

FIRST ENCOUNTERS,
LINGERING IMPRESSIONS



Jardin du Luxembourg, 1998, © Peter Coles

L'Invitation au voyage

Charles Baudelaire

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parce que c'était lui; parce que c'était moi: Sharing Baudelaire's music

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My first meeting with Baudelaire was through a Flammarion paperback edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Baudelaire was a 'set author' on the first-year syllabus of the French undergraduate degree programme I was embarking on. I had never encountered the poet's work before, though I had read some Hugo and Verlaine. At first, I hardly knew what to make of Baudelaire's writing. I found myself having to look up a lot of words in the dictionary – *le chemin bourbeux, le feston et l'ourlet, un grand reposoir, un siècle vaurien* – and started to build a picture of a poetic world that was strangely enticing. I still own that same paperback, which is filled with pencil scribbles, underlining ideas and concepts that inspired or confused, annotating unfamiliar meanings and connotations, and sketching out links between poems (fig. 1). In the flyleaf I once jotted down the words *vertige – gouffre – vide* and I created a kind of family tree that links Baudelaire – Wagner – Goya – Delacroix. Elsewhere, I find comments about *Dante et Virgile aux enfers*, the 1822 Delacroix painting that hangs in the Louvre, and which, when I saw it for the first time, reminded me somehow of Baudelaire's 'L'Irrémédiable', knowing as I did by then that Baudelaire had also written admiringly of Delacroix's work. Where images once emerged from the page, as I flick through the book now, I cannot help but hear tunes and melodies that have become associated with the poems. The opening line from 'Ciel brouillé' rings out in my head with the tempo and pitches of a song setting that I heard premiered in Paris in 2016. My copy also suggests that I once equated the opening stanza of 'Ciel brouillé' with 'L'Invitation au voyage', but now that poem is always attached to music for me, rather than to other poems or to other paintings.

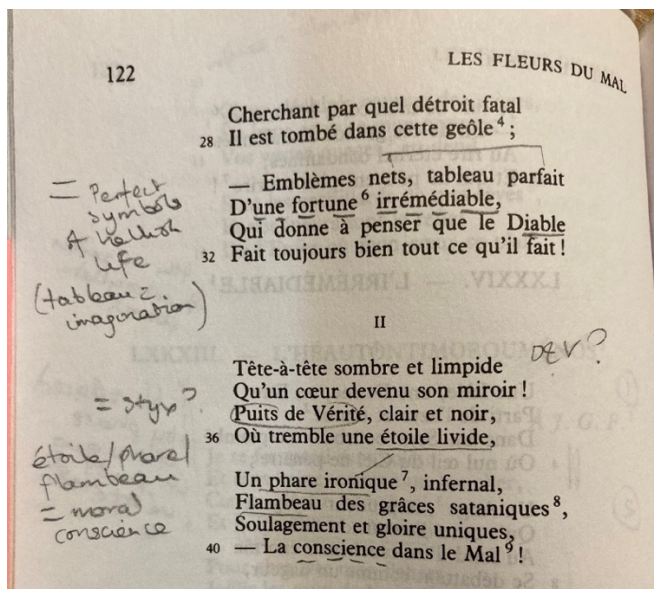
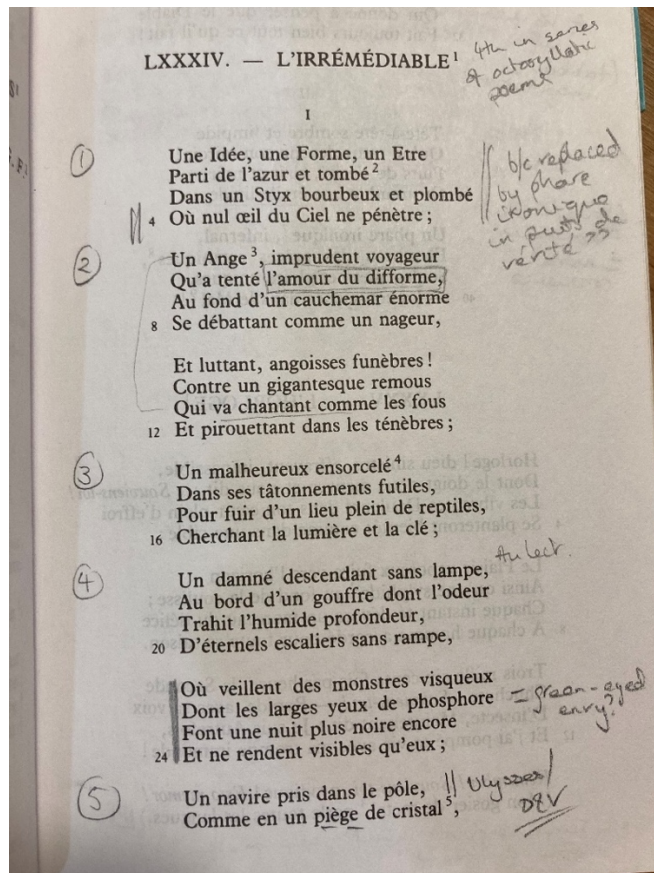


Fig. 1: The author's annotated copy of 'L'Irrémédiable' from the GF-Flammarion 1991 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*

The resonances between Baudelaire's poetry and music are particularly strong for me these days. I first sang the 1870 Duparc setting of 'L'Invitation au voyage' as a student, deciphering the melody as I sight-read the score.¹ I've since also performed the 1863 Cressonnois version of 'L'Invitation au voyage' in lecture-recitals.² From experiences of singing Baudelaire emerged an interest in what else might be out there. Many other Baudelaire songs by Chabrier, Charpentier, Debussy, Fauré, Rollinat, and Vierne have now become deeply familiar to me through coaching professional singers, including for the 2017 *Voyages* album of Baudelaire settings spanning cabaret and classical music.³ I've built playlists of Baudelaire pop songs to support the findings of the *Baudelaire Song Project*, which has uncovered over 1,700 song settings of Baudelaire's poems.⁴ The trends we can observe in how Baudelaire 'speaks' to musicians are striking. Over 15% of the songs use the same four poems – 'L'Invitation au voyage', 'Recueillement', 'La Mort des amants', and 'Harmonie du soir' – whether in classical or pop music genres. But classical musicians have tended to favour the more complaisant texts, where rock and metal musicians have opted for the more subversive ones.

Baudelaire is a malleable poet, whose disdainfulness is balanced by seductiveness. The aura of the scandalous artist whose poems were banned has continued to attract so many people to Baudelaire, but so too has the prescience of a poet whose insights into the shocks of the modern world provide salient reality checks about the human condition. For me, Baudelaire has become a companion, a friend I like to introduce to others. His poems are not always comfortable. There are misanthropic and misogynistic overtones to some of his work, and some of the images he creates are quite repulsive. But the very uncomfortableness of Baudelaire's poetry is precisely what appeals to me. I might not like to hear the violent screeches of the 'Litanies de Satan' (as reimagined by Diamanda Galás, perhaps)⁵ or the shouts of 'Imbécile!' in 'Le Vampire' (as reimagined by Susanna, perhaps),⁶ but the disquiet that Baudelaire's language sets in train helps me to keep things real.

If some readers of Baudelaire have fetishized the poet's persona rather than his writings per se, such responses in fact operate in quite a Baudelairean way.⁷ Baudelaire himself fetishized Wagner. His obsessive adulation for the opera composer is expressed in a letter dated 17 February 1860. Baudelaire writes 'il me semblait que cette musique était la mienne', in a manoeuvre that appropriates Wagner's music by claiming it as his own.⁸ In eliding the composer's music with his own (despite a fundamental lack of technical musical prowess), Baudelaire sets in train the same operation of elision that others then do to his poetry. Composers and songwriters who appropriate his words for their own songs effectively claim Baudelaire's words as their own (and in 20% of Baudelaire songs they are in fact doing so through another language using translated lyrics). Understanding why Baudelaire's poetry has appealed to over 750 musicians and counting probably comes down to a process of recognition: that Baudelaire's poetry speaks to them in such a way that they want to take him into their own creative fold, even if, like me, they experience some discomfort in doing so. We might, then, understand Baudelaire's legacy as a form of amiable yet fractious companionship from which we can all get our own share.

¹ Henri Duparc, 'L'Invitation au voyage' (1870): https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W6515_GBAJY0652324.

² Jules Cressonnois, 'L'Invitation au voyage' (1873): https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W6918_GBAJY0652301.

³ Mary Bevan and Joseph Middleton, *Voyages* (Signum Classics, 2017).

https://open.spotify.com/album/2URCWCwWYDI6vRLOAUad2?si=3_WPj8GSQuGZ6Qo6U_4w4Q&nd=1.

⁴ *The Baudelaire Song Project*: <https://www.baudelaire song.org/search/>.

⁵ Diamanda Galás, 'Litanies of Satan':

https://open.spotify.com/track/3Wij3Osx39agAHINQYYVBk?si=TxrI0f_oQauGbFhR3YftAQ&nd=1.

⁶ Susanna, 'The Vampire':

<https://open.spotify.com/album/6UMfvIFmpCpEJOD7RCYMZe?highlight=spotify:track:26xVKmTtBtCnDsknWp9nUd>.

⁷ On the concept of 'Baudelaire fétiche', see Mathilde Labbé, 'Baudelaire au centenaire des *Fleurs du mal*: Commémoration et lectures de circonstance', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 58:1 (2018), 74-86.

⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. by Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1966-1973), II, p. 1452. Baudelaire's recognition of himself in Wagner's music is also described as a process of anamnesis, as per Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica ficta (Figures de Wagner)* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991), pp. 61-62.

What Baudelaire Means to Me

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I first encountered Baudelaire as an A-level student. Sadly, the teaching of French at my school focussed more on language than literature. Compounded with the strangely affectless quality about the texts my teachers chose for us to read in class, it is a wonder I have much interest in French literature at all. At school, we drudged stolidly through passages of *L'Étranger* and *Thérèse Desqueroix* with little sense of excitement. That only came later at university, when a supplementary class on Flaubert's 'Un Coeur Simple' opened doors for me.

In comparison, the English teachers at my school were more inspired. So, strangely enough, it was as a student of English Literature that I first came across Baudelaire, as we pored over *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. Tracking down fragments of quotation and pondering over snippets of allusion in class with other earnest teenagers seemed like a rich game or an elaborate crossword that we hoped to solve together. I haven't really stopped doing this since and I owe the teachers (Chris Barlowe and Sally Meyers) who corralled that unruly bunch of adolescents a significant debt for a life-long love of trying to figure out what's going on in texts.

As an engagement with Baudelaire, however, these first efforts were not particularly successful. For example, the opening section of Eliot's poem, 'The Burial of the Dead' ends by quoting loosely from the preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*: 'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frere!'.¹ My teenage ears formed only the roughest idea of what was happening here. The effect seemed cacophony. What I saw and heard was part of a polyglot collage of quotations from languages and eras that were not familiar to me: French phrases jostled alongside demotic German ('Bin gar keine Russin') and the names of battles from ancient Greek history ('the ships at Mylae' [pp. 55-57]). Perhaps I caught a vague intimation that Eliot was channelling various voices from European poetry through his own writing, but little more.

I was, however, unwittingly and slowly becoming familiar with a particular canon formed from the writers that Eliot himself had encountered as a young man. And I was absorbing some very particular ways of understanding those writings. Encountering Baudelaire through Eliot undoubtedly shaped the way that I understood the French poet. And I suspect I may not be alone in this. Later in my studies, at university, I would learn to recognize more fully the contours of Eliot's literary vision and start looking beyond it to form my own tastes. I would understand how deeply personal his vision of Baudelaire was. Indeed, the process of canon formation, the development of taste and the discovery of writers with deep, personal significance are topics that Eliot himself wrote about in several places, most notably in 'What Dante Means to Me', first delivered as a lecture in 1950:

I think that from Baudelaire I learned first a precedent for the poetic possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic.²

Posthumously collected in *To Criticize the Critic* (1965), this essay provides an obvious retrospective gloss on several different aspects of *The Waste Land*. The intimation of 'poetic possibilities' in the 'modern metropolis' suggests that Baudelaire enabled Eliot to reconcile his nascent spiritual leanings with his experience of urban modernity. But it is also important to recognize the hindsight at work here: Eliot would write on several occasions about Baudelaire in the 1920s and 30s in ways that sought to reconcile his burgeoning Christian faith with his interest in the French poet. Notably in 'Baudelaire' (1930) he would use the French poet to ground his assertion that blasphemy is 'a way of affirming belief'.³ Baudelaire was undoubtedly important to Eliot's spiritual struggles before and after his public affirmations of Anglo-Catholic faith from 1928 onwards. But in 1922 *The Waste Land* struggled with affirmation in any form and it's important not to diminish that retrospectively through knowledge of Eliot's subsequent conversion.

Consider, for example, the address to the 'hypocrite lecteur' that Eliot quotes in 'The Burial of the Dead': closer inspection reveals that the 'poetic possibilities' activated by this allusion open

up complex frictions between English and French, both as languages and as poetic conventions. Baudelaire's poem may be less co-operative than it seems.

Note how *The Waste Land* stretches the original line, adding the address, 'you!'. This addition of an extra syllable makes the new line impossible within French classical prosody based around the alexandrine and unlikely in conventional English rhythmic forms. The presence of Baudelaire's poem is potentially disruptive from the outset. Early printings of Eliot's poem in the *Dial* and *Criterion* mark out Baudelaire's words in italics, but these have disappeared from subsequent printings. These disappearing italics also take with them a visual marker of linguistic difference, so that, as Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue point out, there may be momentary ambiguity about what language is being spoken: the first two words ('You! hypocrite') might be English. The ambiguity is only resolved when the line reaches 'lecteur' (p. 620).

'Mon semblable' may seem to modern ears indubitably French, but the word 'semblable' – describing some sort of similarity or likeness – is well attested in the English language. It dates back to 1400 and whilst the *OED* supplies few examples after 1700 (suggesting it is now obsolete), Shakespeare can be found using it five times. In English mouths, the medial vowel sounds of 'semblable' tend to be shorter and flatter, anglicising a word that is probably French in origin after all. Eliot's poem, then, may feel capable of dispensing with italics because of the way that the line seems to force readers into adopting a performative French accent to avoid falling flat in this way.

The rhythmic impossibility of Baudelaire's line as it features within *The Waste Land* is compounded by other minor changes that Eliot institutes in the punctuation of the original line. His addition of an exclamation after 'lecteur', alters the weighting of Baudelaire's line, which proceeds through a carefully iterative sequence of dashes and commas:

– Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!⁴

Syntactically each part of this line (lecteur – semblable – frère) seems to carry equal weight, although it is also possible to construe them as culminative. So the reader has to decide whether Baudelaire is haranguing them with set of insults ('you hypocrite; you're just like me; you're my

brother’) or whether the line arrives at a sense of revelation (‘you hypocrite; we’re the same really; we might even be brothers!’). The balance of possibilities here is complicated further by the demands of French prosody, which requires that the reader sound the terminal ‘e’ of ‘semblable’. A regular reading of the rhythm here, as four units (hemistiches) of three syllables, would bleed ‘semblable’ into the final phrase:

– Hypocrit/ e lecteur, – / mon semblabl/ e, – mon frère!
 3 + 3 + 3 + 3

But a less regular rhythmic reading might seek to retain the semantic integrity of ‘mon semblable’ in line with the demands of the punctuation, starting a new hemistich only after sounding the final ‘e’:

– Hypocrit/ e lecteur, – / mon semblable, / – mon frère!
 3 + 3 + 4 + 2

This effect, known as a ‘coupe lyrique’, creates a rhythmic stumble that might contribute to the effect of revelation, but it is not inevitable.⁵ The reader has to decide how the line should be sounded. The process of decision-making required by these lines is an important means for Baudelaire to co-opt his readers into the broader exploration of moral and aesthetic compromise that characterises this preface and makes it such a fantastic point of departure for *Les Fleurs du mal* as a whole. The rhythm of the line and such ambiguities are vital to the ethics and politics of the poem, which also hinges upon whether the poetic speaker discovers likeness and proximity in his audience (‘we’re the same’), or refuses to exonerate readers from his own faults (‘you’re just as bad as me’).

Eliot’s version of the line might seem to trample all over this. Following on from the exclamation mark after ‘you’, the addition of a second exclamation mark after ‘lecteur’ may seem hectoring:

You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!

This catches the switch to a direct personal address in Baudelaire’s preface, which only emerges in the final couplet of the poem about ‘ennui’. Eliot’s version skips over the preceding verses, which

use the first-person plural ('La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine, | Occupent *nos* esprits' [emphasis added]).⁶ *The Waste Land* capitalizes upon this tonal shift for its own purposes, as if it were the condition of Baudelaire's poem and not a departure. But Eliot also repunctuates the line, so that it looks as though it contains two syntactic units rather than three: 'semblable' and 'frère' may become subordinate attributes of 'hypocrite lecteur'. Any sense of the unfolding of possibilities or identities is diminished.

But Eliot may have heard this sequence differently, for Baudelaire's line was a touchstone of sorts for him elsewhere. On 12 February 1926, he used it in a letter to his friend, colleague, and intellectual rival, John Middleton Murray: 'You are in some sort of purgatory, I am perhaps thoroughly damned. But that's one reason why I want to see you. And I always feel with you "mon semblable – mon frère"' (p. 620). Written from a place of misery, this letter confirms the central role played by Baudelaire in Eliot's spiritual tribulations. But even this is ambiguous: since this post-dates *The Waste Land* it is possible that Eliot is quoting his own allusion to Baudelaire here. Note the way he drops the 'hypocrite' part of the line, so that it becomes an affirmation of likeness and co-feeling. Eliot can hardly have been unaware that such co-feeling is at odds with the spirit of Baudelaire's poem, which is sly about the kind of brotherhood it suggests with readers.

Perhaps this explains something about *The Waste Land*. Its exclamatory tones ('You! hypocrite lecteur') are consonant with this whole final sequence of 'The Burial of the Dead', which is spoken by an un-named presence who addresses 'Stetson!' with a sequence of exhortations. This is sometimes read as an allusion by metonymy to the gruffly American identity of Eliot's compatriot poet, Ezra Pound, although Eliot's letter to Middleton Murray may suggest other biographical possibilities. Within the mythic scope of Eliot's poem, the speaker is linked to 'Stetson' through a shared experience of combat at the battle of Mylae in 260 BC. The exchange may be jovial ('What ho – brother!'), rather than hectoring; but equally 'Stetson' and the speaker may share some complicity in the deaths they have witnessed during their experience of combat.

This points to a further, final ambiguity that arises from Eliot's decision to remove the italics from these lines after the earliest printings. For it takes away one visual marker that these words represent a further level of quotation within the quoted speech at this point in the poem. This may make it unclear whether the speaker is supposed to be consciously quoting the French poet or whether Baudelaire's words are imagined as erupting *through* his mouth. Baudelaire may be absorbed into that wider polyphony in *The Waste Land* which also finds the sounds of a London pub modulating into lines from *Hamlet*. Is Baudelaire present at this point in *The Waste Land* because his poetry helps form some point of contact between the speaker and 'Stetson'? Or does *The Waste Land* contrive to echo Baudelaire's line here as a means of elevating a guilty complicity into poetry? Much of the power of Eliot's poem lies in a refusal to resolve such questions. An intrinsic truculence in Baudelaire's poem contributes to the unresolved conflicts at the heart of *The Waste Land*.

In this way, seemingly minor distortions to rhythm or punctuation in the original serve as points of friction or resistance between Eliot's poem and his source material that speak to the broader concerns of both. Certainly, Eliot's poem has shaped the way that I have read and re-read Baudelaire over the years. I will never know how differently I might have experienced his work, if I had encountered Baudelaire in a more thoroughly French context. Instead, my experience of both Baudelaire and Eliot continues to be shaped by such play of difference and likeness between linguistic and literary conventions.

¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot – Volume 1: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber, 2015), p. 57. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.

² T. S. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot – Volume 7: A European Society, 1947-1953*, ed. by Iman Javadi and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), p. 483.

³ T. S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot – Volume 4: English Lion, 1930-1933*, ed. by Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 157.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 6.

⁵ See Clive Scott, *The Riches of French Rhyme* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 312-13.

⁶ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 5.

Baudelairite et réversibilités

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Nous avions, du temps où j'étais enfant, un exemplaire des *Fleurs du mal* dans la bibliothèque familiale. C'était un gros volume au papier épais. Sur la couverture, la longue chevelure sombre et la robe noire d'une silhouette de femme tranchaient sur un fond flamboyant. Ce pastel, je le revis plus tard au Petit-Palais, c'était *Sur champ d'or* de Charles-Lucien Léandre.

Je ne sais plus par quel hasard je me trouvai, à quatorze ans, à compulsier avidement ce recueil par une nuit d'été, une de ces nuits d'été qui ne se goûtent qu'au nord de l'Afrique et au bord de l'océan, après une interminable journée de chaleur éreintante, dans le parfum mêlé d'iode des lauriers-roses et des orangers. Je crois que ma baudelairite a commencé cette nuit-là, où toutes mes sensations confuses s'étaient engouffrées dans les vers de Baudelaire, s'en étaient vêtues, s'étaient haussées sur la pointe des pieds pour se grandir à leur démesure. Je me mis, furieusement, à écrire des vers, bancals pour la plupart mais qu'importe, je parlais baudelairien — du moins le croyais-je.

Mon adolescence baudelairisée fut une lutte contre le temps. D'autres figures tutélaires, Keats, Poe, Wilde, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, m'avaient instillé la perception aiguë que tout instant porte en lui-même sa mort. « Meurs, vieux lâche, il est trop tard ! » est une étrange litanie pour une gamine de quatorze ans, mais Baudelaire m'apprit à m'ennuyer. À son écoule, je m'éduquai les sens. Je berçais mon infini sur le fini de l'océan atlantique que je voyais de ma fenêtre ; j'avais une obsession pour les lourds parfums mêlés de santal ; j'écoutais Wagner ; j'adoptai un chat.

La pensée de Baudelaire s'étendait entre le monde et mon regard comme un voile, déformant certes la réalité et cependant faisant voir, au gré d'imprévisibles souffles, d'inattendues et profondes vérités. Baudelaire m'apprit à sentir et à penser. J'appris dans « Révolte » un

catéchisme à rebours, qui comme chez les prophètes de l'Ancien Testament semble obliger Dieu, à force d'imprécations, à se manifester. Quelques années plus tard, lisant un passage des *Pensées* pour préparer le bac, je retrouvais ce gouffre que Baudelaire emprunte à Pascal et y découvris une insatisfaction plus profonde que ce qu'exprimait le rock torturé que j'écoutais à l'époque. L'année suivante, je retrouvais chez Platon ce rêve d'un arrière-monde qu'on regrette, qu'on n'a jamais vu et dont le souvenir nous guide et nous tourmente, et chez Nietzsche l'urgence de sentir et l'impatience d'être.

Je m'offris une autre édition des *Fleurs du mal*, mon édition à moi, celle-là. C'est, de tous mes livres, celui qui a le plus voyagé. J'enrage à voir sur les autres la marque de l'usage ; j'aime de celui-ci la couverture fatiguée, les coins élimés par les sacs de cours, les sacs à main et les sacs de voyage. Chaque pli y est comme une ride sur un visage aimé, la preuve que le temps passe, oui ; qu'il étend sur nous sa dictature, certes ; mais que nous avons vécu, grandi, souffert, vieilli ensemble.

Quand, à dix-sept ans, je partis pour Paris, c'est cette édition que j'emportai. *L'Orphée* de Moreau en couverture condensait toutes mes obsessions de l'époque. J'avais, naturellement, glissé de Baudelaire à la fin de siècle. Par Baudelaire, je fus introduite dans le cercle de Huysmans, de Jean Lorrain, de Marcel Schwob, de Georges Rodenbach ; mais aussi de Gustave Moreau, de Fernand Khnopff, de Carlos Schwabe. Mes amis de papier et de toile étaient baudelairiens ; mes amis de chair aussi.

C'étaient des sonnets qu'on se récitait ; on se gaussait des méchancetés que Baudelaire écrivait sur Hugo ou sur la Belgique, on écoutait des adaptations de Baudelaire en musique par Fauré, par d'Indy, par Marc Seberg, par Mylène Farmer. Ce que j'aimais le mieux, c'était rentrer le long des quais en me murmurant à moi-même — mais était-ce à moi-même ? le long soupir qu'est « Recueillement ».

J'essayais souvent d'écrire, à cette époque. C'était du Baudelaire en prose, le talent en moins, saupoudré de néologismes fin-de-siècle. À défaut de rendre hommage à Baudelaire par ma plume, je le fis par mon clavier d'étudiante, en décortiquant l'héritage baudelairien dans *Princesses d'ivoire et d'ivresse* de Jean Lorrain pour mon mémoire de maîtrise.

C'est Lorrain qui énonça à cette époque un diagnostic définitif : « la baudelairite », ce délicieux mot de sa façon, ne désigne que trop bien une manière de s'éduquer à sentir trop fort l'à-peine visible, à faire de chaque moment vécu un musée de sensations rares, un mausolée vide à la gloire de ce qui n'a pas été.

J'ignorais que ce mal avait en lui-même son propre remède. Non pas le rire diabolique et grinçant qui massacre le moindre élan d'adoration, mais une forme de pitié douloureuse, attendrie non sur soi mais sur autrui. J'en ai connu, des fous et des folles à l'esprit massacré par la vie, errant dans le Paris mal famé des abords des gares. Des Mademoiselle Bistouri, il y en a à foison, dans les rues et dans les livres. La Thérèse Desqueyroux de Mauriac a Baudelaire pour saint patron.

La prière qui clôt « Mademoiselle Bistouri », je l'ai prise au sérieux, très au sérieux. Elle me semble de la même encre, habitée par le même timbre, que ces papiers intimes où Baudelaire prend sans cesse la résolution de prier. Quand Baudelaire prie, il ne prie pas seul. Il y a auprès de lui son père, et Mariette, et Poe, et tous ceux qui souffrent.

« Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grandes douleurs. »

Je fus guérie, je crois, de ma baudelairite sous sa forme pernicieuse quand j'eus confiance dans l'idéal, quand je vis qu'il ne tenait qu'à moi d'y croire par-delà le spleen. Aux sirènes torturées et

torturantes, aux femmes fatales et damnées, je préférerais l'ange de « Réversibilité ». Quand il m'a été donné d'enseigner Baudelaire à mon tour, c'est cette imperceptible nuance d'aurore et de pastel que j'ai voulu montrer à mes élèves puis à mes étudiants à travers les coruscations rouges et noires du spleen.

Baudelaire m'apprit l'individualisme frénétique qui vit et meurt devant un miroir ; il m'apprit aussi qu'il faut être un héros et un saint pour soi-même. Baudelaire m'apprit la révolte ; il m'apprit aussi la douceur triomphante, plus forte que la passion et que la mort, la tendresse qui sourit aux malades et s'agenouille auprès des tombes.

J'imagine Baudelaire foudroyé sur les dalles de l'église Saint-Loup. Qu'a-t-il vu ? J'ignore si la prédiction de Barbey s'est accomplie. Je fais régulièrement ma prière à Baudelaire.

Baudelaire m'a appris le mot « ostensor » . Il m'a appris à me tenir au calme et en silence dans l'obscurité ; que l'attente désespérée peut être une prière ; que l'atroce passage du temps nous laisse saluer de loin les regrets qui dérivent au long des souvenirs ; que si nous sommes affamés d'idéal, c'est que nous cultivons sans cesse, quelque douleur qu'il en coûte et mal gré qu'on en aie, l'idée que nous valons mieux que ce qui en nous ne cesse de mourir.

Baudelaire now: the sounds of childhood

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A major issue, beyond all forms of pointless subjective concerns, is that of the changes in one's representation, not of an artwork but of an artist. The fact is that one's appreciation of a creator is never constant – the reason an actor finds Shakespeare a genius is bound to vary according to one's age, background, ideals, or how one's life has previously been shaken. So, as a researcher in the interaction of philosophy and translation, I aim first to retrace the stages of my appreciation of the poet that has accompanied my life for many years.

Lately as I learnt of the suicide of a younger colleague and friend, the only thing I could express was through quoting Baudelaire, 'la mort, le seul vrai but de la détestable vie!' ('Le Tir et le cimetière'). This would never have occurred to my mind in my early or mature years.

I discovered Baudelaire when I was a child, and through the sense of hearing. In those days, there were no television sets in homes and my father, who had been a professional actor, would act in radio programmes, plays or texts. So he would help me learn to recite poems for school. What I liked in Baudelaire's poetry was his art of words especially his use of the specifically French *mélodie* (melopoeia, different from the melody of Italian speech, so close to singing) sometimes verging on melancholy, maybe because of its regular patterns, the glide with the 'mute *è*', the barely pronounced nasal sounds, the predominantly soft consonants, the returning last-syllable stress ... I was obviously unaware of all this, and learnt later that I had detected a touch of art for art's sake in Baudelaire,

Celui [...]
– Qui plane sur la vie, et comprend sans effort
Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes!
(*'Élévation'*)

Forgetting about my own case, I wonder if European education is so right in directing children to ideas and meanings, whereas, at their age, the beauty of sounds is what really appeals to them. ‘Harmonie du Soir’ needs no additional explanation; ‘les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir, [...] | Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige’ is something every child has experienced in summer evenings. Likewise, I doubt a primary school child will not understand, or be sensitive to

Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble
Aimer à loisir
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
(‘L’Invitation au voyage’)

Later I found another Baudelaire; still puzzled by the oxymoron collection of ‘poèmes en prose’, but leaving it for later days, I revelled in almost metaphysical poetry:

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

I knew a lot by heart – training at the Conservatoire may have helped in that sense. Of course, I read Sartre on Baudelaire and, though severe in my estimation, the philosopher showed me another facet of the genius. Unlike many of my fellow-students, I stuck to the idea of Baudelaire as a lord of poetry but never ranked him among literature’s great names: too non-conformist for that!

Another period of my life began with my discovery and long travels with the English philosopher G. E. Moore. I extended my quest to the Bloomsbury Circle, and went on living with Baudelaire as a companion, but not as an object of study. I sometimes reflected upon the distance between Moore’s and the poet’s concepts of Beauty, wondering if they were that far from each other:

Je trône dans l’azur comme un sphinx incompris;
J’unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,

Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.
(‘La Beauté’)

It was also the period when my thought fructified on the most uncommon, unexpected address to the reader,

Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
– Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!
(‘Au Lecteur’)

that sounded like thunder in the sky of morals! How could readers, how could *I*, be charged with hypocrisy? What word then would be appropriate for the Prosecutor General Ernest Pinard? As early as 1857, Baudelaire had opened the road to Wilde, but also to Bergson’s *morale close* and *morale ouverte*, and to Moore’s ethical emancipation from morals, too.

Very recently, my relationship to Baudelaire changed totally due to a superb documentary film I saw about his youth. Thus far I had never been interested in biographies, thinking they spoilt one’s love of a poet’s work. Yet, this time, it was quite the opposite, ‘J’ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques’ was no longer a riddle. We were brothers in exile; he had settled on *Île Maurice* and *Île Bourbon* (1841-42); I had spent my early childhood abroad. Both of us enjoyed the sunlit beauty of an exotic cradle, till our lives suddenly shattered, being suddenly uprooted from bliss towards Europe, where more often than not ‘le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle’ [Et] nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits’ (‘Spleen (IV)’). His ‘*vies antérieures*’ that had obsessed me for so long were suddenly mine,

C’est là que j’ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes
Au milieu de l’azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
(‘La Vie antérieure’)

Now all that’s left to me is the expectation of a black-feathered raven to approach my haunts and announce my final departure, as it did for Charles and Edgar Allan ...

So why is it so important to ‘document’ one’s experience of a dead poet, however important the encounter may be? The answer probably lies in ‘Phares’, which may be read as a

praise of painters, but also as a phenomenology of an aesthetic experience, in which an artist is the missing link between each man and some unsaid, mute, reality,

Ces malédictions, ces blasphèmes, ces plaintes,
[...] sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes
(‘Les Phares’)

Baudelaire is Baudelaire for Baudelaire, maybe! For each of us, he is the right mix of emotions and appropriateness, freedom and relevance, an ethos put into words.

A Prose Reverie for Charles Baudelaire

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As a child of popular culture, it seems fitting that my long-delayed appreciation of Charles Baudelaire began in front of a television screen. Every Halloween since childhood, I ritualistically set myself before the TV to re-watch the first ‘Treehouse of Horror’ episode of *The Simpsons*, which offers an affectionate parody of Edgar Allan Poe’s sombre poem ‘The Raven’ (1845). Electronic images of the cartoon raven, relentlessly repeating the eerie word ‘Nevermore’, ingrained themselves on my young mind, which was completely oblivious to the show’s overt satire. Astride the bust of Pallas, the raven’s cartoon utterances seemed both strange and beguiling, containing an unsettling symbolism I couldn’t understand. After continual nagging, my parents finally relented and bought me a collection of Poe’s works containing this mysterious narrative. That small, mass-produced edition of Poe’s stories and poems, bound in cheap red cloth, its pages tipped with artificial gold, still sits on my shelf, gathering dust until the darker months, when I routinely re-read my favourites: ‘Ligeia’ (1838), ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ (1839), ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ (1842), ‘The Oval Portrait’ (1842), and, of course, ‘The Raven’.

A childhood fascination with Poe encouraged a lifelong fascination with the Gothic, and, unknown to me in my youth, with the decadent. With adolescence came a searching for Poe’s literary kin, and, as Poe’s French translator, Baudelaire’s name quickly rose to the top of my list. Excitedly purchasing an English translation of *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) at age fifteen, I rushed home prepared to be astounded by Poe’s spiritual scion. But Baudelaire’s poetry was not the rapturous revelation I had intended for it to be. The verse seemed hollow and cynical – cruel, even – and I regrettably shrugged it off as pompous and moved on to Walter Pater’s impressionistic meditations on art, and to the incantatory odes of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Yet, Baudelaire’s writing began to subtly work on me throughout my late teens and early twenties. I grew to adore his arrogance

and glamour, and his hieratic assertions on art, beauty, literature and artifice corrupted my vision of the world.

Alongside Oscar Wilde, Baudelaire became my intellectual mentor. Rejecting utility in art, I began to assert the beauty of the world at the expense of the ethical – a troubling notion when shifted from theory to reality. But it is Baudelaire's veneration of the artificial that has had the longest, and the most profound, effect on my thinking. In Baudelaire, nature, red in tooth and claw, is symptomatic of humanity's barbarism, and must constantly be refined through the aesthete's cultivated gaze. Thus, Baudelaire's poetic landscape creates a paradise of beauty and artifice in which the natural is profane. Artifice, Baudelaire writes in 'La Peinture de la vie moderne' (1863), is a 'sublime distortion of nature'.¹ As such, the dandies and the aesthetes that populate Baudelaire's corpus, with their elegant narcissism and 'aristocratic superiority of the mind', are granted noble status. Dandyism, Baudelaire writes, is a 'cult of the ego' whose vocation is elegance and 'distinction', the dandy the 'last flicker of heroism' in a decadent age.² Putting practice into action, Baudelaire created an artificial personality and became it, importing an icy, elegant style into modern culture, art merging with life.

Re-reading Baudelaire on the bicentenary of his birth, I find myself enthralled, mystified and aghast by his vision of nineteenth-century Paris, a Dantean landscape run by vice and gold, and of his transformation of everyday existence into a panoramic spectacle of the world. In 'Les Chats', a feline's cold, agate stare transports us back onto the burning sands of Ancient Egypt, where we reverently bow, entranced, before the Great Sphinx. In 'L'Âme du vin', a bottle of red re-invigorates the dying embers of the working-man's soul. And, in 'Parfum exotique', ribbons of scent thrust us backwards into the undulating oceans of memory, where the past and present merge in sensual overload. Yet Baudelaire is not solely a documentarian of the ephemeral. In 'Un Voyage à Cythère', for instance, we find the tragedy of the human condition laid out bare before us: From a ship, the poet sees his double hanging in the gallows, buzzard-pecked and torn at by wild dogs. Having set foot on the black isle of Cythera, the home of the Goddess Venus, the double passes

from innocence to experience and is forced to yield to his inevitable death. Despite his hostility to the natural world, Baudelaire violently dramatizes humanity's passivity towards a voracious nature which he displays with all of its barbarities.

Aestheticizing the grotesque, and luxuriating in the sensual, Baudelaire radiates a modern ennui, a cultural melancholy and apathy. However, Baudelaire's poetry is no mere decadent dead-end. Just as he lavishly praises the artistic genius of Leonardo, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Goya, and Delacroix as torches of beauty and truth in the roiling seas of history, so, too, does Baudelaire act as a beacon whose fire, once ignited, illuminates others. It is through Baudelaire that I discovered the ornate, Orientalist luxuriance of Théophile Gautier; the decadent connoisseurship of Des Esseintes, the aesthete *par excellence* of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884); and the seductive, mechanical monstrosities of Raoule de Vénérande, the crossdressing libertine of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884). So, too, can Baudelaire's aesthetic lineage be traced through to my favourite modern authors: Jean Genet, Angela Carter, and Michel Houellebecq, all of whom revive and revise Baudelaire's imperious *femmes fatales*, his graceful androgynes, and his sophisticated aesthetes for the modern audience.

And thus it is that a child's Halloween tradition developed into and helped cultivate a vision in which art is exalted, and the artificial revered.

¹ Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), pp. 390-436 (p. 426).

² Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', pp. 420-21.

Chris Waters

Autumn term, 1962, a South London (Boys') Grammar School: the Cuban Missile Crisis had just come to an end, but Planet Earth had not, which meant that I would, after all, be taking my A-levels in English, German, and French. C'est la vie.

French O-level had been taught – or rather, enforced – by an elderly irascible Scot, who kept a cane in his drawer, and never gave the slightest hint that French words could be combined to make French poems, which could in their turn be delicious, haunting – or even seductive. Grammar, dictation, and repetition were all.

Whereas Mr. B – our A-level master, much younger but nevertheless somewhat meticulous, and a little desiccated and ascetic in manner (he would have made a credible monk), revelled in his sonorous readings of Verlaine and Baudelaire – 'de la musique avant toute chose'.

Which is perhaps why, nearly 60 years later, I still have lines and stanzas from both poets echoing down my neural pathways – including the first half of 'L'Invitation au Voyage'. So why that poem, why those lines? In an adjacent and equally shabby classroom on other days, we were tuning in to the language of Keats and Hopkins – musical, sensuous, tortured, yes – and delicious to hear, if not to speak ourselves: boys were becoming blokes, and blokes did not emote (well, not until rock & roll said it was ok). What was clear, and what was irresistible, was the different order of noise those French words, phrases, lines and rhymes were making – and the different mouth-shapes needed to form them:

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!

The vowels here were long and languorous and palatable – and *bien sûr*, more sexy. Keats and Hopkins could rhapsodize, but here with Baudelaire, it felt as though we were being allowed, encouraged, to trespass into an intimate and heady love-world. (Mr. B had told us something of

Jeanne Duval, and the relationship with Baudelaire, and she occupied a fairly lurid position in our adolescent imaginations.)

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

I can still hear, still visualize Mr. B hypnotizing himself and us with that refrain, letting his guard down, for an instant or two living Baudelaire's dream. These poems were after all *Flowers of Evil*, and none of us had caught a whiff of that before. Keats and Hopkins were chaste and unrequited, whereas bad Baudelaire came in reeking of the street. Concoct all that into a smouldering dream of escape into some faraway perfection – and what was not to like?

But in terms of impact, what hypnotized/seduced in the language, simultaneously confused and unsettled us, in the emotions being conveyed, and stirred. If Jeanne was his fiery mistress, how could she also be his 'enfant', his 'soeur'? Why did Charles aspire to die with her in the Shangri-la which she resembled? And how could a woman resemble a country? This wasn't as clear as Donne's 'My America, my new-found-land' – this was somewhere 'oriental', nebulous, exotic – perhaps even imaginary! – so where on earth were we? And if he loved her, and she loved him – *o naïveté* – why does he say she has 'traitres yeux'? It all seemed so complex and contradictory. So what was the destination on the invitation? And then Mr. B had quoted (with some relish) Baudelaire's line 'La femme est naturelle – c'est à dire abominable'. This was shocking – both the relish and the misogyny! We were not equipped to agree or disagree – so did it then apply to our mothers, our sisters, the girls we wanted to meet and date?

I might have answers for some of these questions now, but beyond them all, what remain are the cadences and sonorities of a haunted and haunting voice. In comparing several English translations/versions of the poem for this piece, I am struck certainly by their inventiveness, but also by their pallor compared with the life-blood of the original – an obvious point, but it means that I am glad that we were not taught these poems through other people's translations, but had to de-code them sufficiently to find our way into them, and then still be able to savour the musical

energy and resonance of the original. All of course, with assistance from Mr. B. who, in the Easter term, issued his own Invitation to a Voyage, by organizing a sixth-form outing – a day trip from Folkestone to Boulogne – for most if not all of us, our first Channel crossing, first *dégustation*, first of many journeys in a long liaison, which will stretch well beyond Covid and Brexit.