres” XXVI appears in *La Vie parisienne*.
- 13 Aug. 1864 The prose poem “Les Projets” XIV in *La Vie parisienne*.
- 1 Nov. 1864 The prose poems “Une Mort héroïque” XXVII, “La Fausse monnaie” XXVIII and “La Corde” XXX in *L’Artiste*.
- 25 Dec. 1864 The prose poems “Les Yeux des pauvres” XXVI, “Les Projets” XXIV, “Le Port” XLI, “Le Miroir” XL, “La Solitude” XXIII and “La Fausse Monnaie” XXVIII appear under the title *Le Spleen de Paris* in the new *Revue de Paris*.
- 21 June 1865 The prose poem “Les Bons Chiens” L is published in *L’Indépendance belge*.
- 1 June 1866 Prose poems under the title *Petits Poèmes lycanthropes* published in *La Revue du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*: “La Fausse monnaie” XXVIII and “Le Joueur généreux” XXIX.
- 12 June 1866 *L’Événement* republishes “La Corde” XXX.
- 27 Oct. 1866 *La Petite Revue* republishes “Les Bons Chiens” L as does *Le Grand Journal* one week later.
- 31 Aug. 1867 Baudelaire dies on the same day that the *Revue nationale et étrangère* publishes “Les Bons Chiens” L.<sup>71</sup>

Baudelaire concentrates on prose poetry at the expense of verse poetry in the second part of his career, which begins with the 1857 publication of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Only a week after his censorship trial that summer, Baudelaire published the *poèmes nocturnes*, consisting of numbers XVI, XVII, XVIII, XXII, XXIII, and XXIV. These poems are homogenous on several counts; they all range from slightly

<sup>71</sup> The roman numerals mark the ordering of the poems in the first complete collected works of the prose poems published by Michel Lévy, Paris 1869.

less than one page to two pages in length; they treat Baudelaire's important themes: time, the eternal, beauty, the dream, solitude and the dichotomy of good and evil. All of these topics have in common a singular attachment to man's desire to find some form of security or pleasure. All the *nocturnes* resemble verse poetry in the brevity and parity of the paragraphs or stanzas. As of August 1857, three of the *nocturnes* had already been published as verse poems: "L'Horloge," "L'Invitation au voyage" and "Le Crépuscule du soir," and the other three *nocturnes* had close cousins in verse poems such as "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" ("La Chevelure" XXIII); "La Solitude" ("Le Vin du solitaire" CVII), and "Les Projets," ("Rêve parisien" CII, since they both recount reverie followed by clairvoyance into a new reality).

"L'Horloge" begins the group *nocturne*. The first sentence formulates a proverbial wisdom: "Les Chinois voient l'heure dans l'oeil des chats" ("The Chinese tell time in a cat's eyes"). The rest of the tale goes on to prove this statement, but adds a twist at the end. A missionary out strolling has forgotten his watch and asks a local boy for the time. The youngster races off and returns with a fat cat in his arms. The time is correctly divined by the aperture of the cat's iris, as it naturally varies with the intensity of sunlight. The poem describes time as: "vast, solemn, huge, unified," (l. 18) but also as "light and swift" (l. 21). The eyes of a woman, "Felina," communicate a consciousness of time, to the point where the narrator is able to conceive of it and describe it. The recurring expression "voir l'heure" (l. 1, 17, 27, 28) raises the question: "Who can genuinely see time"?<sup>72</sup> The poet believes that he can: "Yes, I see the time; it is Eternity!" Baudelaire and Barthes include "time slowed down" as a criterion for the pleasure of the text. Perhaps by looking closely, or by developing a certain consciousness, the reader can experience literary pleasure.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine asked: "For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it?" He discusses with God: "These words we speak, [. . .] should there in our words be some syllables, short, others long?" Similar to Baudelaire, he includes the notion of "the word" as elemental in conceiving time. (Pusey 245-47).

The “fort gros chat” possesses some additional meaning, in as much as Baudelaire elaborates a web of feline figures, such as Felina, over his career. Just as in the prose “L’Horloge,” the poet finds pleasure in the look or the eyes of the partner, in verse poems “Le Chat XXXIV,” “Le Chat” LI, and “Les Chats” LXVI. Examples come from “Le Chat” XXXIV: “Et laisse-moi plonger dans tes beaux yeux, / Mêlés de métal et d’agate” (OC 107). (“And let me peer deep into your beautiful eyes of metal and agate”); from “Le Chat” LI: “Je vois avec étonnement / Le feu de ses prunelles pâles, / Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales, / Qui me contemplent fixement” (OC 123). (“I see astonished the fire of his pale eyes, bright lanterns, living opals, steadily contemplating me”). And finally from “Les Chats”: “Et des parcelles d’or, ainsi qu’un sable fin, / Étoilent vaguement leurs prunelles mystiques” (OC 138). (While particles of gold, like a fine sand, star indistinctly their mystic pupils”). The eyes are receptors of personal insight but also transmitters of a universal language. The “prunelles” – profound center of the eyes – represent a dark point of communication. In a literary metaphor the pupils are analogous to absence, where the mere possibility of significant variation produces results that are sometimes clear, sometimes mysterious. The eyes (and language) are alternately enigmatic or informative and are an example of Baudelaire’s depiction of abstract ideas (mystery of beauty, pleasure of surprise) using a palpable entity.

The first paragraph of “L’Horloge” displays the poet’s accent on time by the number of verb tenses employed; present (voient), present progressive (se promenant), simple past (s’aperçut, demanda), pluperfect (avait oublié) and imperfect (était); a varied array for only four lines of text. The poet continues with this multiplicity of verb tenses throughout the work, effecting a type of continual present as one tense carries the reader in one chronological direction, while another balances the movement. These verb manipulations also allow subtle points of view to change without upsetting the narrative. In the penultimate paragraph the narrator starts with the imperfect (venait), a continual action inserting itself into the present (repose). Questions asked in the present tense and answered in the conditional mood produce uncertainty. The last paragraph unsettles, as the speaker suddenly shifts from answering the Genie or Demon, to speaking in the present tense with the Madam. As if to complete a tour de force



lesson on the French verb, the poet terminates the madrigal with his answer in the future tense (demanderai).

These verbal notices are evidence of a reader's additions to the writerly text, a Barthesian sign of textual pleasure. The pleasure of manipulating time, "seeing it," "affirming it," and "defining it" is an authorial act of pleasure. The text labels itself a work of some artifice: "J'ai eu tant de plaisir à broder cette prétentieuse galanterie." ("I took such delight in elaborating this pretentious romance"). This admission by the narrator is a turn of surprise.

"L'Horloge" is sprinkled with expressions equating time and visual perception. "Toujours la même, une heure vaste, solennelle, grande comme l'espace, sans divisions de minutes ni de secondes – une heure immobile qui n'est pas marquée sur les horloges, et cependant légère comme un soupir, rapide comme un coup d'œil" (*OC* 295). ("It's always the same, an enormous, solemn moment, as big as space, without divisions of minutes or seconds – a moment stopped, not proclaimed by clocks, and however as light as a sigh, as fast as the blink of an eye"). Thus "L'Horloge" combines two of Baudelaire's most important notions: the eyes and time – eyes representing the ports of access for knowledge and comprehension; time representing omnipresence, the unknown – "vast, solemn, and great," as is space.

The closing gambit of "L'Horloge" returns the musings of the poet back to earth as the missionary addresses his friend: "N'est-ce pas, madame, que voici un madrigal vraiment méritoire et aussi emphatique que vous-même? En vérité, j'ai eu tant de plaisir à broder cette prétentieuse galanterie, que je ne vous demanderai rien en échange." ("Now is this not, Madam, a truly praiseworthy madrigal, and as exaggerated as yourself? In fact, I took such delight in elaborating this pretentious romance, that I will ask nothing of you in exchange"); in other words, no further demands for pleasure. In search of time the narrator has come up with this tale. His little melody is played, with varying notes. Time is reflected in some of these notes and just as the missionary had looked into the eyes of a cat in order to "tell time," in effect, taking control of the text, the author manipulates his art work in order to subjugate time. Baudelaire's use of the musical term *madrigal* implies a rhythm for his tale. In so far as Madrigal is a lyrical poem of medieval heritage or a polyphonic song popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, it is productive of pleasure. Surprise and musicality are woven into “L’Horloge” as pleasurable attributes of reading.

The title of the next nocturne, “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” XVII, recounts little activity. Paradoxically, the poem is full of it. It is very ordered structurally, composed of a total of thirty-four lines equally divided into seven paragraphs. (Its quasi-doublet in verse, “La Chevelure” XXIII contains seven stanzas of exactly five verses each, so the poems are of ordered heritage). The first and last paragraphs begin with the imperative: “Laisse-moi [. . .], a figure promising to “attach loose ends,” to assert order in the poem. In between its departure where the woman’s hair enables the poet’s imagination to manipulate time (“pour secouer des souvenirs dans l’air”) (“stirring memories into the air”) and its return to an equivalent reference, “que je mange des souvenirs,” (“I seem to be eating memories”) a steady rhythm is established. The most obvious supplement to this cadence is the anaphoric “Dans” repeated in paragraphs four through six: “Dans l’océan [. . .], Dans les caresses [. . .], Dans l’ardent foyer.” Paragraphs two and three are linked by the adjective “tout,” repeated four times in the ten lines and by the familiar entreaty “tu” (Si tu pouvais savoir) that shifts the majestic to the personal.

An infinite voyage is taken in this extent of a woman’s hair, which for the poet slows the passage of time. When he repeats “longtemps, longtemps” and refers to “des souvenirs dans l’air” he is at once imagining infinite time, and to some extent, touching it, for not only is the hair of the woman the symbol of his effort, but after immersing himself (physically and symbolically) in it, he extracts pleasure from it.

The rhythm is steady, but the movement is dramatic. The poet, after representing the ocean as practically infinite space (plus bleu et plus profond) in the third paragraph, he opens the fourth with striking metaphor, her hair “is the ocean” and instantly describing the real-life aspects of ocean lore (le port, les chants mélancoliques, les navires etc.). This technique goes beyond simple novelty, to pleasant surprise. Though the images in the poem are exotic and exciting, the pleasure of “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” is, according to Barthes, located in the “seam of the two edges, the interstice of bliss, [. . .] in the volume of the languages” (*Pleasure* 13).

The woman's hair takes the poet's imagination to this unique place where time is slowed down: "Je retrouve les langueurs des longues heures passées sur un divan [. . .] je vois resplendir l'infini." ("I recover the languor of passing long hours on a divan [. . .] I see the infinity glowing"). The sensual pleasure is announced: "Laisse-moi respirer longtemps, longtemps, l'odeur de tes cheveux, y plonger tout mon visage, comme un homme altéré dans l'eau d'une source" (*OC* 296). ("Let me inhale ever so long, ever so long, the odor of your hair, plunge my whole face into it, like a thirsting man into the water of a spring"). The poem's seven paragraphs come within a line of being the same length – a stanza-emulating effect. In addition to overt repetition, Baudelaire includes assonance and alliteration to heighten the soothing result: "Laisse-moi respirer longtemps, longtemps [. . .] comme un homme altéré [. . .] comme un mouchoir odorant [. . .] comme l'âme des autres [. . .] dans l'air [. . .] dans l'océan [. . .] dans les caresses" [. . .]. The hypnotic effect of this cadence draws the reader into a dreamy scene. The paronomasia: "les langueurs des longues heures" and the images evoked "sur un divan" slow the flow of time to a pleasurable, tranquil pace.

A more intellectual pleasure of this rendezvous proceeds from the second paragraph: "Si tu pouvais savoir tout ce que je vois! tout ce que je sens! tout ce que j'entends dans tes cheveux!" ("If only you could know everything I see! everything I feel! everything I hear in your hair!"). The mind, according to the *synesthésie* theory, can make possible response to a sensation with the faculties of a different sense – smelling flavors (respirer [. . .] l'eau) or seeing odors (agiter [. . .] mouchoir dans l'air). The poet proceeds to a physical and intellectual synthesis: "Quand je mordille tes cheveux élastiques et rebelles il me semble que je mange des souvenirs." ("When I nibble at your elastic and unruly hair, I seem to be eating memories"). The poet controls the references to time and space (un hémisphère) and then he experiences them as he communicates pleasure.

Baudelaire's successive relations with Jeanne Duval, Marie Daubrun, and Madame Sabatier inspired some of his poetry during this time. During his mid-twenties, Jeanne Duval, the "Vénus noire" of Haitian descent became his off-and-on partner for over twenty stormy years. Starting in 1847 he also

carried on a two-year relationship with the actress, Marie Daubrun. In 1853 Baudelaire courted Madame Apollonie Sabatier, an organizer of literary gatherings at her home.

*La femme*, or better, feminine preeminence plays a central role in the six *poèmes nocturnes*. Let us recall that at the end of “L’Horloge” the poet addresses his somewhat mysterious *emphatique madame*. “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” links the beauty of *la femme* via the metaphor of hair to pleasure, even an eternal pleasure that goes beyond the constraints of time. In “L’Invitation au voyage” there are several references to a special woman from *mon cher ange* (l. 14) to the final line – *de l’Infini vers toi* (l. 88). In “Le Crépuscule du soir” the deliverance from daily existence is portrayed as a feminine entity *la nuit*: “Comme sous le noir présent transperce le délicieux passé; et les étoiles vacillantes d’or et d’argent” (OC 307). (“As the delicious past intervenes on the night with its sparkling stars of gold and silver”). “La Solitude” is an isolation – without any partner that profiles woman by her absence. Finally in “Les Projets,” as in poem XVIII, the narrator dreams of an escape with a woman to some tropical paradise.

The third of the *nocturnes*, “L’Invitation au voyage,” is Baudelaire’s paragon of the prose poem and incorporates several features of the pleasurable text. This poem embodies every aspect of Baudelaire’s definition of the prose poem: written in prose, with poetic resonance, and made musical by stanzas (short paragraphs) and repetition; a supple prose adapted to its subject; forceful but with no long narratives; and in the end, efficacious for dealing with the soul, the dream and conscience. “L’Invitation au voyage” is also a work of art that reflects on the pleasure of art.

“Reduction of the ego,” Baudelaire’s first principle of pleasure is put into play even though the poem is by and large a first-person quest. It ends with all pleasure handed over to an “other,” the poet’s beloved: “Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c’est toi. C’est encore toi [. . .] tu les conduis [. . .] ta belle âme [. . .] mes pensées enrichies qui reviennent de l’Infini vers toi.” (“These treasures, this furniture, this excess, this uniformity, these scents, these miraculous flowers, they are you. Still you again [. . .] You lead them gently [. . .] your lovely soul [. . .] my enriched thoughts returning from the Infinite toward you”). One can conclude that concentration on “you” liberates the “I” for pleasure.

Any voyage should lead to something new, a change of pace, some version of novelty. Given the appreciation of art as a framework for the poem, the tension between what is real-life setting and a painted one makes each succeeding paragraph an adventure, a sort of a trip of discovery: “Will the poem confirm painting or will it refer back to reality?” Relating actual life to the nature of painting allows for novel twists and turns in the portrayal of the images, be they real or imaginary.

The fourth paragraph of “L’Invitation” announces a musicien, a reference that the poem’s action takes place in real-life. But even then, one has the power to “Allonger les heures par l’infini” (“Prolong the hours with an infinity of sensations,”) an act that seems almost god-like and thus beyond concrete reality. The sixth paragraph is the best evidence yet, that all is the subject of a painting. On shining panels “blissful pictures live discreetly.” But this image too is subverted by “the souls of the painters who created them.” Still, towards the end of the paragraph another sensorial nod to reality is made; from the corners of drawers and folds in cloth are emanated aromas. In the seventh paragraph the verb “embellished” harks back to a world of art and of the plastic arts in particular. At this point the idea of painting as reality dominates, so that the next-mentioned “alchemists” become the artists of record. The flowers they paint, dahlias and tulips, allegorically bring decisive and creative energy to the artist. Dumas, associated with the *tulipe noire*, was known for his audacious and prolific work while the blue dahlia is a metaphor for creative invention. This creative energy is pleasurable for the reader: “never ceasing the limits of their happiness.” In the ninth paragraph, the beloved is “framed by analogy” thus implying her power to transmit meaning and understanding. Paragraph ten adds further innuendo by saying that this is a “picture painted by my mind.” The choices laid out are real.

In “L’Invitation au voyage” the verse and prose versions share identical conclusions. The poet finds a magical place of refuge from the difficulty of life. This place is in his mind; or is it in a painting? One version rhymes and the other does not, yet they arrive at the same conclusion. The verse version (*OC* 125) consists of three, twelve-verse stanzas each of the stanzas punctuated with a couplet-refrain, all totaling 42 verses. None of the verses is longer than seven syllables, most are five in length. The compact structure is contained in three movements (stanzas), beginning, middle and end. The first of the three

parts is personal and emotional: “Mon enfant, ma soeur, / Songe à la douceur / D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble!” (“Child, Sister, think how sweet to go out there and live together!”). The second section emphasizes nourishing the soul: “Les riches plafonds, / Les miroirs profonds, / La splendeur orientale, / Tout y parlerait / A l’âme en secret” (“Rich ceilings; deep mirrors; an Oriental splendor – everything there would address our souls, privately”). The final section implies a diffusion out from the personal to the panoramic: “Qu’ils viennent du bout du monde, / – Les soleils couchants / Revêtent les champs, / Les canaux, la ville entière” (“They come from the world’s end. – Setting suns re clothe the fields, the canals, the whole town”).

Visually, the first two stanzas and refrains are bathed in translucent light, a motif that evokes mystery and curiosity. “Les soleils” are not clear and bright but “mouillés,” (“damp”) obscuring their light. Even the eyes, though “brillant” are clouded by “leurs larmes” (“their tears”). In the second stanza the light is brighter: “Des meubles luisants, Polis par les ans” but the “miroirs,” instead of sharing the bright light, are “profonds,” an adjective that casts shadow and doubt on the images therein reflected. Only in the final stanza is the light most natural: “les soleils couchants [. . .] dans une chaude lumière.” (“Setting suns [. . .] in a warm light”).

The physical layout of the stanzas and refrains, if they are center-justified, imitates the shape of a classic vase in the ancient tradition. This sort of ordered elegance reinforces the aspirations of the poet: a destination as still and polished as marble. The reference to “traîtres yeux” recalls one of Baudelaire’s verse poems “La Beauté” XVII where the eyes are fixed, almost lifeless “Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles” (“My eyes, my eyes wide with eternal clarities!”). There is little activity in the poem. The numerous infinitives serve this static effect: *aller, aimer, mourir, dormir, assouvir*. Not only does the lexicon serve to placate the scene, but the portrayal of depth, “Les riches plafonds, / Les miroirs profonds,” suggests permanence. For instance, we are taken to a close-up view of the sun, “Les soleils mouillés” and a deep view of the sky, “ces ciels brouillés,” “Qu’il viennent du bout du monde.” These images give the impression day-dreaming in an exotic seaside port.

The stark divergence of certain phrases promotes an anxiety: “loisir” with “mourir,” “charmes” and “traîtres,” “Tout y parlerait” as communicative contrasted with the muted “l’âme en secret.” The number of rich or sufficient rhymes evokes a steady, calm ambience: “sœur”–“douceur,” “ensemble”–“ressemble,” “mouillés,”–“brouillés” etc. The rhyme scheme is unusual, (a a b c c b d d e f f e) and progressive as every third verse rhymes and carries forward the momentum (instead of counting on the couplets that have a stationary effect). The staid and compact design of the poem and the soothing rhyme belie the extravagant richness, which is itself stirred by all the senses. Exoticism and comfort are induced by the input from sight, feel, smell, and hearing. Only taste is left out. “*Songe à la douceur*” places the mind first among our informational “receptors.” The eyes are highlighted: “De tes traîtres yeux, / Brillant à travers leurs larmes.” (“With your treacherous eyes as they shine through tears”). The shined furniture suggests, literally and figuratively, a palpable richness. “Aux vagues senteurs de l’ambre” (“their odors vaguely mixed with amber”) not only speaks directly to the sense of smell but adds the ancient or traditional resonance of the amber. The sense of hearing is part of the equation where: “Tout y parlerait / à l’âme en secret / Sa douce langue natale.” (“Everything there would address our souls, privately, in their sweet native tongue”).

The invitation is a private affair, between the poet and his beloved, but it is made in a universal context. This space is suggested by mentions of distance: “D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble!,” “de ces ciels brouillés,” “Qu’ils viennent du bout du monde,” and “revêtent les champs.” The personal aspect of the poem is underscored by the double address in the first verse: “Mon enfant, ma sœur” emphasized by the alliteration *Mon – ma*, and the first of several anaphoric rhymes: “*Mon – Songe*” : “D’aller – aimer; *Les soleils – ces ciels; Dont l’humeur – Ton moindre; Les soleils – Les canaux*” and has for an effect the framing of the subject. The verse poem communicates much like the prose poem with both sharing qualities of painting. Both poems tout rich and decorated galleries of paintings. Inspired by the paintings the two lovers dream of “là-bas.” The desire to travel, in fact any desire, is fulfilled in this setting, because everything is “order and beauty, abundant, calm and voluptuous.”

In the first image of the prose version the poet is thinking of this marvelous, magical place *Cocagne*. The physical description (beautiful, rich, calm, decent) coalesces with the emotions (pleasure, disorder [banished], happiness) punctuated by very commonplace objects – plants, in the first paragraph and cooking, in the second. There is a brief flashback to a cold and miserable past. The theme shifts to music in the fourth paragraph combining with the mention of the “waltz,” while the concept of time emerges as “hours toward the infinite.” In the sixth paragraph, prose coincides with verse in an indoor scene. It is a room decorated with paintings – shining panels mounted on a wall, gilded leather framing expensive works of art. The sun shines into the art room through tall, complexly decorated windows. The physical description of the rich, artful setting turns again, as did the previous description toward the sensual – the smells and the intoxicating view. The individual features of the interior settings are profiled: cooking apparatus, tableware, jewels. The protagonist makes a personal observation: he has found his black tulip and his blue dahlia. The dream is incessant, *réjouissant*, and all melds back to the favored sister as she resembles the artwork. The poem closes by returning to the exterior view of a harbor, exuding the exotic nature of the East.

The dream of a tropical paradise, the indoor richness of ornate paintings, bathed in varying intensities of light are all outlined in the verse interpretation and spelled out in a painterly way in the prose version. Signifiers are more extensive in the prose, but the signifieds are the same. The sign that links the signifiers with the signifieds is the same poetry that evokes peace and exotic tranquility.

In the eighty-eight lines of “L’Invitation au voyage” six questions emerge: 1) Tu connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s’empare de nous dans les froides misères, cette nostalgie du pays qu’on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité? (l. 15). (“Do you feel that feverish ailment seizing us in our stark affliction, that longing for unheard-of realms, that anguish of curiosity?”). 2) Un musicien a écrit *l’Invitation à la valse*; quel est celui qui composera *l’Invitation au voyage*, qu’on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d’élection? (l. 25) (“A musician has written “Invitation to the Waltz.” Who then will compose “Invitation to the Voyage,” to be presented to the beloved woman, to the favored sister?”). 3) Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia, c’est là, n’est-ce pas, dans ce beau pays si calme et si rêveur, qu’il



faudrait aller vivre et fleurir? (l. 62). (“Incomparable flower, rediscovered tulip, allegorical dahlia, isn’t it there, to that beautiful land, so quiet and so dreamy, that we must go to live and flourish?”). 4) Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre correspondance? (l. 66). (“Would you not be framed by your analogy there, and could you not mirror yourself, as the mystics say, in your own correspondence?”). 5) Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d’opium naturel, incessamment sécrétée et renouvelée, et, de la naissance à la mort, combien comptons-nous d’heures remplies par la jouissance positive, par l’action réussie et décidée? (l. 73). (“Each of us carries within a dose of natural opium, ceaselessly secreted and renewed; and, from birth to death, how many hours can we count filled with concrete delight, with well-executed and resolute action?”). 6) Vivrons-nous jamais, passerons-nous jamais dans ce tableau qu’a peint mon esprit, ce tableau qui te ressemble? (l. 75) (“Will we ever live, will we ever enter that picture painted by my mind, that painting which resembles you?”). These questions, profiled by their limited occurrence, offer another perspective on the poet’s concerns and on the outcome he projects for the poem. Questions, though nominally seeking information, emphasize, generate new ideas, or provoke rhetorical responses.

In the eleven-paragraph poem these questions are found in two concentrations. The first two questions begin paragraph three and terminate paragraph four. The other four questions are clumped in paragraphs nine and ten; in fact paragraph nine is nothing but two questions asked back-to-back and paragraph ten has two questions preceded by only one statement. The questions are less interrogative and more emotive because they are yearning in tone as indicated here: “the feverish ailment, the beloved woman, it’s there isn’t it, could you not see yourself, from birth to death, will we ever live?” In the questions main themes are evident: misery and the pleasure of avoiding it; music leading from dance to travel; painting as the main milieu of the poem; analogy as it frames meaning; time; and art related to the special partner. The questions imply hesitation, where the poet seeks reinforcement in the quest.

The first question sets the scene of wintry misery and the consequent desire for the just mentioned Cognac warmth: “tant la chaude et capricieuse fantaisie s’y est donné carrière (*OC* 297), (“so freely does a hearty and capricious fancy flourish). We pass almost imperceptibly from a physical fever (*cette*

maladie fiévreuse) to a mental dilemma (cette nostalgie qu'on ignore), a type of tmesis where a break in the text demands the reader slow down to reflect on events. All six questions are rhetorical in tone, as if the questioner wants to support his own posture by assuming agreement from the partner.

The second question: “Quel est celui qui composera *l'Invitation au voyage*, qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d'élection?” implies an artistic and historical imperative. Artistically, “the poet” is the answer to the query, for he is already in the process of composing the poem. Historically, the poem's title refers back to the musical composition, “L'Invitation à la valse” (Weber 1819) and forward to the one-act play of Alexandre Dumas père (1851).<sup>73</sup> A desire to craft a future artwork – “fleur incomparable,” “tulipe retrouvée” – is expressed by the third question because flowers symbolize the entirety of the hoped-for destination. The third and fourth questions, placed back-to-back in the ninth paragraph, address the ultimate destination for Baudelaire, “l'éternel” or “l'infini” or specifically in the poem, “Cocagne,” where all is good, where even daily unpleasantness is excluded. Baudelaire is referring to “le bien,” “le beau,” and “le vrai” the terms used in his letter to Alphonse Calonne, January 1859;<sup>74</sup> the aphorism declares that one can experience what is good by doing right things; one can arrive at the truth by seeking more knowledge; and beauty is found in poetry. This is hardly a complete philosophy, but the statement does underscore Baudelaire's thought.

The flowers he mentions are symbols of perfection and just to approximate this beauty requires constant effort – “Qu'ils cherchent, qu'ils cherchent encore [ . . . ]!” (“May they search, continue to search!”). Only by art and by analogy can man even approach these ideals. The literary figures of analogy and suggestion (speaking like the mystics)<sup>75</sup> are two fundamental markers for pleasurable reading. The

<sup>73</sup> <http://hector.ucdavis.edu.edu/Berlioz2003/ProgNotes/090Invita.htm> and [http://www.dumaspere.com/pages/dictionnaire/invitation\\_valse.html](http://www.dumaspere.com/pages/dictionnaire/invitation_valse.html). 12 June 2008

<sup>74</sup> La morale cherche le *bien*, la science, le *vrai*, la *poésie* et quelquefois le roman, ne cherchent que le *beau*. (*Corr. I* 537).

<sup>75</sup> For Baudelaire this could have been Swedenborg (1688-1772), who published a “mystical” book called *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (London: 1758).

two worlds, one literary and one real are not cordoned off but share an unobstructed passage. In the present usage flowers represent literary figures: simile (fleur incomparable), metaphor (tulipe retrouvée) or allegory (allégorique dahlia). Allegory and suggestion both possess an element of chance: suggestion approximates a hoped-for meaning and is thus a gamble for accuracy. Through a component of risk allegory and suggestion offer pleasure to the reader.

The fourth question marks a pivot point – three questions precede and two questions follow. The poet implies that his art is a source of pleasure; writing offers possibilities to brush up against the ideal. In addition, Barthes says: “Writing is the proof that the text desires the reader” (*Pleasure* 6). Both see a form of correspondence in writing that Baudelaire brings up in this key question (4). Correspondence allows sensorial transfer between non-customary pairs: “hearing” colors or “smelling” tastes. Baudelaire claimed it possible to evoke these various *synesthésies* in his poetry. In the same manner that the Baudelairean prose poem was inspired by the elegant prose of Rousseau, one can also say that this theory of overlapping perceptions by the senses has an important early reference in *Emile* (1762) where he talks of the sounds of early morning, not necessarily heard but felt, as “freshness for the soul.”<sup>76</sup> These sensorial correspondences are experienced in “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure”: “Y plonger tout mon visage, comme un homme altéré dans l’eau d’une source” (*OC* 296). (Plunge my whole face into it, like a thirsting man into the water of a spring”) where the “odor” normally smelled becomes the “water” to be imbibed. An analogy is set up in this quotation: just as one can drink and feel the refreshment of water, the poet experiences the pleasure of a woman’s hair. On one hand analogy suggests and promotes meaning for a text. On the other hand, it could restrict elaboration of a work. For example, if a painting becomes known for a specific analogous presentation, it will be more difficult to create new interpretations of the work.

<sup>76</sup> Holcombe, A.O., H.J. Over & E.L. Altschuler. *Old roots of a theory of synesthesia in Rousseau’s Emile and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*. San Diego: Society for Neuroscience, 2007.

The fifth question is more properly a declaration: Everyone has creative power and internally created joy that orient our endless pursuit of happiness. Pleasure is found in “successful and decisive action” as opposed to lethargical meandering to which Baudelaire was so prone.

The sixth and final question – (“Will we ever live, will we ever enter that picture painted in my mind, that painting which resembles you?”) – moves from the ephemeral and temporal joys of the text to the more permanent desire to arrive at a destination and to adopt, in a permanent fashion, the contemplation of pleasure. Freud’s “death instinct” as a motivator of behavior is reified in this last question. It too is rhetorical. The present is placed in contrast with the eternal and is manifested in the painting – solid, completed. The adverb “ever” repeated twice underlines the disappearance of time. “C’est là qu’il faut aller vivre, c’est là qu’il faut aller mourir!” (“There is where we must live, where we must go to die!”) expresses the desire to participate in the works of art thereon focusing all the senses. One listens: “Un musicien a écrit l’*Invitation à la valse*.” One sees: “une bijouterie bariolée.” One smells: “s’échappe un parfum singulier.” One touches: “tamisés par de belles étoffes.” And one tastes: “comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine.” Pleasure for Baudelaire is in the “action décidée de l’artiste.” The never-ending quest for knowledge is at once a constant disappointment but also a source of pleasure. “Cette nostalgie du pays qu’on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité?” (*OC* 297). (That longing for unheard-of realms, that anguish of curiosity?).

Reducing ego, novelty, risk, rhythm and dream – the features of pleasure for Baudelaire – all project positive results. Novelty, rhythm and dream are consensus “optimists;” reducing ego is arguably positive; but *risk*? This is the one notion that exudes danger. However, in his 1933 novel *La Condition humaine* André Malraux (1901-1976) portrays a scene where risk and pleasure are associated with gambling: “He (Clappique) was so sure he would lose that he had not played everything as if to prolong the sensation of losing.”<sup>77</sup> In “L’*Invitation au voyage*,” a gambler’s risk offers pleasure to the writer and is available to the reader in the form of the ultimate gamble, the question of life and death: “Et de la

<sup>77</sup> From the English translation, *Man’s Fate*, André Malraux.

naissance à la mort, combien comptons-nous d'heures remplies par la jouissance (*OC* 298). ("From birth to death, how many hours can we count filled with concrete delight").

The eighth paragraph brings another peripeteia of pleasure to "L'Invitation." On the surface the poet has made an abrupt shift from describing a sumptuous painting (paragraph 7) to the quest of horticulturists grafting flowers (paragraph 8). This suggests that man's incursion into the realm of pure beauty, exemplified in flowers, is less esthetic than commercial, as these researchers can sell the latest species of flower to pay their expenses: "Qu'ils proposent des prix de soixante et de cent mille florins pour qui résoudra leurs ambitieux problèmes." ("May they offer prizes of sixty and of one hundred thousand florins for someone to solve their ambitious problems!"). The imagery is hardly idealized as it would be in Lamartine's writing, but is used for its allegorical value. Baudelaire's references to natural elements have a characteristic symbolic role. Where Baudelaire is short on rivers, grassy knolls, and the like, he is heavy on the impersonal nature – tulipe noire et dahlia bleu – figures that have further connection to Dumas, creator of tulipe noire in one of his novels and dahlia bleu, as symbolic of society's latest fashion. Antithetical figures like these reinforce the technique, frequent in Baudelaire's work, of seeing beauty even in evil. Nature for Baudelaire is an internal one – a nature of the mind, with which he measures the source of truth. Here are some of his allusions to natural phenomena that suggest how his technique is peculiar. When he speaks of the "brumes de notre nord" ("mists of our North" l. 3) he refers symbolically to a dream state or to the melancholy that would grip his consciousness for days on end. "Les délicates végétations" (l. 7) offer an alternative, a pleasurable one, to this "brume." "Les soleils couchants," (l. 35) are less a lyrical notation and more, an intimation of the infinite produced by the assorted angles and intensities of light. "L'horticulture," (l. 58) is for Baudelaire, another art, like poetry that produces beauty.

Another foundation for the pleasure of the text for both Baudelaire and Barthes is music and rhythmic quality in the text. The cadence of "L'Invitation" (prose) is inherited from the verse version and is illustrated in the last paragraph by eight successive demonstrative adjectives (Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe etc.) plus the image of tall ships, their masts rocking back and forth on the waves. This tranquil

rhythm is underscored by the sonorities of the open vowel sound mixed with alliterative / m / “Et d’où montent les chants monotones de la manœuvre” (“From which the crew’s monotonous songs ascend”). Repetition has several permutations: *Un vrai pays*, repeated eight times; *tout est*, repeated three times, and *où*, repeated four times. The first words of paragraphs one through seven rhyme with /□/: Il est; Un vrai; Tu connais; Oui, c’est; Qui, c’est; Un vrai – a pattern that breaks off for paragraphs eight and nine but returns and finishes in paragraphs ten and eleven: “Des rêves, Ces trésors [. . .]”. The poem sets up rhythm by recurrence.

The enormous number of adjectives used by Baudelaire is a main vehicle for the pleasure of the text. Barthes calls adjectives a “constraint”<sup>78</sup> [. . .] which are those doors of language through which the ideological and the imaginary come flowing in” (*Pleasure* 13). Ideology (for Barthes, stagnant thinking that threatens the pleasure of the text) often requires adjectives to underscore or repeat meaning with a noun they ostensibly modify (sale boulot, mauvais garçon, liberal intellectual). This adjectival use is the opposite of where pleasure occurs: when adjectives fulfill their duty and signify a descriptive meaning (“hautes fenêtres ouvragées”).

Baudelaire does not explicitly extol the adjective’s pleasurable force, but his predilection for their use is evident. In the 88-line “L’Invitation au voyage” he incorporates approximately 80 different adjectives. Even then it is not the repeated adjectives that are so impressive, such as “beau,” three times or “profonde,” two times, but the seventy-odd *different* adjectives employed here listed with line numbers in parentheses: superbe (line 1), vieille (2), singulier (3, 47, 55), noyé (3), chaude (5), capricieuse (5), savantes (7), délicates (8, 72), vrai (9, 49), beau (9, 19, 66), riche (9, 20, 49), tranquille (10, 20, 82), honnête (10, 20), grasse (11, 14), douce (11, 21), poétique (14), excitante (14), cher (15), fiévreuse (16), aimée (28), lentes (30), profonde (32, 35), significative (32), luisants (33), dorés (33), sombre (34), béates (35), calmes (35, 67), couchants (36), tamisés (38), hautes (39), ouvragées (39), vastes (41), curieux (41),

<sup>78</sup> Mortimer argues against the Miller’s translation of *la main mise* as “constraint” favoring instead, “taking of power.”

bizarres (41), armés (41) raffinées (42), muette (44), mystérieuse (44), propre (50), luisant (50), belle (50), magnifique (51), splendide (52), bariolée (53), laborieux (54), entier (55), supérieur (55), réformée (57), corrigée (57), embellie (58), refondue (58), ambitieux (63, 72), incomparable (65), retrouvée (65), allégorique (65), rêveur (67), naturel (74), positive (76), réussie (77), décidée (77), miraculeuses (78), grands (79), énormes (79), monotones (81), fatigués (85), gorgés (86), natal (87), enrichies (87).

Among these modifiers there is a considerable number of past participles used as adjectives, words that add a touch of certainty to situations. For example, “fatigués par la houle et gorgés des produits [. . .] mes pensées enrichies” (l. 85) become facts placed in the past and are made for the reader, more sure. The overall effect fortifies a believable and pleasurable image. Barthes says that the text’s desire for the reader is found in the site defined by mutual reader/writer desire. He charges adjectives as gatekeepers at the doors to pleasure.

Another stylistic detail that affects the significance of the text is the position of the adjectives, whether *pre*-positioned or *post*-positioned. For example the expression: “Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia” (l. 62) shifts from standard syntax to one that calls attention to itself. If the pleasure of the text is the remedy for ennui and indifference, as it was for Baudelaire, anything that helps eliminate banality increases pleasure. Adjectives refine their subject beyond the given, commonplace meaning. The adjectives in the sentence: “Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes ou par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en nombreux compartiments” denote vague window openings, but when modified with *hautes* and *ouvragées* – the banal gives way to precision and pleasure.

Baudelaire limits himself to one or two adjectives per noun, rarely exceeding three. However with nouns, accumulation can be intense: “Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c’est toi” (OC 299). (“These treasures, this furniture, this excess, this uniformity, these scents, these miraculous flowers, they are you”). Here the accent of even one adjective at the end of the list (miraculeuses) refines the items into a subset that is pleasing. This particular use of *miraculeuse* bridges the attention of the text to the other, –“c’est toi.” After five nouns in a row are enumerated

without adjectives, the placement of *miraculeuse* has a surprising and pleasurable effect. Furthermore, the rhythm is altered by the adjective, which in turn underscores the musicality of the passage, a pleasurable tactic pertinent for both Baudelaire and Barthes.

Baudelaire plays with adjectives in the phrase: “Où tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine comme une splendide orfèvrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée!” (l. 47). (“Where everything is rich, tidy, and glossy, like a clean conscience, like a magnificent array of kitchen utensils, like splendid silverware, like colorful jewelry!”). The three adjectives: rich, tidy, and glossy are respectively applied to four entities: conscience, cookware, silverware and jewelry. Attention falls on the household objects as referents. The allusions are brisk, from mental to mundane, from conscience to pots and pans. This sort of juxtaposition challenges the flow of reading and contributes to the pleasure of the text much as Barthes suggests in his “ruptures at the margins of the text.”

Pleasure in Baudelaire’s poetry is also produced by the juxtaposition of the philosophical with the ordinary, a form of novelty or surprise. He explores, for example the infinite aspect of our senses. Spatial distance is portrayed – “to the ends of the earth” as with the expressions: “L’Orient de l’Occident, la Chine de l’Europe.” Superlatives, accentuating the extreme are plentiful: “Où tout est beau, riche,” “Où tout vous ressemble mon cher *ange*.” (“Where everything is beautiful, rich,” “Where everything resembles you my dear angel”). The position of the mirror in the famous painting by Velàzquez,<sup>79</sup> offers a glimpse of the infinite; in the same fashion Baudelaire says: “Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoffes [. . .] et de toutes choses, de tous les coins [. . .] Qu’ils reculent sans cesse les limites de leur bonheur.” (“The mirrors, the metals, the fabrics [. . .] from everything, from every corner [. . .] They ceaselessly extend the limits of their happiness”). All these phrases evoke the *au-delà*, a look toward our limits and beyond.

<sup>79</sup> The 1656 painting by Diego Velàzquez, “Las Meninas,” due to the angle of the mirror, poses pleasurable questions: Who’s painting whom?



Both Baudelaire and Barthes call dreams a source of pleasure. Both versions of “L’Invitation au voyage” conjure the dream state. A vagueness is present from the first phrase: “There exists a magnificent land, a land of Cockaigne,” granted, a destination but nothing specific. Baudelaire speaks regularly of the dream or of dreamlike consciousness. In the fifty prose poems the word occurs with the same frequency as “solitude,” “Dieu,” “plaisir,” and “âme,” his major themes (*Cargo, PP* 343). He seeks to venture beyond the concrete, via his art, in order to explore the realm of the spirit and morality. For the poet / searcher the dream is thus a useful inspiration and a mode of discovery.

The word “rêve” did not enter the French language until the thirteenth century when it was a permutation of the verb “esver” (to wander) that itself had evolved from the latin “exvagus” (wandering or strolling), and the gallo-roman “esvo” (vagabond).<sup>80</sup> To dream was thus to wander about, without fixed itinerary. Even as late as the nineteenth century the term was rarely used. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries Freudian theory realized the significance of dreams and began its frequent usage. Baudelaire (along with a few such as Nerval) was ahead of his time in bringing the concept out of limbo and using it as an important and real phenomenon. “Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre” (*OC* 94). (“I am beautiful, like a dream in stone”). Baudelairian dreams consistently feature a bizarre or unusual component. He relates in “Le Crépuscule du soir”: (*OC* 306) “Le crépuscule (symbolic for the dream) excite les fous.” (“Twilight [the dream] agitates madmen”). In the three “Crépuscules” (verse, prose, and du *matin*) the dream links the living with the dark side: “Ô nuit! ô rafraîchissante ténèbres! [. . .] vous êtes la délivrance d’une angoisse!”<sup>81</sup> (*OC* 307). (“Oh night! oh refreshing darkness! [. . .] you are the liberation from anguish!”).

Barthes’s declaration that pleasure accumulates around textual breaks (asyndeton, anacoluthon, and tmesis) has an example in “L’Invitation au voyage” – the famous break where “tu” follows “vous” discussed earlier in chapter four. The fourth *nocturne*, “Le Crépuscule du soir” takes place in the

<sup>80</sup> *Le Petit Robert*, Paris: Société du nouveau littré, 1979.

<sup>81</sup> This line could be construed as a premonition of Baudelaire’s untimely and aphasic death at age 46.

environment of dream. Baudelaire describes “twilight’s tender and indistinct tints” as forming a pensive but generally positive coming of the night. Further along, the poem divides night into good and bad – into “rafraîchissantes ténèbres” (rather positive) and “signal de sabbat” (rather ominous). By and large the dream yields to the positive: “Crépuscule, comme vous êtes doux et tendre!” (“Twilight, how gentle and tender you are!”) and “Le soir, précurseur des voluptés profondes” (“The evening, herald of profound voluptuous pleasures”), refer to the pleasure associated with dreams.

The Crépuscule series, *du soir* (verse and prose) and *du matin* (verse) elaborate the features of novelty and dream. The verse poem “Le Crépuscule du soir” XCV was published in 1852, the prose version with the same title in 1855 and the variation, “Le Crépuscule du Matin” CIII in the section “Tableaux Parisiens” of *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). In the prose version Baudelaire takes the role of omniscient narrator who can divine the thoughts of his characters: “Et leurs pensées prennent maintenant les couleurs tendres et indécises du crépuscule” (OC 306). (“And their thoughts now absorb twilight’s tender and indistinct tints”). The narrator asks: “Quels sont les infortunés que le soir ne calme pas?” (“Who are the hapless ones not calmed by evening?”). He relaxes after a long day’s work, but the peace is interrupted by cries, “des harmonies d’enfer” (“hellacious harmonies”). This relaxation, amended with evil innuendo, puzzles and is reinforced by the description : “plus aigre, plus sombre, plus taquin.” (l. 29) (“more bitter, gloomier, more pestering”). A tinted light signals the peace of sunset: “Les lueurs roses qui traînent encore à l’horizon comme l’agonie du jour sous l’oppression victorieuse de sa nuit.” (“The pink glows still lingering on the horizon like the day dying under its night’s victorious subjugation”). The binary arrangement is thus typically Baudelairian, where good and evil exist together.

In both verse and prose the night is personified as it “falls” and “transforms” the coming darkness into an agreeable harmony. A second level of connotation contrasts the rich and poor (les infortunés) of the town. In the verse version, the daylight evokes clarity and comprehension whereas nighttime serves up confusion and disbelief. Man must face up to his dual nature, expressed with animal features: “Et

l'homme impatient se change en bête fauve" (*OC* 164). ("And impatient man changes into a wild animal"). Baudelaire introduces into the prose-scene the classic symbol for wisdom and nightly forays, the owl – "Quels sont les infortunés que le soir ne calme pas, et qui prennent, comme les hiboux, la venue de la nuit pour un signal de sabbat?" (*OC* 306). ("Who are the hapless ones not calmed by evening, and who like owls, take the night's arrival as a sign of witch's sabbath?")

"*Le jour tombe,*" at the beginning of the prose version, with its definite article, suggests a universal application for "*Le Crépuscule du soir,*" as does the follow-up "*les pauvres esprits fatigués du labeur.*" Baudelaire places side by side the working world and the psychic one. The workers are relaxed at the end of an arduous day, but the coming of nighttime turns out to be more psychological than chronological. "Un grand apaisement se fait dans les pauvres esprits fatigués du labeur." ("A great calming forms in the pitiable minds wearied by the day's toil"). The twilight brings out, from time to time, the "monster" in all: "Le crépuscule excite les fous." The physical linked to the mental corresponds to the dichotomy of good and evil that functions in all three poems. The verse version (*OC* 164) follows a related series of developments, the twilight is portrayed as charming yet potentially criminal. A litany of sordid evening occurrences are highlighted. "Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage." ("Spirits devoured by savage pain.") "Elle remue au sein de la cité de fange." ("It swarms in the bosom of the gutter city.") But all is not without hope as the poet adds a positive spin just as the first rays of light enter tentatively onto the scene. "Encore la plupart n'ont-ils jamais connu / La douceur du foyer et n'ont jamais vécu!" ("And after all, most have never known the pleasure of the hearth and have never lived!").

The four unequal stanzas in the verse renditions can be matched with four thematic divisions in the prose edition. In the prose poem (*OC* 306) the first three paragraphs suggest a neutral zone between good and evil. In paragraphs four and five the narrator describes old acquaintances afflicted by various "folies" precipitated by the evening hour. The longer paragraph six presents the moral of the tale that indeed, the night is home to much imprudence and foolishness but that these indiscretions are not exclusively the domain of the night, only proof of humanity's fallen nature. The final three paragraphs are

lyrical in a fashion that makes the poem indicative of the genre itself, exhibiting both lyrical and prosaic qualities at once.

The word *crépuscule* is normally translated as twilight but when qualified by “*du matin*” it becomes the opposite – dawn. One expects “*Crépuscule du matin*” (*OC* 173), coming at the beginning of the day, to offer light and happiness. But again, agony and not glory leads off this verse poem “*C’était l’heure où l’essaim des rêves malfaisants / Tord sur leurs oreillers les bruns adolescents.*” (“It was the hour when swarms of evil dreams / Set dark adolescents writhing on their pillows”). Hope that the progression of the poem will bring about a reprieve from the initial desolation is misplaced. All sordid vesperal activities – prostitution, unfaithful men or women, the coldness of night, the illness worsened by clammy air – are all represented in the *matin* poem. The closing line welcomes the timid *aurore* but in an indeterminate Baudelairian way: “*Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux, / Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.*” (“As gloomy Paris, rubbing eyes, / Took up its tools, old workingman”).

The three “*Crépuscules*” relate visions of prostitution, fatigue from manual labor, and criminality that infiltrate nineteenth-century city-life. The differences lie in the prose / verse dichotomy and in the variance of light particular to the setting or rising sun. These subtle differences hark back to the ruptures signaled by Barthes as a place of textual pleasure (*Plaisir* 14). Collisions of unlike codes, pompous new words, erotic themes expressed in pure, grammatical sentences cause, according to Barthes, the language to be redistributed in a pleasurable way.

We can apply this differential principle to the verse forms of *Crépuscule* in terms of the quality of the light as well as its intensity. In “*Crépuscule du soir*” XCV the angle of light decreases as the sun sets. With the lighting intensity dropping, the elements of the dark have an easier time concealing their activities. “*Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup; le ciel / Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve, / Et l’homme impatient se change en bête fauve*” (*OC* 164). (“It arrives as an accomplice, treading softly, the sky slowly closing itself off, / And the impatient man changes into a savage animal”).

On the other hand, the light of the morning (“*Crépuscule du matin*”) illuminates the same subjects but in a different manner. “*La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge; / Où l’âme, sous le poids du corps*

revêche et lourd, / Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour” (*OC* 173). (“When lamps, like a bloody eye pulsing and beating, make red spots on the day; / When the soul, under the harsh and heavy weight of the body, / Imitates the battle between lamp and daylight”).

The two versions of “Le Crépuscule du soir,” the rhymed poem of 38 verses, and the prose one of 65 lines also highlight the difference poetry-prose.<sup>82</sup> In both, the evening arrives agreeably with the promise of rest and rejuvenation for the working person. “Aujourd’hui nous avons travaillé!—C’est le soir qui soulage / Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage” (*OC* 164). (“Today we have worked! – It is the evening that soothes / The minds under attack by intense pain”). Or in the prose version: “Le jour tombe. Un grand apaisement se fait dans les pauvres esprits fatigués du labeur de la journée” (*OC* 306). (“Nighttime falls. A great calming forms in pitiable minds worried by the day’s toil”). Both renditions abruptly turn their original expression of happiness towards intimations of evil in the night. From the verse: “Cependant des démons malsains dans l’atmosphère / S’éveillent lourdement, comme des gens d’affaire / Et cognent en volant les volets et l’auvent (*OC* 166). (“However evil demons in the atmosphere / awaken heavily like busy workers / And pound on the shutters and the roof as they fly by”). The quick about-face by the prose version is expressed this way: “Cependant du haut de la montagne arrive à mon balcon, à travers les nues transparentes du soir, un grand hurlement, composé d’une foule de cris discordants, que l’espace transforme en une lugubre harmonie” (*OC* 306). (“However from the top of the mountain comes to my balcony via the transparent evening clouds, a great cry, composed of a mass of discordant cries that space changes into lugubrious music”).

The verse poem is slightly more visual in presentation than the prose work where the impression is largely auditory. The first sign of disarray in the prose is a combination of “un grand hurlement, de cris discordants” and “cette sinistre ululation.” (“a great howling, discordant shouts” and “Their ominous ululation”). By contrast in the rhymed poem evil creeps in “à pas de loup” (“stealthily”) and from there on

<sup>82</sup> There is only one verse version of “Le Crépuscule du matin.”

visual images predominate: “se change en bête fauve,” (“changes into wild animal”), “La Prostitution s’allume,” (“Whoredom kindles”) and “au sein de la cité de fange,” (“in the bosom of the gutter city”).

“Le Crépuscule du soir” XXII announces the second half of the six *poèmes nocturnes*. By its philosophical treatment of the unsavory aspects of urban nightlife it portends the style and substance of the last two *nocturnes*, “La Solitude” XXIII and “Les Projets” XXIV. The two “Crépuscules” exhibit some difference in rhythm and length but not much else; the final effect is the same. The pleasure of the text lies in the juxtaposition of the three versions where the reader can compare signifiers. Though twilight touches off madness and other assorted aberrations, it remains inevitably a time of contemplation and beauty, that of “gold and silver stars, sprinkled over it” (Kaplan 51).

The fifth of the six *nocturnes*, number XXIII “La Solitude,” delves into the theme of wayward actions promoted not by darkness, but by loneliness. There are no clear moral lessons that result from the tale but rather a debate about solitude and art. The narrator wonders about his own lifestyle and the question of whether solitude or community is better? The poet reflects on the advice of “un gazetier philanthrope,” who supports his arguments with the sayings of “des Pères de l’Eglise.” The narrator adds the qualifier: “Like all unbelievers” – a small irony as most unbelievers would fall in against the Church Fathers and not vice versa. The narrator posits his case with a great deal of certainty, at the beginning: “I know that the Demon gladly frequents arid places.” But by the end of this recitation, he formally expresses doubt: “I suspect,” “La Bruyère says somewhere, perhaps [. . .],” “probably afraid,” “Almost all our woes [. . .] I believe,” “I *could* call fraternity, if I *would* agree.” The poet responds to the Devil’s argument that solitude is evil: “Oh, solitude is only dangerous for the already distracted and idle;” a group to which he does not want to belong. He considers, for argument’s sake, other personality types such as the “bavard” coming from “les races jacassières,” (“our jabbering races”) and has a feasible riposte for all of them. The image, at once violent and ridiculous – of the lover of crowds, giving a speech from the gallows, is nonetheless vivid. Towards the end of the work the poet reflects on the opinions of literary icons La Bruyère (1645-1696) and Pascal (1623-1662), the last two paragraphs taking the form of quotations.

The eight practically equal paragraphs of the prose poem mimic verse-poetry by their brevity and grouped themes. Paragraphs one and two pit the two street-level participants one against the other – the poet and the “gazetier philanthrope.” Paragraphs three and four, both commencing with generalities “Il est” or “Il y a” bring up historical references, one to “l’île de Robinson Crusoé” and another to “les tambours de Santerre.” The life of Crusoe on a deserted isle repeats a traditional theme but the historical allusion to the Santerre drums is striking, as their playing reportedly drowned out the gallow’s speech of Louis XVI. Paragraphs five and six are first-person references to intense emotion, first hate: “Mais je les méprise.” (“But I despise them”); and then envy; “Voyez-vous le subtil envieux!” (“Look at that subtle and envious one!”). The final two paragraphs also portray strong emotions – first fear, “craignant sans doute” (“probably afraid”) and finally sadness “tous nos malheurs” (“all our woes”). The lexical field is spotted with emotive phrases: “solitude est mauvaise” (l. 1), “les incroyables” (l. 3), “s’enflamme merveilleusement” (l. 6), “ses passions” (l. 8), “suprême plaisir” (l. 10), “furieux” (l. 12), “répugnance” (l. 17), “sans craindre” (l. 19), “plains pas” (l. 22), “méprise” (l. 25), “envieux” (l. 30), “dédaigne” (l. 30), “malheur” (l. 33), “craignant” (l. 35), “affolés” (l. 40), “bonheur” (l. 40). The poem is thus powerfully emotive throughout even as the poet preaches peace and solitude.

In this poem Baudelaire incorporates novelty after novelty under the cover of superficial banality. The “generous” newspaper man (gazetier philanthrope) is a vociferous antagonist. The poet’s mention of “le Démon” brings more intense discussion of murder and inflamed passions. The next paragraph refers to capital punishment juxtaposed with supreme pleasure.<sup>83</sup> One would become a “furious fool” if stranded like Robinson Crusoe. Another unlikely, but affective scene is the pending execution of a person so enamored of public address that he cannot resist a last speech. The poet takes all this in stride: “Je ne les plains pas [. . .] mais je les méprise.” (“I do not pity them [. . .] but I despise them”).

<sup>83</sup> In *Le Plaisir du text* Barthes uses the same image, a purely imaginary circumstance, to express the intensity of jouissance: “[. . .] que le libertin goûte au terme d’une machination hardie, faisant couper la corde qui le pend, au moment où il jouit” (*Plaisir* 15).

This poem foreshadows Baudelaire's current and future role as prose poet. It will not be a precise effort, as indicated by the offhandedness of his attributions: "La Bruyère quelque part" and "Pascal je crois." His will be a new language (that of prose poetry) and not "the belle langue de mon siècle." He will treat city-life: "la foule, le malheur, la prostitution" the same subjects as this poem. These works will be tinted with irony: the title of this poem probably should have been "Les Projets," the poem that follows it, instead of "La Solitude," but in any case the new language of the prose poem is forceful. In 1855 this prose poem and "Le Crépuscule du soir" were the first among all the prose poems to be published.

The structure is verse-like; the paragraphs are of equal length imitating poetic stanzas. The repetitive "je" and "il" begin the paragraphs five out of eight times adding to the cadence. A number of sentences share internal rhymes also provoking an ordered feel: "[. . .] la solitude est *mauvaise* pour l'homme [. . .] le Démon fréquente *volontiers*" along with copious alliteration: "Je ne les *plains pas, parce* que je devine que leurs effusions oratoires leur *procurent* des *voluptés égales*." Pascal, for his part was a strict Jansenist, and criticized the elasticity of the prevailing Catholic principles of his day and the form of this prose poem is thus very "Jansenist," with its tight order and the superficially rigorous strictures.

The uncertain tone of the poem implies a doubt: "Does the poem really discuss "solitude" and "crowds" or is it about "language" as embodied in the two great writers, Pascal and La Bruyère? The seventh paragraph, instead of making things clear, is loaded with layered negatives: "[. . .] de ne pouvoir être seul!" ("not being able to be alone!") when one could have said "being in public;" and at the end of the paragraph: "craignant sans doute de ne pouvoir se supporter eux-mêmes" ("probably afraid they couldn't tolerate themselves") or more directly "to criticize themselves" or even more to the point, "not to attack" the author. At first this sentence seems to advance the poet's argument that "solitude is good for man," but there are so many negations of negations meshed with conditional and subjunctive moods that the argument veers away from the value of solitude to a mimetic comment on the capacity of language, where words elucidate or obfuscate beyond face-value. In the third paragraph the argument curiously introduces "bavards" (l. 10). Those voluble talkers are the poet's counter-example to being attracted to solitude and its alleged dangers. So the narrator shifts the polemic emphasis from his desire for solitude to



focus on those who typically prefer crowds. Hyperbole is the mark of the fourth paragraph. The narrator extends his claim about gossips to the “race jacassière” and “le supplice suprême” both strong assonances teamed with alliteration. Humorously, the poet claims that those who follow crowds would jump at the chance to give a speech, even if they were headed toward an execution, as long as their audience could hear their farewell speech! In paragraph five we detect a more conciliatory tone, but the attack returns in the next paragraph: “[. . .] le hideux trouble-fête!” (“the disgusting spoilsport”).

The poet aligns himself with Pascal, for whom solitude is good and who considered the exterior world as “affolé” (“panic-stricken”). The poet wonders if he can build on Pascal’s tradition. But why does speaking the language of the nineteenth century require support from Pascal? The contemporary language of the nineteenth century places Baudelaire at odds with the old language and esthetic of La Bruyère and Pascal. The narrator feels out of place and is self-critical as he searches for his identity – a lover of solitude in the more and more public world of mid-nineteenth-century Europe. The poem starts as a discussion between art for art’s sake and art for public consumption, but finishes by going in a linguistic direction that has been subtly alluded to and made manifest by the emotive language employed throughout.

“A Une Heure du matin” X continues the discussion of accommodating one’s solitude with an impulse for society and communion. Here the protagonist is a man of letters recounting a typical day: “Horrible vie! Horrible ville!” On his daily schedule the author has a number of typical encounters. His fellow writers mutter stupidities. He argues with the director of a literary revue about the structure of his work and his possible remuneration. He greets at least twenty different people just going about their lives, but he really only recognized five of them. In about the same numbers he passed out handshakes; worried about the quality of so many encounters, he recalls that he had forgotten to procure gloves as a health precaution. He brags (Why? He wonders.) about certain villainous acts that were not his fault, but on the other hand he denies the indiscretions that he willingly performed. Reflecting on such a day’s activities he lets out an autonomic exclamation: “Ouf! Is that all?” Finally at one in the morning the poet cries out in his troubled sleep: “Seigneur mon Dieu! accordez-moi la grâce de produire quelques beaux vers qui me

prouvent à moi-même que je ne suis pas le dernier des hommes, que je ne suis pas inférieur à ceux que je méprise” (*OC* 285). “Lord my God! Grant me the grace to produce a few beautiful verses to prove to myself that I am not the lowest of men, and that I am not inferior to those I despise!”

Like the *nocturnes*, “A Une Heure du matin” recounts routine events – taking a walk, shopping, traveling, or working – and evaluates them later in a musing. When the poet exclaims: “Finally alone!,” he has not just diminished the demands surrounding him to the comfort of his personal solitude, but he has gone one step further and has laid aside his *self*. He has entered the world of souls evidenced in the final paragraph: “Âmes de ceux que j’ai aimés, âmes de ceux que j’ai chantés, fortifiez-moi, soutenez-moi, éloignez de moi le mensonge et les vapeurs corruptrices du monde” (*OC* 285). (“Souls of those I have loved, souls of those I have sung, fortify me, sustain me, remove me from untruth and the world’s corrupting fumes”). Baudelaire reiterates<sup>84</sup> that reality is in the unseen and that the physical world is “corrupting.” For pleasure of novelty, consider the poet’s encounter with a “female acrobat” (no less) in paragraph three, “une sauteuse,” who requests a sketch from him. Baudelaire often frames himself in his poems with analogies, just as he asks of his partner in “L’Invitation au voyage”: “Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre correspondance?” (“Would you not be framed in your analogy there, and could you not mirror yourself, as the mystics say, in your own correspondence?”). In “A Une Heure du matin,” analogy helps the mind to shift instantly from the human scale to an infinite one.

“Les Projets” XXIV, last poem in the group nocturne talks of the mind’s ability to transport a person from the trials of everyday life. “Les Projets” is an appropriate last *nocturne* as it enlarges the thought onto more general considerations as do the prose poems. This poem resembles other *nocturnes* in its lyricism and its quest for tranquility. The poet while walking in the park, sees a magnificent marble staircase that conjures up thoughts of his beloved arrayed in a princess’s finery. Further along in his walk

<sup>84</sup> In his introductory letter for *Les Paradis artificiels*, a book-length project, he had written that earthly things are hardly existent and that true reality is better found in dreams.

he passes an art boutique. The engravings in the window portray exotic scenes of tropical paradise: “Dans l’atmosphère, une odeur enivrante, indéfinissable” (*OC* 309). (“In the atmosphere, an intoxicating, undefinable fragrance”). This is the future he sees for himself and his love. The poet continues his promenade as twilight falls on a traditional, simple but happy family gathering; no palace and no exotica, just a contented home life. The protagonist debates his three model-existences and comes away, not necessarily favoring any of the options, but reflecting on the power of the mind that could give him all three if he wanted.

This poem returns to one of Baudelaire’s key themes, the infinite.<sup>85</sup> Affirmations such as: “A cette heure” or “plus tard dans une rue” hint at the importance of chronological time for the poet. The use of the present participle, *en passant*, or *en rentrant* has a static effect on the text, prolonging a single moment towards the infinite. Another feature that imparts meaning here is the repetition of “Et” at the beginning of the last three paragraphs of “Les Projets.” This recurring “et” has the effect of emphasizing what comes before and what comes after it, so that the reader focuses on the last comparison as the new one is taking place. The poet is confident that his mind can take him to any of three potential existences, according to his desires. He admits that just the idea of such lifestyles evokes for him *jouissance*, a feeling beyond ordinary happiness, a realization of the infinite.

In addition to the chronological infinite (eternity), the spatial infinite (infinity) is addressed in “Les Projets.” The first two spaces indicated are “grand parc” and “palais” with its “grandes pelouses”—hence grandeur is evident. The second paragraph places the action “dans une rue” and quickly veers, by way of an art engraving, to the poet’s desire for tropical spaciousness. His mind transports him to the space of abundance described in detail in the third paragraph. The dreamer “returns” to the city street that matches the scale of his own reality: “en rentrant seul chez lui.” All seems to be a typical mental promenade with the goal of relieving daily stress.

<sup>85</sup> Cargo (372, 377) cites 7 uses of the word “infini”, 13 permutations for “inconnu” and 17 for “dieu” in the *Petits Poèmes en Prose*. These three terms operate as near synonyms.

In “Les Projets” the initial paragraphs point at two social strata. First the narrator speaks of his *princesse*, yet right away this princess is found “dans une rue” – a brisk turn-about from a royal reference to one of the streets. The narrator describes tropical paradise but precedes his thoughts on the tropical trees with an ellipsis. This sort of anacoluthon signals a mental hesitation as he attempts to remember some tropical trees “arbres bizarres et luisants dont j’ai oublié” or the sources of the wonderful tropical odors “une odeur enivrante, indéfinissable” (OC 309). These are instances of Barthesian pleasure found in marginal language that evokes intrigue. The key modifiers in the poem are the adverbs of manner that suggest *how* an action takes place. For example: “Elle a *naturellement* l’air d’une princesse,” (l. 6) or “*Décidément*, c’est là qu’il faudrait demeurer” (l. 14) “il continuait *mentalement*” (l. 17) and finally “mon âme voyage si *lestement*” (l. 50). All four of the adverbs reiterated at different points of the story, support the spiritual foundation of the poet’s thought. His reflections are not logical but emotional, and these are adverbs of emotion. Despite this, they are as real as Cartesian reality; that is, his pleasure experienced is as real as the imagined palace, rococo chairs or cabin that he mentions earlier. These emotive thoughts have the same origin as logical thought but as feelings, they are purported to be fleeting and ephemeral. This use of adverbs is one of Baudelaire’s depictions of the conscience that he mentioned in his definition of the prose poem in the *lettre programme*. Indeed, plans for the future are no less or no more real than any emotion.

In this last *nocturne* the narrator has found his pleasure: “Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?” (“And what good is it to carry out plans, since planning itself is a sufficient delight?”). The use of “jouissance” instead of “déllice” or “plaisir” is an indication that Baudelaire did not have in mind just average pleasure, but more like bliss. The poet refers explicitly to one of Barthes’s sources of literary pleasure, the dream: “J’ai eu aujourd’hui, en *rêve*, trois domiciles où j’ai trouvé un égal plaisir” (OC 310). (“Today, in dream, I had three domiciles where I found equal pleasure”). The declaration of the poet mirrors the pleasure construed by the artist. “Le plaisir

et le bonheur sont dans la première auberge venue, dans l'auberge du hasard, si féconde en voluptés" (*OC* 310). ("Pleasure and happiness are at the first inn reached, at the inn of chance, so fertile in voluptuous pleasures"). The pleasure of the prose poem is found also in the "hasard" or the unexpected and in the "féconde [. . .] voluptés." Specifically these motifs of pleasure include forceful adjectives, flexible turns of phrase, and musical rhythm. Coming at the end of the group *nocturne*, *Les Projets* makes use of literal and figurative mentions of pleasure. In this work we can cite three of Barthes's constituents: pleasure at the margins of the text, pleasure from the dream, and in time manipulated.

Referring to Baudelaire's definition of the prose poem – paragraphs, lyrical, contrastive and supple language, addressing conscience, dreams and the soul – these *poèmes nocturnes* offer full examples of the definition and further they illustrate the pleasure of the text as construed by both men. How does Baudelaire treat impalpable abstract subjects? Personification is his technique in the prose poem XLVIII "Any where out of the world (N'importe où hors du monde)" where the poet converses very matter of factly with his soul. It seems the soul is in need of a new habitat. It is ironic that the poet offers the soul various options based on physical and climatic features: Lisbon is warm and built on marble; Holland is beautiful with plenty of museums; Batavia has the attributes of European civilization and a tropical climate. The soul, that the poet knows so well, stays silent during all of these proposals until she finally "explodes, and wisely shouts at me, 'Anywhere! Anywhere! provided it is out of this world!'" (Kaplan 120).

Baudelaire's *lettre programme* claims that the prose poem is adaptable to the soul, dreams and conscience. Four of the six *nocturnes* make explicit references to l'âme: "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure," "L'Invitation au voyage," "La Solitude" and "Les Projets." "L'Horloge" makes no direct mention of the soul, but includes several allusions to associated concepts: *l'éternité, une heure vaste et solennelle* and *le plaisir*. The poet proclaims the mystical nature of dreams as only attainable by ambitious and delicate souls. The concept of an ambitious and delicate soul harks back to the idea of the mind's natural functioning as ventured by Kant. The mind must be sensitive to the incoming information

available, at which point it understands by ordering the input with its *a priori* categories. The mind must be ambitious in order to stay alert and sensitive to this natural function.

The treatment of the soul in “L’Invitation au voyage” XVIII is noteworthy as three of its four mentions are grouped in the sixth paragraph. In a private gallery, paintings have taken on the qualities of artists: “discrete, quiet and profound.” The images of furnishings in the paintings are “like refined souls.” The gallery even adopts a “soul” that has qualities of enticing fragrances. In the introduction to “Le Gateau” XV the poet speaks of traveling to a beatific land that inspires his soul “d’une grandeur et d’une noblesse irrésistibles,” and as in the previous example, simile is used to portray the soul : “My soul seemed as vast and pure as the sky’s dome which enveloped me” (Kaplan 31). Personification and simile are thus two of Baudelaire’s techniques for depicting the ephemeral.

In the *lettre programme*, after mentioning the soul, Baudelaire cites reverie as a target for prose poetry’s capacity. The writing is to adapt itself to the ups and downs of contemplation. Clues to the treatment of reverie abound in poem V “La Chambre double” where the collection repeats eight times the term *reverie*. The poet invokes colors, “rose et de bleu” to describe the room where thoughtfulness pervades. The identification of: “Un rêve de volupté” is intense, but its addendum, “pendant une éclipse” is even more revealing. “Éclipse” connotes rarity and uniqueness, making dreams of happiness rare. The poet reaches back to personification to describe the meditative state: “Les meubles ont l’air de rêver.” The pure dream is equated with harmonious paintings, not discrete and analysed art but art with the feeling, somewhat indistinct, that arises from it. The dream is well documented in the *poèmes nocturnes*.

There is a Baudelairian darker side to this reverie. In “La Chambre double” the narrator receives a dull blow to the stomach, “just like in a bedeviled dream” (Kaplan 7). The first half of the poem has seven mentions of “reverie” and the last, pessimistic half, only one more. Baudelaire illustrates an act such as meditation by describing the physical appearance of the setting and equating the activity with a celestial event using simile; he then personifies the activity including everyday objects. The anticlimax shifts the allusions, from sublime to mundane and concludes in an equilibrium – a balanced and believable view of meditation.

“Conscience” is the third abstract term that Baudelaire claims amenable to the art of prose poetry. *La conscience*, in French usage, has two meanings: the faculty of awareness and the arbiter of right and wrong. Often *connaissance* is substituted for simple awareness whereas in “L’Invitation au voyage” la belle conscience is either a “rich, tidy” or “glossy” conscience. The items placed in simile to *conscience* are kitchenware, silverware and jewelry. It is thus that Baudelaire adapts his prose poetry to the “soubresauts de la conscience,” (“jolts of consciousness”), that is, with very concrete items positioned next to broad concepts such as Art and Nature.

The music of the prose is evidenced by the lexicon: un madrigal (*OC* 296), comme l’âme des autres hommes sur la *musique* (*OC* 296), l’invitation à la *valse* (*OC* 298), une lugubre harmonie (*OC* 306), les tambours de Santerre (*OC* 308), le chant plaintif des arbres à musique (*OC* 309). The contrastive and supple language abounds as in: “Dans l’ardent foyer de ta chevelure” – a bold image of the hair (“In the fiery hearth of your tresses”). For flexible language we have: “J’entrevois un port fourmillant de chants mélancoliques, d’hommes vigoureux” (“I discern a harbor teeming with melancholic songs, with vigorous men”) where the poet links emotional and physical attributes of sensuality in an nebulous fashion.

All six of the *nocturnes* however, never depart from the philosophical question: “Is this right, is this true, is this good?” In “L’Horloge” the protagonist keeps tabs on value: “Ce qui était *vrai*” (l. 11) and “[. . .] que voici un madrigal vraiment méritoire” (l. 30). (“Which was true [. . .] Is this not, Madam, a truly praiseworthy madrigal”). In “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure” the search for value in beauty is intoxicating: “Je vois resplendir l’*infini* de l’azur tropical” (l. 28). (“I see the infinity of the tropical azure glowing”). In “L’Invitation au voyage”: “Combien comptons-nous d’heures remplies par la jouissance positive, par l’action réussie et décidée?” (l. 72). (“How many hours can we count filled with concrete delight, with well-executed and resolute action?”). From “Le Crépuscule du soir”: “Crépuscule, comme vous êtes doux et tendre!” (l. 50). (Twilight, how gentle and tender you are!). In “La Solitude”: “Je ne les plains pas, parce que je devine que leurs effusions oratoires leur procurent des voluptés égales” (l. 22). (“I do not pity them, because I suspect that their oratorical outpourings gain them voluptuous pleasures

equal to those”). And finally from “Les Projets”: “Le plaisir et le bonheur sont dans la première auberge venue” (l. 39). (“Pleasure and happiness are at the first inn reached”). All these citations bring to the forefront, questions and answers about values.

The work “L’Invitation au voyage” was one of three that Baudelaire chose to duplicate in verse and prose. We have used both versions as models of the pleasure of the text. For readers in mid-nineteenth-century France, “L’Invitation à la valse” would have had the noteworthy resonance of a still popular song performed since 1819, when composed by Carl Maria von Weber. An aficionado of Baudelaire would have also noticed the name “Weber,” included in the same stanza with “Delacroix” in the verse poem, “Les Phares” VI. Even Dumas père, a best-selling author and celebrity of the day, used Weber’s title in a one-act play. Is there one element of pleasure that kept this title and these works so persistently prominent? Matisse, a half-century later must have found something of this pleasure, as he named one of his famous paintings after the refrain: “Luxe, calme et volupté,” borrowed straight from Baudelaire’s verse poem, “L’Invitation au voyage.”



## CHAPTER 6

## ONE TITLE, FIVE ARTS

The genre prose poetry fills a special literary niche. In a compact and accessible form it treats ethics, beauty, art, and truth. In Baudelaire's case the settings are intriguingly placed – from Nanking, China to a circus hovel in Paris. His version looks at important questions such as: “What is it like to understand time?” or “Do dreams really clarify our existence?” The narrator of the first *poème nocturne* (XVI) offers a partial answer to the first question: “I see Eternity, in the eyes of the beautiful Felina.” The second *poème nocturne* (XVII) wonders: “Is a woman's hair just another erotic symbol?” The poem delivers more than a stock response, for in this *chevelure* lies the poet's inspiration for retrieving palpable memories and tangible dreams. The third *nocturne* (XVIII) shifts focus subtly between painting and reality, the pattern coalescing in a depiction of the infinite. In prose poem XXII the gray area of twilight is a fitting locale for an encounter between good and evil. The discussion of solitude (XXIII) surprisingly includes the comments of two canonical authors, Pascal and La Bruyère, both proponents of solitude and meditation. The last of the *nocturnes*, “Les Projets” XXIV, synthesizes the preceding themes of time, beauty, dream, solitude, and memory into a classic formulation of mind over matter.

In all of the *poèmes nocturnes* ambiguity lurks, mystery is seductive. In “L'Horloge” for example, the shifting perspective of narration, from third to first to second-person (all in thirty-three lines) evokes doubt about the identity of the participants. In XVII, “Un Hémisphère,” the poet appeals first to feeling, “[. . .] like a thirsting man into the water of a spring,” and then to abstraction: “I see the infinity of the tropical azure glowing.” In “L'Invitation au voyage” he speaks of paintings as simultaneously signifier and signified: “Will we ever live, will we ever enter that picture painted by my mind, that painting which resembles you?” The “doublet” versions – prose and verse – of “Le Crépuscule du soir” bring out the dual nature of twilight: “While the trembling gold and silver stars, sprinkled over it, represent those fires of fantasy which ignite well only under the deep mourning of the Night.”

“La Solitude” treats the value of singular meditation, yet questions the efficacy of language to support the argument: “If I would agree to speak the lovely tongue of my century,” – that is, if the poet fell in with the reigning ideology. The last nocturne, “Les Projets,” addresses the very question of this dissertation: What happens when we enjoy reflection or reading as it were – the subject treated by Barthes in his poetics of pleasure? The pleasure of the text is in fact the product of a mental ability, the one that Baudelaire claims in the last *poème nocturne*, to travel nimbly via the mind, and further to enjoy the expectations as much as the trip.

This last chapter will first recapitulate Baudelaire’s contribution to the development of the prose poem, his definition of a pleasure that precedes Barthes’s theory and how the *poèmes nocturnes* manifest precisely the attributes of textual pleasure that Barthes enumerates a century after Baudelaire. The second part of the chapter emphasizes facets of pleasure that have caused one of the titles of the *poèmes nocturnes* to be “reconstituted” into several other forms of art.

After Baudelaire, Rimbaud wrote the prose poems published in *Illuminations*. Mallarmé experimented with “Plainte d’automne” and “Frisson d’hiver.” Lautréamont released *Les Chants de Maldoror* in 1869, about the time of the first publication of *Oeuvres complètes de Baudelaire*. Today still, the prose poem remains an engaging genre, able to accomplish objectives that poetry or standard prose do not achieve. A prose poem (“La Chambre double” V) speculates on dreams for example, in the framework of describing a bedroom. In another model of twenty-eight lines, “Le Confiteur de l’artiste” portrays the infinite, and also comments on the attempt to define beauty. Thus prose poetry addresses abstract subjects in short, entertaining prose. If attempting the same, verse poems are corralled by their rhyme into limited depictions; essays or short prose end up more descriptive than imaginative. The beauty of the prose poetry is the balance between narrative and suggestion.

Where other writers, like Bernard, Lemaitre, and Sandras hesitate and obfuscate, Baudelaire explicitly defines the prose poem in a workable, if personal style – rhythmic prose, absence of rhyme, sometimes vigorous but always coordinated language, appropriate for describing dreams and other evanescent entities. Baudelaire seeks pleasure, seeks to define it, seeks to communicate it along with

notions such as the soul or the conscience. Pleasure surfaces as a poetic topic by virtue of its absence from his day-to-day living. The lack of and his dream for pleasure make it a feature in his work.

The *poèmes nocturnes* especially illustrate Baudelaire's definition of prose poetry and his notion of the pleasurable text. Five main points are related to his definition of pleasure: reduction of ego, novelty, risk, rhythm and the dream. For example, in "L'Horloge" the entire tale "forgets self," as the narrator recounts the story of a missionary learning about time from two sets of eyes – one a cat's, the other a woman's. In line twelve the story shifts from third to first-person with: "Pour moi," and "je me penche." This first person speaks of his female partner "Felina." The "je" shifts from addressing the world *about* Felina to speaking to a "Madam" person to person. The poet, narrator, and first-person "je" get intertwined to the point where the self is lost. Although the appearance of a "je" would seem to indicate an increase of ego, the subjection of that "je" to the "tu" at the poem's end implies reduction of ego.

Novelty and its intensified version, surprise are offered by Baudelaire as characteristics of pleasure. These notions are realized in brisk turns of plot for the poet, while for Barthes they are manifested (at times) as grammatical interruptions: asyndeton, anacoluthon, and tmesis. An example of surprise occurs in "La Solitude" XXIII where the narrator defers to La Bruyère and Pascal, skipping over more conventional authorities such as Corneille and Racine, in a novel selection. The pleasure of risk-taking is announced in prose poem IX where the narrator recalls an acquaintance who lit a cigar next to a power keg just "to experience the pleasures of anxiety" (Kaplan 13). *Les Petits poèmes en prose* take up controversial subjects: spleen, suicide, mental illness – in other words, the very subjects that provoked Baudelaire's 1857 censorship. In the followup Baudelaire has adopted a new form with which to convey his thought. The author hardly shies away from controversy. The poverty and evil illustrated in "Le Crépuscule du soir" XXII – underscored by expressions such as "a sign of the witches' sabbath" and "anxiety of a perpetual disquiet" – represent a pleasurable risk, in the face of government censors. The government censored the verse poem "A Celle qui est trop gaie," that does include some intense imagery ("scourge your joyous flesh, to bruise your absolved breast [. . .]") whereas the prose poem "Le Galant tireur" XLIII expresses similar homage to woman's beauty and is accompanied by violence (the narrator

shoots the head off a doll at a shooting range, subtly implicating his wife) but substitutes amusement for censorship.

Practically all of Baudelaire's prose poems lay claim to a pleasing rhythm. "L'Hémisphère dans une chevelure" XVIII employs anaphora<sup>86</sup>: *Laisse-moi respirer, Laisse-moi mordre* or *Dans l'océan, Dans les caresses, Dans l'ardent foyer* and renders a hypnotizing effect. The poet's desire to forestall time is revealed in "L'Invitation au voyage": "Là-bas, où les heures plus lentes contiennent plus de pensées." ("Where the slower hours contain more thoughts").

Barthes's definition of pleasure shares several attributes with Baudelaire's. Barthes supported the whole genre of the *nouveau roman* and its subversion of plot – a position that denied him admission to the academic establishment until late in his career. Both authors thus challenged the status quo of their day in order to realize a gambler's pleasure. The rhythm or the music of the text is a form of pleasure for Barthes as well as for Baudelaire. And then the dream is signaled out by both as having almost magical and certainly pleasurable powers.

The text desiring the reader, pleasure at the margins, adjectives as gatekeepers of the imaginary, music, and dreams, all are part of Barthes's theory of the pleasure of reading. In Barthes's first principle the author occupies space produced by a reader's intrinsic textual interest and opens thereby "the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an unpredictability of bliss" (*Pleasure* 4). If the writer flirts with and seduces (*draguer*) the space of the reader, then just the possibility of a reader / writer exchange, tinged with desire, produces excitement and pleasure of what could be. In "Le Confiteur de l'artiste" (*OC* 276) the poet probes the space of his potential reader with suggestions worthy of Lamartine: "Que les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes!" ("How penetrating are the ends of autumn days!"). But abruptly in the next phrase the poem takes on a psychological, not romantic tenor more appropriate to the Marquis de Sade than to the romantic poet: "Ah! pénétrantes jusqu'à la douleur!" ("Ah! penetrating to the verge of pain!"). Suddenly the tone shifts again but this time, philosophically: "Grand délice que celui de noyer

<sup>86</sup> Anaphora – repetition at the beginning of verses for poetic effect.

son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer!" ("Sheer delight to drown one's gaze in the immensity of sky and sea!") that recalls Pascal. The author charms the space of the reader by changing identities like so many shirts: a pleasurable tactic.

Barthes's forty-six sections in *Le Plaisir du texte* propose more elements of literary pleasure than did Baudelaire, but among the two sets of ideas we find several commonalities. Barthes sides with Baudelaire in asserting the pleasure of effacing the "self." Freud argued that the alternative to the search for pleasure was to retrench the self, to seek peace, ultimately the peace of death. On a more practical plane, Baudelaire and Barthes both see pleasure in any reduction of the demands of self. The less one worries about resting, feeding and otherwise supplying self, the more pleasure will be experienced. In the prose poem "Le Confiteur de l'artiste," concentrating on beauty results in the loss of ego: "Car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le moi se perd vite!" ("For in the grandeur of reverie, the self is quickly lost!"). Eric Marty, a friend of Barthes, comments on the pleasure of the text as it "corresponds to the suspension, the placing in parentheses of the empirical **me**: pleasure is what suspends this natural me" (Marty 158).

In terms of a blissful, rhythmic text, Barthes concedes: "Pour que la répétition soit érotique, il faut qu'elle soit formelle, littérale, et dans notre culture, cette répétition affichée (excessive) redevient excentrique, repoussée vers certaines régions marginales de la musique" (*Plaisir* 68). ("In order for repetition to be erotic, it must be formal, literal, and in our culture this flaunted (excessive) repetition reverts to eccentricity, thrust toward various marginal regions of music (*Pleasure* 41). Baudelaire likewise finds pleasure in the rhythmic, if offbeat: "enormes navires qu'ils charrient, [. . .] d'où montent les chants monotones de la manœuvre" (*OC* 299). ("The enormous ships they sweep along, [. . .] from which the crew's monotonous songs ascend"). Late in his book (section 43 entitled *Subject*) Barthes weaves his own comment about textual pleasure as it relates to time: "Et ce corps de jouissance est aussi mon sujet historique; car c'est au terme d'une combinatoire très fine d'éléments biographiques, historiques, sociologiques, névrotiques (éducation, classe sociale, configuration infantile, etc.) que je règle le jeu contradictoire du plaisir (culturel) et de la jouissance (inculturelle), et que je m'écris comme un sujet actuellement mal placé, venu trop tard ou trop tôt (ce trop ne désignant ni un regret ni une faute ni une

malchance, mais seulement invitant à *une place nulle*): sujet anachronique, en dérive” (*Plaisir* 99).

(“And this body of bliss is also my historical subject; for it is at the conclusion of a very complex process of biographical, historical, sociological, neurotic elements (education, social class, childhood configuration, etc.) that I control the contradictory interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (noncultural) bliss, and that I write myself as a subject at present out of place, arriving too soon or too late (this *too* designating neither regret, fault, nor bad luck, but merely calling for a non-site): anachronic subject, adrift” (*Pleasure* 62). The bliss of the text is attached to a timeless subject, one that is not fixed in time. This delicate balance that Barthes postulates is manifested by Baudelaire in prose poem X “A Une Heure du matin.” Although the title refers to a definite moment in the night, the narrative recounts the various incidents of a long day for the poet – in fact a day that seemed like an eternity for him. More so than any other, this poem creates a present, a “now” trapped between a repeated past and a hoped-for future. Pleasure arises from this creation of a present moment because it implies that we can control time. We long for the same power or at least the same sensation.

Along with sharing ideas for the pleasure of the text the two authors can be united because of their wide-ranging artistic interests. These combinations and even some coincidences (dual emphasis on dreams, citation of Poe) add to the synergy of their relation.

There is a final association to be tapped into that crosses artistic fields à la Barthes, but begins in Baudelairian-era arts. The title of the third *poème nocturne*, “L’Invitation au voyage” extends its influence from two years before Baudelaire’s birth to almost a half-century after his death, encompassing a popularity of almost eighty years. This unusual phenomenon offers a reflection of what might be called pleasure transferred among arts. One of two variations of the title, “L’Invitation à la valse” or “L’Invitation au voyage,” (line 25 of Baudelaire’s prose poem) appeared in five different, now famous art forms between 1819 and 1904. The first creation was musical, an eight-minute rondo composed by Carl Maria von Weber in 1819. “L’Invitation” has proven itself adaptable not only to Baudelaire’s objectives, but more broadly speaking, to art’s objectives. In the same summer (1857) that Baudelaire published his verse collection *Les Fleurs du mal*, Alexandre Dumas père produced several best-selling novels and

plays. His one-act hit that year, “L’Invitation à la valse,” opened at the Théâtre du Gymnase a week before the poetic collection *Les Fleurs du mal* went on sale.<sup>87</sup> Just two months later, Baudelaire published his six *poèmes nocturnes* including “L’Invitation au voyage.” At this point one musical title, originally from Weber’s composition, had been adopted by Dumas and by Baudelaire for use in four different art forms – a very adaptable title.

By the mid-1850’s Baudelaire also employed the title, albeit with a spin. In prose poem XVIII a question arises in the fourth paragraph: “Un musicien a écrit *L’Invitation à la valse*; quel est celui qui composera *l’Invitation au voyage*?” (“A musician has written *Invitation to the Waltz*. Who then will compose *Invitation to the Voyage*?”). The answer is: “Baudelaire.” But he wrote two literary versions, one that rhymes and the other in prose.

Not only did Baudelaire shift the main point (from dance to travel) of the invitation, but he modified the art form from music to verse (June 1855) and then from music to prose poetry (August 1857). Shortly after the turn of the century Henri Matisse adopted, for his glowing, impressionist painting of enigmatic women bathing at a beach, not the title of Baudelaire’s poem, but the refrain from the verse-version of “L’Invitation au voyage”: “Là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté” (“There, there’s only order, beauty: abundant, calm, voluptuous”).

The current novel to film permutation is well known, but a novel turned film, turned poem, turned prose poem, turned painting is exceptional even by today’s standards. This is precisely what happened with “L’Invitation au voyage.” The reasons for this prolific development constitute a fitting close to this study of Baudelaire, Barthes and the pleasure of the text, for not only does “L’Invitation au voyage” epitomize the *poèmes nocturnes* and their particular accommodation of pleasure, but the title passes to other artistic media with what seems an irresistible will.

<sup>87</sup> 18 June 1857 [http://www.dumaspere.com/pages/dictionnaire/invitation\\_valse.html](http://www.dumaspere.com/pages/dictionnaire/invitation_valse.html). 12 June 2008.

What could cause four different artists to refer so explicitly to a previous art form? Do arts typically borrow titles? If the rondo can be considered a concentrated musical composition, then one can claim that all five resulting arts share a jewel-like density. “L’Invitation à la valse” is a short, one-act play by Dumas.<sup>88</sup> Both of Baudelaire’s poems are concentrated in their structure. The painting of Matisse (see Appendix C) is relatively unadorned in its composition: a simple outdoor scene, fuzzy lines, wide expanses of space, no iconography to decipher. All of the works are compact and precise. The themes of beauty and pleasure run through all of them. Weber’s musical piece conjures up flowing and attractive steps on the waltz floor. In the verse poem images of beauty abound: “Les soleils mouillés, [. . .] Des meubles luisants, [. . .] D’hyacinthe et d’or.” (“Damp suns [. . .] Gleaming furniture [. . .] Hyacinth and gold”). The prose version repeats many of the same images but without rhyme: “Tout est beau, riche, tranquille, honnête.” (“Everything is beautiful, rich, calm, decent”). Women bathing on a beach summons the epithet “beautiful” at least three times in the verse-poem refrain and if according to Kant, beauty is non-conceptual, disinterested, without purpose but universally necessary, such a scene begs to be labeled beautiful. Whatever the case, the content of tropical bathing and repose is pleasurable.

In addition to this consistent beauty of presentation, the five works all pay homage to the infinite or eternal. Weber’s “L’Invitation à la valse,” presents sound that fades in from silence, building to the waltz and fading by degrees to the silence from which it came. The lack of a discrete beginning reinforces the infinite nature of music, specifically for this piece. Dumas’s theater addresses themes of love and marriage, although set amongst an almost frivolous group of young lovers, these themes are characteristically associated with concepts such as eternity. The youth of the heroine signals the timelessness of love’s power and its universality. The nominal shift made by Baudelaire from “Invitation to the dance” to “Invitation to the voyage” does not forsake the concept of infinity that continues by linking all five works of art. The infinite nature of the destination is indicated in the verse version: “Dont

<sup>88</sup> Dumas made a great deal of money with his writing but he spent more than he made. Part of the gap between composition (1851) and presentation (1857) of the one-act play, can be explained by Dumas’ self-imposed exile to avoid creditors.



l'humeur est vagabonde; / C'est pour assouvir / Ton moindre désir / Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde (OC 125). ("Whose mood is vagabond; it's to satisfy your least desire that they come from the world's end"). And from the prose version: "Oui, c'est là qu'il faut aller respirer, rêver et allonger les heures par l'infini des sensations (OC 298). (Yes, we must go there to breathe, to dream, and to prolong the hours with an infinity of sensations"). In the Matisse painting, the sea and the horizon stretch out of the viewer's scope on to the infinite, and yet the body of water and seashore are situated only a few feet in front of the viewer. In terms of the never-ending sky, Matisse has flipped the tables on effecting *mise en abîme*. Instead of the usual dark fade into nothingness, Matisse depicts just the opposite – a brightness of yellow above the horizon that leads the eye to the horizon and on to nothingness, the infinite of "Luxe, calme et volupté." None of the figures are clearly indicated, a point that mimics poetic character that declines to tell, but instead suggests. Like the music of Weber, the painting of Matisse evokes feelings of curiosity and pleasure. The sun, the beach, the food all imply it, or as Matisse said: "Luxe, calme et volupté."

The originating work is Weber's rondo of 1819, "L'Invitation à la valse," a still popular piece where at the overture strings, flutes and clarinets play off one another. A contemplative voice is waiting in the background, the voice of an invitation to dance. About two minutes into the music, a brisk rise in tempo and volume suggests an affirmative response. A move to the dance floor is followed by a waltz-like rhythm as the music repeats and modifies the theme. There is order as the music progresses and turns about, only to move forward again. The decidedly slower, lower and softer denouement returns one to a pensive state, fading away to silence.

Perhaps the affinity of the artists for the title can be seen at a more fundamental level of communication. Music is bereft of the textual information that is available in literature and theater; further, whereas painting signifies with design, colors, spacing and form – music signifies with changing sound. Literature, theater, and painting all have a visual component. Literature signifies with words that convey actions or images. Theater uses actors' words and gestures, scene-settings and the physical stage

itself. Painting communicates ideas with images. These three arts can be reduced to words, though painting requires an intermediate step to go from visual to prose representation. Symphonic music signifies only with sound, sound that can be described, but hardly paraphrased. A stanza of music may evoke forms in the mind, but the first response of the listener is not linguistic; one feels the music before intellectually analyzing it. Music must carry with it, if less information, more feeling than verbal work. The rising crescendo towards the end of Weber's rondo signifies the urgency or the predetermined ending of the dance. In spite of the fundamental difference between a written text and music, they both, in contrast to painting, unfold over a period of time.

Painting is unique because it can only portray a moment in time, yet the space can be patiently elaborated. On the other hand, texts can represent the passage of time, but succeed marginally in representing definitively spatial concerns. The prose poem shares attributes of each medium. It resembles painting by its emphasis on space. How can a word be like a color or a brush-stroke? They are both signifiers. Words like "heat," "sultry," "tropical" (as could be applied to Matisse's painting) signify the scene with yellow, orange and red dabs of paint as well as strokes that outline human forms; in this commonality prose poetry imitates painting or vice versa. The prose poem is a concentrated, relatively brief text that naturally focuses on time and space. As inherently pleasurable, the text, Barthes says, takes advantage of the "force of suspension" (*Pleasure* 65). What is suspended in his theory is belief in the real world, "une véritable époque."<sup>89</sup> The text can be suspended by the use of past participles, for example: "Pays noyé, soleils tamisés, meubles armés." This deferment of belief alludes to a suspension of time which predictably produces pleasurable results.

The rhymed version of "L'Invitation au voyage" is forty-two short verses compared to eighty-eight narrative lines in the prose version. The longer prose poem effects a slightly slower perception of the advance of time. The verse version treats the content similarly as the prose, yet does so with a more structured chronology. Equally seductive, equally suggestive, the two works are differentiated by the

<sup>89</sup> A theoretical moment when all belief in the existence of the real world is suspended.

extent of the voyage. As Baudelaire says in “Les Projets”: “Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?” (“And what good is it to carry out plans, since planning itself is a sufficient delight?”). The act of artistic creation is already a pleasure.

The action of the signifier is fundamental to music since the listener must interpret the signified without words. Dance uses corporal movement accompanied with music to make meaning. Painting and text are linked by words in the theory of ekphrasis as elaborated more recently by Murray Krieger and others. Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* offer a rare combination of visual and textual meaning where sense and suggestion are redoubled by the shapes in which words are laid out. There is a further challenge and a further pleasure to view, read and decipher calligrammes and this is similar to the challenge of the prose poem. Prose poetry, though written in paragraph form, is a relatively concentrated, short form; in this regard the prose poem imitates verse poetry and painting. Regular prose puts more emphasis on the signified, the prose poem on the signifier. The effect for the pleasure of the text is that prose poetry can draw from dual poles of pleasure, signifier and signified.

The one-act play of Dumas, “L’Invitation à la valse,” is a simple theatrical production (four characters) with profound intrigue. Madame d’Ivry, a sixteen-year-old girl, has been widowed and is pursued by her lawyer. Her new husband is arranged to be her childhood sweetheart (Maurice) for whom she impatiently waits. As Maurice enters her chambers Madame d’Ivry is playing the piano, and the song is none other than Weber’s “L’Invitation à la valse.” The two old friends do not however hit it off, but instead Maurice falls for Madame’s younger sister, Mathilde, who in fact had written the letters encouraging Maurice to try his fortune with the widow. The lawyer and Madame now can conveniently get together and all ends happily, it would seem. Dumas’s intentions matched well with Weber’s musical composition, a classical rondo, with a light-hearted rhythm. Dumas wanted to set the tone for his play as classic but not overly serious. Dumas thus asks the question of whether “impulse,” “taste,” or “hunch” can be enough for love. “The Dance” of gaining or losing romantic partners is ordered, yet spontaneous

and typical for relations among the cast of young characters. The impetuous decisions of Madame d'Ivry and her cousin are forecast by the tempo, volume, and instrumental changes of Weber's rondo. Since Weber's 30-year-old rondo would have been familiar to audiences, its use allows them to anticipate events of the plot not stated in words.

Dumas chose the title and the piano piece played by his character Madame d'Ivry to signify the energy typical of young lovers. The players in love change partners much as the music shifts in the rondo. The play is entertaining and innocent, as signified by the music, until the concluding somber tone finishes much like Weber's rondo – in a contemplative mood.

The rhymed version of Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage" precedes its prose partner by two years. In the prose "L'Invitation au voyage," fourth paragraph, the poet makes a fateful observation and asks a question: "Un musicien a écrit *l'Invitation à la valse*; quel est celui qui composera *l'Invitation au voyage*, qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d'élection?" (OC 298). The unnamed Weber was a perennial favorite musician of Baudelaire. In the verse poem "Les Phares" Baudelaire includes Weber's name among a group of important artists such as Da Vinci, Rembrandt and Delacroix. Other references to Weber are made in Baudelaire's art criticism including the *Salons* of 1846, 1855 and in an essay on Wagner (OC 1046). Comments by Baudelaire suggest shared experiences, a sort of *soul* brotherhood: "Un soupir étouffé" ("A stifled sigh"), "une mélodie de Weber [. . .] plaintive et profonde" ("Weber's melancholic and heavy tune"). However, Weber's *L'Invitation à la valse* is more contented than depressing, so Baudelaire saw in him a kindred spirit, but with hope.

The rhythm of the prose poem "L'Invitation au voyage" is initially more energetic than that of the Weber rondo. The important news is announced first: "Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on, que je rêve de visiter avec une vieille amie." ("There exists a magnificent land, a land of Cockaigne, as they say, which I dream of visiting with a familiar confidante"). Reflection on time links the prose poem, rhymed-poem, and painting more than other themes. All three have their particular effect on time's march. Regular and prose poetry decelerate reading-pace by their increased density; painting freezes a moment in time. Rhyming poetry has a subtle time-slowing technique, where after the first part of a pair

of rhymes, there is a pleasurable expectation (and wait) of completing the same sound. “Mon enfant ma sœur, / Songe à la [waiting on the rhyme] douceur.” In “L’Invitation au voyage” this effect is extended because the second pair of rhymes “ensemble” and “ressemble” are separated by two verses instead of one.

Just past mid-nineteenth century the same title had been adopted by Weber, Dumas père, and Baudelaire. In 1872, a second musician, composer Henri Duparc (1848-1933) employed the verse-version “Invitation au voyage” in his brooding piano-vocal composition that incorporated Baudelaire’s lyrics. This same song-poem was interpreted by Charles Panzéra, French baritone, in 1932. Panzéra taught Roland Barthes voice lessons for a couple of years until Barthes’s health prevented further study. Barthes cites Panzéra as the epitome of the pleasure of the voice in his essay, “La Musique, la voix, la langue” (1977).

*L’Invitation à la valse* was adapted to various artists’ needs: Dumas related the light but classical tone of Weber. Baudelaire favored the more somber melodies and expressions of Weber that transfer to both poems using the variant-title. Duparc borrowed from Baudelaire the contemplative and yearning tone expressed in the rhymed poem. Panzéra inspired Barthes by his “purity of vowels, especially the French /u/; the fragile and frank beauty of the /a/; the grain of the nasals, and the /r/ briefly and purely rolled; and finally by the patina of certain consonants at certain moments” (*L’Obvie* 249).

These artists were inspired by a singular title from other artistic fields. Another promise of inspiration for artists has long been intoxication and what it might do to enhance creativity. Baudelaire looked seriously at intoxicants and their effects on his art. In March 1851 he published an essay “Du Vin et du haschisch,” plus a book-length project in 1860 that includes chapters on haschish and opium. His *Fleurs du mal* contain a five-poem section dedicated to “Le Vin” and along similar lines the prose poems include “Enivrez-vous” XXXIII. This particular prose poem exhibits Baudelaire’s use of surprise to achieve a pleasurable effect. “It is always good to get drunk” exclaims the poet – yet drunk for Baudelaire is far from simple alcoholic intoxication. It could involve wine, but poetry and virtue, he claims, also produce a creative high. His 1851 essay had already declared sobriety, even for artists, as the best policy,

(*OC* 423) and yet “Enivrez-vous” is addressed to every person, at least for those searching literature or other art for pleasure.

“Enivrez-vous” admonishes its readers to be alert for places that sometimes drain inspiration: “the steps of a palace” (elegant places); “the green grass of a ditch” (natural settings); or “your own room” (alone). This list sounds suspiciously familiar as Baudelaire’s particular muse sought, often in vain, elegant settings. He never treated “nature” – rocks, hills and trees – like a true romantic. More often than not his illness robbed him of the will to work and more often than not, he lived alone. Still, no matter where the muse departs from the artist the poem offers remedies that might re-inspire: “Demandez au vent, à la vague, à l’étoile, à l’oiseau, à l’horloge” (“Ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock”) and then as if this were not enough one should ask: “A tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout ce qui parle” (“Everything that flees, everything that moans, everything that moves, everything that sings, everything that speaks”). This list raises Biblical associations with Genesis and the creation story: “And every animal of the earth, and every bird of the sky, and all that moves on the earth, having in itself the breath of life.”<sup>90</sup> The list includes creatures that “flee, moan, move, sing, speak” a reflexive question, because the verbs all apply to Baudelaire’s own situation – *fleeing* creditors, *moaning* from the cold, singing on rare occasions (but knowing this pleasure full well) and speaking out, which was his profession. The poet asks us to “look within; it’s all there;” *it* often has to be searched out. *It* is a personal choice; “à votre guise,” as the poet concludes.

Though brief at seventeen lines, “Enivrez-vous” underscores the extreme, even the infinite quality of Baudelaire’s admonitions, “Tout est là,” “C’est l’unique,” “Tout ce qui [. . .] tout ce qui” etc. and then the concepts highlighted tend to have an eternal nature: “le vent, la vague, l’étoile, l’oiseau, l’horloge” and “le Temps.” If the imperative takes on a combative nature it is because man and his finite, earthbound self is in battle against the “l’horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la

<sup>90</sup>Genesis 1:30.

terre.” (“the horrible burden of Time wrecking your back and bending you to the ground”). The poet’s recommendations against this fate, are placed in order: le vin – an ordinary escape; poetry – a higher value, and then virtue itself – the superior strategy for life. However the most important point for the poet is linked to time. “Le Temps” dominates the suggestions of the author as it penetrates all criteria. The text that corrals the flight of time is the text of pleasure.

The titles shared by works from a variety of artistic media beg for comparison. Could the borrowing of the titles pertain to the method of delivery? Barthes comments on this: “L’artiste peut passer à un autre signifiant; s’il est écrivain, se faire cinéaste, peintre, ou, au contraire, s’il est peintre, cinéaste, développer d’interminables discours critiques sur le cinéma, la peinture, réduire volontairement l’art à sa critique” (*Plaisir* 86). (“The artist can move to another signifier; if he is a writer, he becomes a film-maker, painter, or, on the contrary, if he is a painter, film-maker, he develops unending critical observations on the cinema, on painting, and reduces voluntarily art to criticism”). There is no need for rivalry among different genres; pleasure is available from both.

Weber, Dumas, Baudelaire and Matisse all expressed pleasure as renewed by the loss of self in a distracting activity, the creation of an artwork, for example: “Et tu seras maître vivante, plus encore que le sculpteur peut l’être de l’argile; et tu connaîtras le plaisir, sans cesse renaissant, de sortir de toi-même pour t’oublier dans autrui” (*OC* 304). (“And you will be the master of living matter, even more than the sculptor masters clay. And you will experience the pleasure, ceaselessly reborn, of leaving yourself so as to forget yourself in others”).<sup>91</sup> In *Éros, Plutus* and *Gloire*, real happiness comes by forgetting the “ego.”

In “Le Port” XLII the poet speaks of the pleasure of rhythm as a supplement to beauty. The ships docked in the port “servent à entretenir dans l’âme le goût du rythme et de la beauté. Et puis, surtout, il y a une sorte de plaisir mystérieux et aristocratique pour celui qui n’a plus ni curiosité ni ambition, à contempler” (*OC* 337). (“help maintain the soul’s craving for rhythm and of beauty. And then, especially, there is a sort of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure for someone no longer curious or ambitious enough

<sup>91</sup> From prose poem XXI “Les Tentations ou Éros, Plutus et la gloire.”

to contemplate”). The poem emphasizes the pleasure of cadence, both that of boats rocking in unison and that of literary (mysterious and aristocratic) rhythm.

A summary of pleasure in Baudelaire reveals its episodic nature; it comes and goes; it is renewable, and in an ironic way it demands the forgetting of self in favor of others. Novelty and refinement are traditionally bearers of pleasure, and the prose poem produces pleasure with this in mind. Further, inventing a new art form and working out its details, like the prose poem, is also pleasurable. Risk involves a measure of pleasure, just as catharsis functions in tragedy. Finally the musical elements of pleasure, pointed out by Baudelaire, are found in all five art works that branch off from Weber’s rondo title.

The prose poem remains an enigmatic genre as shown by the recurring and contradictory attempts to explain it. Baudelaire counters this trend by offering a clearer definition. His ideas on pleasure also link him to twentieth-century theory and Barthes’s pleasure of the text. These conceptions about the features of a pleasurable text open up a variety of opportunities for study, from elementary aspects (brief, clear prose, with poetic impact) to theories of semiology and art. Baudelaire sums up his prose poem XXIV “Les Projets,” by noting that aiming for pleasure is really enough. In this last *nocturne*, the protagonist does not adopt any of possible earlier identities: “le missionnaire” of “L’Horloge,” “l’homme altéré” of “Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure,” “mon cher ange” of “L’Invitation au voyage,” the “vous êtes doux et tendre” of “Le Crépuscule du soir,” or “le gazetier philanthrope” of “La Solitude.” Instead the “I” represents every man, someone not accustomed to palaces or far-away isles, but the common man. He is however, a dreamer, a lover of art, and a wanderer of urban settings who has found pleasure in dreams, communion and beauty. For this “Rôdeur parisien” the time to take advantage of this pleasure is now, as he writes in “Les Projets”: “Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante? (OC 310). “And what good is it to carry out plans, since planning itself is a sufficient delight?” (Kaplan 56).



The concept of novelty contributes perennially to pleasure. The prose poem is a relatively new genre. Within this new field, Baudelaire innovates and develops structure and style and then posits an original definition. Barthes also uses a novel approach when he defines the pleasure of the text. Both men seek novelty as a source of pleasure, whether in producing a poem or writing an essay. They disagreed with their contemporaries, but on their own creative terms; Baudelaire with the new prose poem, Barthes with a literary criticism that sought to be . . . literary. Baudelaire's collection *Les Fleurs du mal* expresses evil but in a novel way. Barthes's broke from the domination of logic and ideology to employ feeling and value as principal measures of his poetics of pleasure.

The prose poem of Baudelaire pleases with musical, sometimes equivocal, sometimes forceful prose. Its lyrical quality harmonizes with depictions of abstractions such as the dream. Pleasure is woven into Baudelaire's texts, and especially into the *groupe nocturne*, and just as with Barthes's *writerly* text, one can return again and again to harvest new pleasure from Baudelaire's poems.

Baudelaire postulates pleasure in order to defend against depression. Barthes on the other hand originates his discussion of pleasure in the needs of communication, but equally in the magic and variety of language that effects communication. Harmony as a source of pleasure is a common concept for both men. The manipulation of a text's sound: "musicale sans rythme et sans rime," intrigued Baudelaire. Barthes studied voice, searching precisely for the locus of pleasure: le grain du gosier, la patine de consonnes. la volupté des voyelles ("the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels"). Both men were fascinated and perhaps troubled by dreams, but they counted on them heavily as interpreters of inner feelings.

Having adopted Baudelaire's early definition of the prose poem, one notices its vocabulary often links to pleasurable activities. Baudelaire suggests that his model Aloysius Bertrand deserves the moniker "fameux." His imitation of Bertrand recalls the ancient (Aristotle) and modern (Freud) endorsement of repetition as productive of pleasure. Even the term *modern*, complimented by Barthes, connotes advancement and quality. In his *lettre programme*, Baudelaire goes as far as to say that the miracle (le miracle d'une prose poétique) dreamed of by writers is at hand, if they follow his lead into the prose

poem. Music practically equates with joy; lyrical movement evokes again the pleasure that is embedded in Baudelaire's definition.

For Barthes the difference between pleasurable text and blissful text is important. For the average reader a pleasurable text is good enough. A text of *jouissance* unsettles and discomforts. In some ways the *poèmes nocturnes* are simple texts of pleasure, entertaining with proverbial cats, intoxicating with tropical scenes, describing the binary effect of twilight or making an issue of solitude. Read by others these same texts provide the *jouissance* of challenging the norms of literature. The prose poem naturally takes advantage of its pleasurable, compact expression, and its poetic allusion. thus adding new value to the sometimes overlooked genre. If pleasure is part of a prose poem's definition then it becomes exemplary for Barthes's theory of textual pleasure. Considering the continuum of pleasure begun with Weber's rondo and running through Dumas's play, Baudelaire's poetry, Duparc's music, Matisse's painting and Barthes's theory, subduing time, tapping out the rhythm of music, and immersing the reader into the new and unusual are all qualities that the prose poet brings to the pleasure of the text.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, Hazard. *Critical Theory since Plato*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.
- Arabo, S. and M. Petit. "Baudelaire: un poète critique d'art." 29 February 2004.  
<<http://membres.lycos.fr/mirra/BaudWagDela.html>>.
- Aristote. *La Poétique*. Trans. Roselyne Dupont-Roc et Jean Lallot. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980.
- Bandy, W. T. "Two Centenaries: 'Les Fleurs du mal' and 'Madame Bovary.'" *The French Review* 31 (Jan. 1958): 192-196.
- Baronian, Jean-Baptiste. "Baudelaire et l'Académie française." Bruxelles: Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique, June 2006. 10 December 2007.  
<<http://www.arlfb.be/ebibliotheque/communications/baronian100606.pdf>>.
- Barthes, Roland. *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Éléments de sémiologie*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953 and 1964.
- . *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil, collection Points Essais, 1957.
- . *Critique et vérité*. Paris: Seuil, collection Tel Quel, 1966.
- . *Système de la mode*. Paris: Seuil, 1967.
- . *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. Paris: Tel Quel, 1971.
- . *Le Plaisir du texte*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- . *L'Obvie et l'obtus: essais critiques III*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du mal*. Paris: Larousse-Bordas/HER, 1999.
- . *Flowers of Evil*. Trans. Keith Waldrop. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006.
- . *The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris: Petits Poèmes en prose*. Trans. Edward K. Kaplan. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Athens & London: The University of Ga. Press, 1997.
- . "Poèmes nocturnes." *Le Présent* 24 August 1857: 284-290.

---. *Salon de 1859*. From section VIII, 29 March 2004.

<<http://digilander.libero.it/charlesbaudelaire/bI.htm>>.

*Baudelaire: un poète critique d'art*. 2 February 2004.

<<http://membres.lycos.fr/mirra/BaudWagDela.html>>.

Bernard, Philip and C. Lester. "Philippe Sollers: *Femmes*." *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 163-166.

Bernard, Suzanne. *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris: Nizet, 1959.

Bertrand, Aloyius. *Gaspard de la nuit: fantaisies dans la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*. Ed. Max Millner. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Bon, François. "Baudelaire: Petits poèmes en prose." *Athena*. Ed. Pierre Perroud. 1999. 24 June 2008.

<[http://un2sg4.unige.ch/athena/baudelaire/spleen/baud\\_ppp\\_frame0.html](http://un2sg4.unige.ch/athena/baudelaire/spleen/baud_ppp_frame0.html)>.

Braun, Sydney D. *Dictionary of French Literature*. New York: Fawcett World Library, 1964.

Burton, Richard D. E. "Bonding and Breaking in Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en Prose*." *Modern Humanities Research Association* 88.1 (1993): 58-73.

Cagnon, Maurice. Rev. of *Lois*, by Philippe Sollers. *The French Review* 47.3 (1974). 3 June 2008.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/387153?seq=2>>.

Cargo, Robert T. *A Concordance to Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du mal*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965.

---. *Concordance to Baudelaire's Petits Poèmes en Prose*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1971.

Carrier, David. "The Beauty of Henri Matisse." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38.2 (2004): 80-87.

Castex, Pierre-Georges et Paul Surer. *Manuel des Études littéraires françaises: XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1950.

---. *Manuel des Études littéraires françaises: XIXe siècle*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1950.

Chandler, Daniel. *Semiotics: the basics*. London, New York: Routledge, 2002.

- Cotentin-Rey, Ghislane. *Les Grandes Étapes de la civilisation française*. Paris: Bordas, 1996.
- Coulet, Henri. *Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution – Tome I: Histoire du roman en France*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1967.
- Cowart, Georgia. *French Musical Thought, 1600-1800*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Croix, Alain et Jean Quéniart. *De la Renaissance à l'aube des lumières*. Paris: Seuil, 1997.
- Davidson, Arthur Fitzwilliam. *Alexandre Dumas (père) His Life and Works*. Boston : A. Constable & Co. Ltd., 1902.
- Davison, Hugh M. "The Critical Position of Roland Barthes." *Contemporary Literature* 9 (1968): 367-376.
- Dayan, Peter. "La Musique et les lettres chez Barthes." *French Studies* LVII.3 (2003): 335-348.
- Decaunes, Luc. *Charles Baudelaire: une étude de Luc Decaunes avec choix de textes, bibliographie, dessins, portraits, fac-similés*. Paris: Seghers, 1959.
- . *Le Poème en prose: anthologie 1842-1945*. Paris: Seghers, 1984.
- De Grève, Marcel. "Poème en prose." *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires*. Available : <http://www.ditl.info/arttest/art3502.php>. 18 June 07.
- Delisle, Virginie. "Charles Baudelaire." *A la lettre*. Internet. 11 December 2007. <http://www.alalettre.com/HFcenter.htm>.
- Derrida, Jacques. *L'Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967.
- Dorsch, T. S. *Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry; Horace: On the Art of Poetry; Longinus: On the Sublime*. Middlesex and Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.
- Durry, M.-J. "Autour du poème en prose." *Mercure de France*, 273 (February 1937): 495-505.
- Eliot, Charles W. *The Apology, Phædo and Crito of Plato*. Trans. by Benjamin Jowett. New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1937.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W Norton &

- Company, 1961.
- Goldsmith, Helen Hart. "Art and Artifact: Pictorialization in *Gaspard de la nuit*." *The French Review* 44 (Winter 1971): 129-139.
- Heath, Stephen. *Image, Music, Text / Roland Barthes*. New York: Hill & Lang, 1977.
- Jakobson, Roman et Claude Lévi-Strauss. "Les Chats de Charles Baudelaire." *Revue Française d'Anthropologie*. 2 (1962): 5-21.
- Johnson, Barbara. "Poetry and Its Double: Two *Invitations au voyage*." *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- . *Défigurations du langage poétique: la seconde révolution baudelairienne*. Paris: Flammarion, 1979.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. by James Creed Meredith; revised by Nicholas Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Kaplan, Edward K. *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Esthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious in the Parisian Prowler*. Athens, GA and London, 1990.
- Knight, Diana. "Roland Barthes: the *Corpus* and the *Corps*." *Poetics Today* 5:4 (1984): 831-837.
- . "Where to begin?" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.2 (2001): 493-501.
- Krueger, Cheryl L. *The Art of Procrastination: Baudelaire's Poetry in Prose*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007.
- Labarthe, Patrick. *Petits Poèmes en prose de Charles Baudelaire*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- Lagarde, A. et L. Michard. *Les Grands Auteurs français Anthologie et Histoire Littéraire: XIX siècle*. Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1997. 429-454.
- Laude, Patrick. "L'Esthétique baudelairienne: Entre l'Un et le Multiple." *Symposium XLVIII* (Spring 1994): 37-50.

- Le Dantec, Y.-G. *Baudelaire: Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.
- Lemaitre, Henri. *Charles Baudelaire Petits Poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)*. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962.
- Lund, Steffen Nordahl. *L'Aventure du signifiant*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981.
- Malraux, André. *La Condition humaine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.
- Marty, Éric. *Roland Barthes le métier d'écrire*. Paris: Seuil, 2006.
- McGraw, Betty R. "Semiotics, Erotographics, and Barthes's Visual Concerns." 6 Sept. 2007. [http://www.jstor.org/jstor/gifcvtdir/ap005173/00492426/ap060023/06a00080\\_1.1.gif?jstor](http://www.jstor.org/jstor/gifcvtdir/ap005173/00492426/ap060023/06a00080_1.1.gif?jstor).
- Michaud, Guy and Alain Kimmel. *Le Nouveau Guide France*. Paris: Hachette, 1990.
- Mitterand, Henri. *Littérature: Textes et Documents XX siècle*. Paris: Nathan, 1989.
- Montaigne, Michel de. "De la Force de l'imagination." *Essais Livre I chapitre XX*. édition 1595 [www.bribes.org/trismegiste/montable.htm](http://www.bribes.org/trismegiste/montable.htm).
- Monte, Steven. *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.
- Mortimer, Armine Kotin. *The Gentlest Law*. New York: Peter Lang, 1989.
- Newton-De Molina, David. Rev. of *Le Plaisir du texte* by Roland Barthes. *The Modern Language Review* April 1974: 362-365.
- Patty, James S. "Notes, Documents, and Critical Comment, Baudelaire and Bossuet on Laughter." *PMLA* 80 (1965): 459-461.
- Pichois, Claude éd. et Jean Ziegler. *Baudelaire Correspondance I (janvier 1832-février 1860)*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
- . *Baudelaire Correspondance II (février 1860 – avril 1867)*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
- Pichois, Claude éd. *Œuvres complètes I et II: Charles Baudelaire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975, 1976.
- Pirsig, Robert. *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.
- Pliny, the younger. *Pliny, a life in letters*. Ed. Betty Radice. London: Folio Society, 1978.

- Pusey, Edward Bouverie. Trans. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Franklin Center, PA. : The Franklin Library, 1982.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. "Barthes, Roland." *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. Ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth. 30 May 08.  
<[http://www.taalfilosofie.nl/bestanden/hopkins\\_barthes.pdf](http://www.taalfilosofie.nl/bestanden/hopkins_barthes.pdf)>.
- Raser, Timothy. *A Poetics of Art Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 1988.
- Riffaterre Michael. "Describing poetic structures: Two approaches to Baudelaire's *les Chats*." *Yale French Studies* 36/37 (1966): 200-242.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Poésies, Une Saison en enfer, Illuminations*. Éd. Louis Forestier. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *Le Voyeur*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959.
- Rueckart, William H. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" *The Iowa Review*. 9.1 (1978): 71-86.
- Sandras, Michel. *Lire le poème en prose*. Paris: Dunod, 1995.
- Sanyal, Debarati. *The Tie that Binds: Violent Commerce in Baudelaire's "La Corde"* *Yale French Studies*. 6 October 2008.< <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090610>>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Situations*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.
- Scott, Maria C. *Baudelaire's Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives*. Cornwall, England: MPG Books, 2005.
- Schofer, Peter et Donald Rice et William Berg. *Poèmes, pièces, prose: Introduction à l'analyse de textes littéraires français*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Schmidt, Joël. *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1985.
- Seppä, Anita. "Foucault, Enlightenment and the aesthetics of the Self." *Contemporary Aesthetics*. 30 August 07.<[http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?article\\_ID=244](http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?article_ID=244)>.
- Shattuck, Roger. *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*. New York: Random House, 1968.



Sollers, Philippe. *Théorie d'ensemble*. Paris: Seuil, 1968.

Spronck, Maurice. *Les Artistes Littéraires: études sur le XIXe siècle*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1889.

Stephens, Sonya. *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Poétique de la prose*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971.

---. *Theories of the Symbol*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982.

---. "La Poésie sans le vers," *La Notion de littérature*. Paris: Seuil, 1987.

---. *The Replacement of Ethics by Aesthetics*. San Diego: University of California, 2005.

Vadé, Yves. *Le Poème en prose et ses territoires*. Paris: Éditions Belin, 1996.

Vincent-Munnia, Nathalie. *La Poésie en prose des lumières au romantisme 1760-1820*. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993.

---. *Les Premiers poèmes en prose: généalogie d'un genre dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle français*. Paris: H. Champion, 1996.

Weber, Alfred. "History of Philosophy: Thomas Hobbes." 3 Jan. 2008.

<<http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Weber%20-%20History/hobbes.htm>>.

## APPENDIX A

## “Lettre programme” à Arsène Houssaye (Noël 1861)

Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu'il n'a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement.

Considérez, je vous prie, quelles admirables commodités cette combinaison nous offre à tous, à vous, à moi et au lecteur. Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture; car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d'une intrigue superflue. Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l'espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j'ose vous dédier le serpent tout entier.

J'ai une petite confession à vous faire. C'est en feuilletant, pour la vingtième fois au moins, le fameux *Gaspard de la nuit*, d'Aloysius Bertrand (un livre connu de vous, de moi et de quelques-uns de nos amis, n'a-t-il pas tous les droits à être appelé *fameux*?) que l'idée m'est venue de tenter quelque chose d'analogue, et d'appliquer à la description de la vie moderne, ou plutôt d'une vie moderne et plus abstraite, le procédé qu'il avait appliqué à la peinture de la vie ancienne, si étrangement pittoresque.

Quel est celui de nous qui n'a pas, dans ses jours d'ambition, rêvé le miracle d'une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience?

C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant. Vous-même, mon cher ami, n'avez-vous pas tenté de traduire en une chanson le cri strident du *Vitrier*, et d'exprimer dans une prose lyrique toutes les désolantes suggestions que ce cri envoie jusqu'aux mansardes, à travers les plus hautes brumes de la rue?

Mais, pour dire le vrai, je crains que ma jalousie ne m'ait pas porté bonheur. Sitôt que j'eus commencé le travail, je m'aperçus que non-seulement je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle, mais encore que je faisais quelque chose (si cela peut s'appeler *quelque chose*) de singulièrement différent, accident dont tout autre que moi s'enorgueillerait sans doute, mais qui ne peut qu'humilier profondément un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d'accomplir *juste* ce qu'il a projeté de faire.

Votre bien affectionné,

C.B.

APPENDIX B  
Poèmes nocturnes

XVI  
L'Horloge

Les Chinois voient l'heure dans l'œil des chats.

Un jour un missionnaire, se promenant dans la banlieue de Nankin, s'aperçut qu'il avait oublié sa montre, et demanda à un petit garçon quelle heure il était.

Le gamin du céleste Empire hésita d'abord ; puis, se ravisant, il répondit : "Je vais vous le dire." Peu d'instant après, il reparut, tenant dans ses bras un fort gros chat, et le regardant, comme on dit, dans le blanc des yeux, il affirma sans hésiter : "Il n'est pas encore tout à fait midi." Ce qui était vrai.

Pour moi, si je me penche vers la belle Féline, la si bien nommée, qui est à la fois l'honneur de son sexe, l'orgueil de mon cœur et le parfum de mon esprit, que ce soit la nuit, que ce soit le jour, dans la pleine lumière ou dans l'ombre opaque, au fond de ses yeux adorables je vois toujours l'heure distinctement, toujours la même, une heure vaste, solennelle, grande comme l'espace, sans divisions de minutes ni de secondes, – une heure immobile qui n'est pas marquée sur les horloges, et cependant légère comme un soupir, rapide comme un coup d'œil.

Et si quelque importun venait me déranger pendant que mon regard repose sur ce délicieux cadran, si quelque Génie malhonnête et intolérant, quelque Démon du contretemps venait me dire : "Que regardes-tu là avec tant de soin? Que cherches-tu dans les yeux de cet être? Y vois-tu l'heure? mortel prodigue et fainéant?" je répondrais sans hésiter "Oui, je vois l'heure; il est l'Eternité!"

N'est-ce pas, madame, que voici un madrigal vraiment méritoire, et aussi emphatique que vous-même? En vérité, j'ai eu tant de plaisir à broder cette prétentieuse galanterie, que je ne vous demanderai rien en échange.

XVII  
Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure

Laisse-moi respirer longtemps, longtemps, l'odeur de tes cheveux, y plonger tout mon visage, comme un homme altéré dans l'eau d'une source, et les agiter avec ma main comme un mouchoir odorant, pour secouer des souvenirs dans l'air.

Si tu pouvais savoir tout ce que je vois! tout ce que je sens! tout ce que j'entends dans tes cheveux! Mon âme voyage sur le parfum comme l'âme des autres hommes sur la musique.

Tes cheveux contiennent tout un rêve, plein de voilures et de mâtures ; ils contiennent de grandes mers dont les moussons me portent vers de charmants climats, où l'espace est plus bleu et plus profond, où l'atmosphère est parfumée par les fruits, par les feuilles et par la peau humaine.

Dans l'océan de ta chevelure, j'entrevois un port fourmillant de chants mélancoliques, d'hommes vigoureux de toutes nations et de navires de toutes formes découpant leurs architectures fines et compliquées sur un ciel immense où se prélassent l'éternelle chaleur.

Dans les caresses de ta chevelure, je retrouve les langueurs des longues heures passées sur un divan, dans la chambre d'un beau navire, bercées par le roulis imperceptible du port, entre les pots de fleurs et les gargoulettes rafraîchissantes.

Dans l'ardent foyer de ta chevelure, je respire l'odeur du tabac mêlé à l'opium et au sucre ; dans la nuit de ta chevelure, je vois resplendir l'infini de l'azur tropical ; sur les rivages duvetés de ta chevelure je m'enivre des odeurs combinées du goudron, du musc et de l'huile de coco.

Laisse-moi mordre longtemps tes tresses lourdes et noires. Quand je mordille tes cheveux élastiques et rebelles, il me semble que je mange des souvenirs.

## XVIII L'Invitation au voyage

Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on, que je rêve de visiter avec une vieille amie. Pays singulier, noyé dans les brumes de notre Nord, et qu'on pourrait appeler l'Orient de l'Occident, la Chine de l'Europe, tant la chaude et capricieuse fantaisie s'y est donné carrière, tant elle l'a patiemment et opiniâtrement illustré de ses savantes et délicates végétations.

Un vrai pays de Cocagne, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille, honnête ; où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et douce à respirer; d'où le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus; où le bonheur est marié au silence; où la cuisine elle-même est poétique, grasse et excitante à la fois; où tout vous ressemble, mon cher ange.

Tu connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s'empare de nous dans les froides misères, cette nostalgie du pays qu'on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité? Il est une contrée qui te ressemble, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille et honnête, où la fantaisie a bâti et décoré une Chine occidentale, où la vie est douce à respirer, où le bonheur est marié au silence. C'est là qu'il faut aller vivre, c'est là qu'il faut aller mourir!

Oui, c'est là qu'il faut aller respirer, rêver et allonger les heures par l'infini des sensations. Un musicien a écrit *l'Invitation à la valse* ; quel est celui qui composera *l'Invitation au voyage*, qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d'élection?

Oui, c'est dans cette atmosphère qu'il ferait bon vivre, – là-bas, où les heures plus lentes contiennent plus de pensées, où les horloges sonnent le bonheur avec une plus profonde et plus significative solennité.

Sur des panneaux luisants, ou sur des cuirs dorés et d'une richesse sombre, vivent discrètement des peintures béates, calmes et profondes, comme les âmes des artistes qui les créèrent. Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes ou par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en nombreux compartiments. Les meubles sont vastes, curieux, bizarres, armés de serrures et de secrets comme des âmes raffinées. Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoiles, l'orfèvrerie et la faïence y jouent pour les yeux une symphonie muette et mystérieuse ; et de toutes choses, de tous les coins, des fissures des tiroirs et des plis des étoffes s'échappe un parfum singulier, un revenez-y de Sumatra, qui est comme l'âme de l'appartement.

Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je, où tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine, comme une splendide orfèvrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée! Les trésors du monde y affluent, comme dans la maison d'un homme laborieux et qui a bien mérité du monde entier. Pays singulier, supérieur aux autres, comme l'Art l'est à la Nature, où celle-ci est réformée par le rêve, où elle est corrigée, embellie, refondue.

Qu'ils cherchent, qu'ils cherchent encore, qu'ils reculent sans cesse les limites de leur bonheur, ces alchimistes de l'horticulture! Qu'ils proposent des prix de soixante et de cent mille florins pour qui résoudra leurs ambitieux problèmes! Moi, j'ai trouvé ma tulipe noire et mon dahlia bleu!

Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia, c'est là, n'est-ce pas, dans ce beau pays si calme et si rêveur, qu'il faudrait aller vivre et fleurir? Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre correspondance?

Des rêves! toujours des rêves! et plus l'âme est ambitieuse et délicate, plus les rêves l'éloignent du possible. Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d'opium naturel, incessamment sécrétée et renouvelée, et, de la naissance à la mort, combien comptons-nous d'heures remplies par la jouissance positive, par l'action réussie et décidée? Vivrons-nous jamais, passerons-nous jamais dans ce tableau qu'a peint mon esprit, ce tableau qui te ressemble?

Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c'est toi. C'est encore toi, ces grands fleuves et ces canaux tranquilles. Ces énormes navires qu'ils charrient, tout chargés de richesses et d'où montent les chants monotones de la manœuvre, ce sont mes pensées qui dorment ou qui roulent sur ton sein. Tu les conduis doucement vers la mer qui est l'Infini, tout en réfléchissant les profondeurs du ciel dans la limpidité de ta belle âme ; – et quand, fatigués par la houle et gorgés des

produits de l'Orient, ils rentrent au port natal, ce sont encore mes pensées enrichies qui reviennent de l'Infini vers toi.

## XXII Le Crépuscule du soir

Le jour tombe. Un grand apaisement se fait dans les pauvres esprits fatigués du labeur de la journée; et leurs pensées prennent maintenant les couleurs tendres et indécises du crépuscule. Cependant du haut de la montagne arrive à mon balcon, à travers les nues transparentes du soir, un grand hurlement, composé d'une foule de cris discordants, que l'espace transforme en une lugubre harmonie, comme celle de la marée qui monte ou d'une tempête qui s'éveille.

Quels sont les infortunés que le soir ne calme pas, et qui prennent, comme les hiboux, la venue de la nuit pour un signal de sabbat? Cette sinistre ululation nous arrive du noir hospice perché sur la montagne, et, le soir, en fumant et en contemplant le repos de l'immense vallée, hérissée de maisons dont chaque fenêtre dit: "C'est ici la paix maintenant ; c'est ici la joie de la famille!" je puis, quand le vent souffle de là-haut, bercer ma pensée étonnée à cette imitation des harmonies de l'enfer.

Le crépuscule excite les fous. – Je me souviens que j'ai eu deux amis que le crépuscule rendait tout malades. L'un méconnaissait alors tous les rapports d'amitié et de politesse, et maltraitait, comme un sauvage, le premier venu. Je l'ai vu jeter à la tête d'un maître d'hôtel un excellent poulet, dans lequel il croyait voir je ne sais quel insultant hiéroglyphe. Le soir, précurseur des voluptés profondes, lui gâtait les choses les plus succulentes.

L'autre, un ambitieux blessé, devenait, à mesure que le jour baissait, plus aigre, plus sombre, plus taquin. Indulgent et sociable encore pendant la journée, il était impitoyable le soir ; et ce n'était pas seulement sur autrui, mais aussi sur lui-même que s'exerçait rageusement sa manie crépusculeuse.

Le premier est mort fou, incapable de reconnaître sa femme et son enfant ; le second porte en lui l'inquiétude d'un malaise perpétuel, et fût-il gratifié de tous les honneurs que peuvent conférer les républiques et les princes, je crois que le crépuscule allumerait encore en lui la brûlante envie de distinctions imaginaires. La nuit, qui mettait ses ténèbres dans leur esprit, fait la lumière dans le mien ; et, bien qu'il ne soit pas rare de voir la même cause engendrer deux effets contraires, j'en suis toujours comme intrigué et alarmé.

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

Crépuscule, comme vous êtes doux et tendre! Les lueurs roses qui traînent encore à l'horizon comme l'agonie du jour sous l'oppression victorieuse de sa nuit, les feux des candélabres qui font des taches d'un rouge opaque sur les dernières gloires du couchant, les lourdes draperies qu'une main invisible attire des profondeurs de l'Orient, imitent tous les sentiments compliqués qui luttent dans le cœur de l'homme aux heures solennelles de la vie.

On dirait encore une de ces robes étranges de danseuses, où une gaze- transparente et sombre laisse entrevoir les splendeurs amorties d'une jupe éclatante, comme sous le noir présent transperce le délicieux passé ; et les étoiles vacillantes d'or et d'argent, dont elle est semée, représentent ces feux de la fantaisie qui ne s'allument bien que sous le deuil profond de la Nuit.

## XXIII La Solitude

Un gazetier philanthrope me dit que la solitude est mauvaise pour l'homme ; et à l'appui de sa thèse, il cite, comme tous les incrédules, des paroles des Pères de l'Eglise.

Je sais que le Démon fréquente volontiers les lieux arides, et que l'Esprit de meurtre et de lubricité s'enflamme merveilleusement dans les solitudes. Mais il serait possible que cette solitude ne fût dangereuse que pour l'âme oisive et divagante qui la peuple de ses passions et de ses chimères.

Il est certain qu'un bavard, dont le suprême plaisir consiste à parler du haut d'une chaire ou d'une

tribune, risquerait fort de devenir fou furieux dans l'île de Robinson. Je n'exige pas de mon gazetier les courageuses vertus de Crusoé, mais je demande qu'il ne décrète pas d'accusation les amoureux de la solitude et du mystère.

Il y a dans nos races jacassières des individus qui accepteraient avec moins de répugnance le supplice suprême, s'il leur était permis de faire du haut de l'échafaud une copieuse harangue, sans craindre que les tambours de Santerre ne leur coupassent intempestivement la parole.

Je ne les plains pas, parce que je devine que leurs effusions oratoires leur procurent des voluptés égales à celles que d'autres tirent du silence et du recueillement ; mais je les méprise.

Je désire surtout que mon maudit gazetier me laisse m'amuser à ma guise. "Vous n'éprouvez donc jamais, – me dit-il, avec un ton de nez très-apostolique, – le besoin de partager vos jouissances?" Voyez-vous le subtil envieux! Il sait que je dédaigne les siennes, et il vient s'insinuer dans les miennes, le hideux trouble-fête!

"Ce grand malheur de ne pouvoir être seul!..." dit quelque part La Bruyère, comme pour faire honte à tous ceux qui courent s'oublier dans la foule, craignant sans doute de ne pouvoir se supporter eux-mêmes.

"Presque tous nos malheurs nous viennent de n'avoir pas su rester dans notre chambre," dit un autre sage, Pascal, je crois, rappelant ainsi dans la cellule du recueillement tous ces affolés qui cherchent le bonheur dans le mouvement et dans une prostitution que je pourrais appeler fraternelle, si je voulais parler la belle langue de mon siècle.

## XXIV Les Projets

Il se disait, en se promenant dans un grand parc solitaire : "Comme elle serait belle dans un costume de cour, compliqué et fastueux, descendant, à travers l'atmosphère d'un beau soir, les degrés de marbre d'un palais, en face des grandes pelouses et des bassins! Car elle a naturellement l'air d'une princesse."

En passant plus tard dans une rue, il s'arrêta devant une boutique de gravures, et, trouvant dans un carton une estampe représentant un paysage tropical, il se dit : "Non! ce n'est pas dans un palais que je voudrais posséder sa chère vie. Nous n'y serions pas chez nous. D'ailleurs ces murs criblés d'or ne laisseraient pas une place pour accrocher son image ; dans ces solennelles galeries, il n'y a pas un coin pour l'intimité. Décidément, c'est là qu'il faudrait demeurer pour cultiver le rêve de ma vie."

Et, tout en analysant des yeux les détails de la gravure, il continuait mentalement : "Au bord de la mer, une belle case en bois, enveloppée de tous ces arbres bizarres et luisants dont j'ai oublié les noms, dans l'atmosphère, une odeur enivrante, indéfinissable... dans la case un puissant parfum de rose et de musc... plus loin, derrière notre petit domaine, des bouts de mâts balancés par la houle, autour de nous, au delà de la chambre éclairée d'une lumière rose égayée par des stores, décorée de nattes fraîches et de fleurs capiteuses, avec de rares sièges d'un rococo portugais, d'un bois lourd et ténébreux (où elle reposerait si calme, si bien éventée, fumant le tabac légèrement opiacé!), au delà de la varangue, le tapage des oiseaux ivres de lumière, et le jacassement des petites négresses, et, la nuit, pour servir d'accompagnement à mes songes, le chant plaintif des arbres à musique, des mélancoliques filaos! Oui, en vérité, c'est bien là tout le décor que je cherchais. Qu'ai-je à faire de palais? "

Et plus loin, comme il suivait une grande avenue, il aperçut une auberge proprette où d'une fenêtre égayée par des rideaux d'indienne bariolée se penchaient deux têtes rieuses. Et tout de suite : "Il faut, – se dit-il, – que ma pensée soit une grande vagabonde pour aller chercher si loin ce qui est si près de moi. Le plaisir et le bonheur sont dans la première auberge venue, dans l'auberge du hasard, si féconde en voluptés. Un grand feu, des faïences voyantes, un souper passable, un vin rude, et un lit très-large avec des draps un peu âpres, mais frais ; quoi de mieux?"

Et en rentrant seul chez lui, à cette heure où les conseils de la Sagesse ne sont plus étouffés par les bourdonnements de la vie extérieure, il se dit : "J'ai eu aujourd'hui, en rêve, trois domiciles où j'ai

trouvé un égal plaisir. Pourquoi contraindre mon corps à changer de place, puisque mon âme voyage si lestement? Et à quoi bon exécuter des projets, puisque le projet est en lui-même une jouissance suffisante?"

## APPENDIX C

