

Baudelaire's Universe: From the Concrete to the Conceptual

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Baudelaire's Universe: From the Concrete to the Conceptual

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“Do the dregs of society supply the heroes of the big city? Or is the hero the poet who fashions his work from such material?”¹

¹ Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (New York: Verso, 1989) 80.

Table of Contents

Invitation au Voyage	3
1. La Vie Antérieure	7
2. Paris Change !	23
3. Le Plaisir qui Tue	39
4. La Domaine de l'Impalpable	52
5. Un Silence d'Éternité	64
6. La Vie, l'Insupportable, l'Implacable Vie !	78
Works Consulted	85

Invitation au Voyage

“Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau, / Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou
Ciel, qu’importe?/ Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau!*”²

² Charles Baudelaire, “Le Voyage,” Les Fleurs du mal. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001)
246.

In seeking to understand the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, the reader is faced with a considerable task. As with all great poetry, the finished product that is presented to the public is a carefully constructed and masterfully engineered work ripped from the poet's own life and soul. One cannot separate the poetry from the poet; each plays a vital role in the formation of the other's character. In conjunction with this idea of solidarity between master and creation, one cannot consider either without first understanding the circumstances under which each came into being. Poetry reveals, to a degree, the inner workings of the poet's mind, but it conveys as well his external relationship to the world he inhabited.

Baudelaire was both a product of his times and a considerable influence on the world that surrounded him. His life spent in Paris can be characterized as a time of turbulence, great change and inner turmoil for both city and poet. Paris became for Baudelaire both paradise on earth and living inferno. The beauty and elegance of the city is captured in his poetry, but these characteristics cannot be taken alone. Juxtaposed with images of the infinite beauty and timeless qualities of the city are images of a force of rapid change leaving in its wake a new, strange place with a tragic quality that was at many times incomprehensible to the poet.

A reading of Baudelaire's works is no light task and requires both persistence and determination. As one does with any work of poetry, we seek here to delve into the life and imagination of another. How can we hope to comprehend and analyze the soul of a stranger? It is of the utmost importance to maintain a degree of modesty in our studies of all poets, knowing that even our most profound efforts can provide us with only a glimmer of the poet's true nature. This holds especially true for Charles Baudelaire whose works are among the most seminal, pivotal and alarming in their construction and

content; the implications that can be drawn about the poet himself often prove vague and illusive.

Baudelaire's poetry is quite often characterized as perverse in nature and inflammatory in content, but one cannot deny the beauty of his verse or the resonating impact his works had on the future of poetry. Baudelaire dared to capture in his poetry imagery that was both primal and scandalous—the human nature that we all possess but of which we dare not speak. It is in this characteristic of his poetry that I have found my own love for Baudelaire. He dared to confront social mores with little concern for the repercussions of his sensationalist writings. It is this aspect of his writing that has prompted a desire in me to explore his work in more than just a cursory manner. The works of Charles Baudelaire have long been considered pivotal in the growth and evolution of poetry for just these reasons. As Rosemary Lloyd comments in her work Baudelaire's World, Baudelaire is, “[...] one of modernism's founding voices. Remarkable for the variety and intensity of his vision, the breadth of his linguistic register, and the relationship he establishes between his themes and his poetic forms [...]”.³

Exploring another's world is a task that can be tackled from many angles. Herein, I have chosen to explore the baudelairien universe through an analysis of historical context followed by a more in-depth look into Baudelaire's physical and psychical relationship to his environment. Taking a solely concrete perspective on the man and his works does not suffice in the case of Charles Baudelaire, for while his body resided in Paris, his mind frequented a world of drugs, dreams and imagination. It was the escapist world of a poet whose soul could not withstand the weight of an existence founded solely in reality.

³ Rosemary Lloyd, Baudelaire's World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) 1.

Baudelaire invites his reader on a voyage through space and realms of consciousness. Baudelaire sought above all to discover and experience *le nouveau* and *l'inconnu*; his desire to achieve a realm *au-delà* of this world pervades every aspect of his poetry. Be it his thoughts of exoticism, eroticism, death or revolt, Baudelaire was a poet of Paris as Paris was a city of the poet, each belonging to each, and each having an irrevocable impact on the future of the other. Thus, if one hopes to achieve some kind of understanding of Baudelaire's poetry, one cannot bypass a study of the city from which he drew much of the inspiration for his work. Herein, I hope to provide an historical discussion of Baudelaire's Paris that is to serve as the basis for further discussion. I include as well an analysis of selected works as seen in light of Baudelaire's often tumultuous relationship to the city. We shall deal firstly with the concrete aspects of Baudelaire's relationship to the city. We will then venture into an exploration of his relationship to dreams, drugs and imagination through which he succeeded in creating an alternate Paris, a visceral Paris more inclined to the poet's soul.

Therefore, as Baudelaire has invited all readers on a voyage into his universe, I too put forth an invitation to explore the writings of a troubled mind that found it difficult to survive in the harsh, real world. By coupling historical fact with analyses of poems pertinent to my discussion, I hope to cast some light on Baudelaire's dualistic life—a life situated in nineteenth century Paris but truly *lived* in a realm of his own creation. The numerous aspects of Baudelaire's life that shall be discussed will prove to have directly led to the poet's pressing *need* for escape. Baudelaire was incapable of maintaining an existence based solely in the real world; his poetry reveals to the reader that the construction of what can be termed *l'univers baudelairien* was an action not just of want but, just as importantly, of primal necessity.

Chapter 1

La Vie Antérieure

“La vie parisienne est féconde en sujets poétiques et merveilleux. Le merveilleux nous enveloppe et nous abreuve comme l’atmosphère, mais nous ne le voyons pas.”⁴

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, “De l’Héroïsme de la Vie Moderne,” Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 170.

Before delving into the specifics of Baudelaire's personal relationship to the city of Paris, it is important to have a broad foundation regarding the historical climate in which he was born and raised. An understanding of the political and social goings on of the day provides an important context for the poet's life and poetry. Without an understanding of the backdrop against which the poet lived his life, it is impossible to understand the need he felt to flee his reality.

Of primary significance to the discussion at hand are the formative years of Baudelaire's childhood and adolescence. It was during the early years of his life that the foundation was laid for the development of the poet that Charles was to become. Charles was born under the flag of the Bourbon restoration on April 9, 1821 in Paris, France. Born to François Baudelaire and Caroline Dufaÿs, the first five years of Charles's life are characterized as generally happy:

Années heureuses, vert paradis des promenades enfantines, Charles conduit par la main paternelle au proche jardin Luxembourg, le jardin de ce qui fut le Sénat, invité à regarder les statues, ornées, sous la Restauration, de cache-sexe par le secrétaire des Beaux-Arts de l'époque, Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld ; peut-être introduit dans le « Musée des artistes vivants » (plus tard, Musée du Luxembourg), ouvert en 1818, où Horace Vernet, Ingres et Thomas Couture vont voisiner près de Delacroix, non loin de Paul Huet, de Corot, de Français, de Daubigny. Et ce sont les promenades de Mme Baudelaire, les boulevards, les boutiques, les bazars, les confiseurs. Et les invitations comme celles que rappellera bien plus tard *Morale du joujou*, la visite à Mme Panckoucke à l'hôtel de Thou...Les Panckoucke sont une dynastie d'érudits, de traducteurs, d'imprimeurs, d'éditeurs. François Baudelaire avait lui-même une bonne bibliothèque ; l'inventaire après décès mentionne l'*Encyclopédie*, Rabelais, Crébillon [...], Voltaire, un album de Piranèse. « Mon berceau s'adosait à la bibliothèque... » et se trouvait près de sculptures et sous des cimaises chargées de toiles et de gouaches. Il est probable que cette imprégnation a beaucoup compté dans l'orientation que prendra la vie de Charles Baudelaire.⁵

⁵ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire/ Paris* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1994) 39.

As one can ascertain from the above passage, Charles's early childhood was significant to his later development in at least one positive respect, introducing him to the worlds of art and literature and serving to lay the foundations for his future adult character.

At the age of five, an event occurred that would alter the trajectory of Charles' life. On February 10, 1827, Charles lost his father. The loss of his biological father would prove to be extremely detrimental to Charles in his future development, aggravating in adolescence his already reclusive nature and creating a rift within his family that would only deepen with time. Charles himself, in later years, recognized his innately solitary nature, "Sentiment de *solitude*, dès mon enfance. Malgré la famille, --et au milieu des camarades, surtout, --sentiment de destinée éternellement solitaire."⁶ Charles felt himself to be fated to lead an extremely lonely existence. He recognized the reclusive characteristics in his own nature. Even in the midst of loved ones, people with whom he should have felt completely at ease, Charles was the outcast. The sentiments of his childhood are indicative of later emotions that would pervade his poetry.

The absence of his father did in fact serve to reinforce the bond between Charles and his mother with whom he would never lose touch despite her actions that the very young Charles could only have perceived as a betrayal of her love for him. Only a year after her husband's death, Caroline was remarried to Major Jacques Aupick, "premier aide de camp du maréchal prince Louis de Hohenlohe."⁷ This second marriage proved difficult to accept for the young Charles. He gradually assumed a position of absolute opposition to his stepfather, seeing in this man an invader and a terrible rival for his mother's affection.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu* (Geneva: Droz, 2001) 12.

⁷ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire/ Paris* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, éditions paris-musées, 1994) 39.

The period in Charles's life during which he was forced to assimilate himself to a new paternal figure was the beginning of his gradual distancing from both stepfather and family in general. The rupture with his stepfather was not an abrupt incident, however, but occurred over the course of his childhood and adolescence:

If Baudelaire grew to hate the General his stepfather, it was without a doubt because Aupick tried to stand in the way of his vocation and especially because he robbed him of some of his mother's love. Even if François had been the same age as Caroline, nothing proves that their son would have loved him either. Only one person really counted in the life of Charles Baudelaire--his mother.⁸

It is therefore evident that with age came a growing resentment for Aupick, an outsider that Charles could never forgive for the theft of his mother's unique attention. The rift created between Charles and Aupick tightened the bond that Charles felt with his mother; it seems as though having an opponent to battle forced Charles to redouble his own affection for his mother as a means of compensation. Charles's gradual distancing from his stepfather reflects as well the growing self-imposed psychological isolation that would both plague Charles and become characteristic of his poetry; this subject, however, shall be broached later on.

The 1820s in France were years under which the nation witnessed a sharp return to the old ways of the monarchy. The final defeat and exile of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1814 had ushered in a new age for the Bourbon monarchy. Louis XVIII was returned to the throne not by a popular movement but by the contriving of a group of faithful royalists.⁹ Louis sought to impose his own sovereignty over the people while avoiding the provocation of a revolt. He therefore issued the *Charte*, a document making France a limited monarchy, while still reflecting the changes that had occurred in France in the wake of the Revolution:

⁸ Claude Pichois, Baudelaire (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 26.

⁹ Royalists--those who were loyal to the monarchy regardless of the regime currently in power.

The *Charte* made France a limited monarchy, with the king sharing power with a bicameral legislature consisting of a hereditary Chamber of Peers and an elected Chamber of Deputies. Voting eligibility was restricted to the wealthy, a group of perhaps 100,000, but this group included many members of the bourgeoisie who had enriched themselves during the Revolution. The special privileges of the hereditary nobility were not restored, and the highly centralized Napoleonic administrative system remained in place.¹⁰

Louis XVIII's government retained the basic tenets of liberalism that had been implemented in the years following the 1789 revolution, such as legal equality of all citizens and relative freedom of the press. Louis, however, did not continue his policies of relative tolerance for long; he died in 1824 and was quickly succeeded by his brother, crowned Charles X.¹¹

Charles X was not the cautious, compromising ruler that his brother had been. His years in exile had provoked in him a strong disgust for liberalism and moderation. His ascension to the throne, marked by the reinstatement of the archaic, ostentatious coronation ceremonies held at the Reims cathedral, was indicative of the reactionary course his regime was to take.¹² While his brother had avoided reactionary appearances, Charles was brazen in the flaunting of his intransigence:

For the most part, [...] the *Ultras*'¹³ pet measures provoked increasing opposition to the regime. A law authorizing the death penalty for desecration of Catholic churches outraged liberals, who also objected to the church's growing influence on the schools. A strict censorship law proposed in 1827 seemed designed to silence opposition to the *Ultras*. Opposed both by the liberal and by dissident royalists grouped around the famous author Chateaubriand, whom Villèle¹⁴ had dismissed from the ministry in 1824, the government lost badly in the 1827 parliamentary elections. Villèle was forced to resign.¹⁵

¹⁰ Jeremy Popkin, *A History of Modern France* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2001) 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 82.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ultras*--vehement royalists.

¹⁴ Villèle, Joseph--provincial, conservative nobleman-replaced Richelieu as minister in 1821.

¹⁵ Popkin 82.

Following the forced resignation of Joseph Villèle, Charles X refused to appoint a prime minister who truly represented the will of the Chamber, appointing instead a conciliatory moderate to the post, the vicomte de Martignac¹⁶. Martignac lacked any real support from both Chamber and monarch and was thus never truly a commanding presence in the ministry; brewing political dissension proved to be an opening for the undermining and eventual upheaval of the monarchy in 1830.

It was under the reactionary monarchy of Charles X that Charles Baudelaire began his childhood. During this period of increased repression, the new intellectual tendency was toward the emerging Romantic Movement. In opposition to rationalist and religious trends, the Romantics glorified nature and emotion:

Although they now joined older liberal spokesmen like Benjamin Constant and Lafayette in opposition to the regime, these younger men did not adopt the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment. The most eloquent, like Hugo and the poet Alphonse de Lamartine, identified themselves with romanticism. This artistic movement had flourished in England and Germany since the turn of the century. In France, Chateaubriand had exemplified its new appreciation of the beauties of nature, its sympathy for the organic, religious society of the Middle Ages, and its glorification of individual emotional experience. [...] By the early 1820's, the romantic spirit had nevertheless made significant inroads into French culture.¹⁷

The romantic trend that began to flourish amongst liberal intellectuals like Victor Hugo in the 1820s established the literary precedent that Charles Baudelaire would seize upon in his poetry. While the regime's direct influence on Charles is uncertain, it was nonetheless instrumental in the development of the government that was to succeed it, the government under which Charles was to develop into an adult.

¹⁶ Martignac, Vicomte de--replaced Villèle as head of a moderate, ineffectual ministry.

¹⁷ Popkin 85.

Aupick, Baudelaire's stepfather, was called to military service in March 1830 and traveled to Algeria as part of an expeditionary force, earning for his service the distinguished rank of lieutenant-colonel.¹⁸ He did not return home to France for fifteen months; in the interim period, Charles was enrolled in a new school, the Collège Royal de Charlemagne.¹⁹ He spent time as well during this period as a boarder in the house of a Monsieur Bourdon, a man known for his excellent training of students to pass the entrance exams required for acceptance to the government schools. This tutoring serves as an indication that Aupick hoped his son would study and pass the necessary exams for a career in a government or civil service position of some kind—a career Baudelaire would inevitably shun for his preferred *vie libre* in Paris.²⁰ Charles left the instruction of M. Bourdon after only one term to accompany his stepfather and mother to Lyons where Aupick began work under the Minister of War. Charles soon grew bored with Lyons, missing the inexplicable allure of Paris. Upon arriving in Lyons at the age of ten, Charles was described by family and instructors as a typical young boy, displaying no signs of the erratic nature that was to manifest itself during his adult years.²¹

While Aupick was abroad and Charles was attending school, France witnessed yet another year marked by revolution. The revolution of 1830 occurred as a result of the restored Bourbon monarchy's failure to unify the French people:

[...] the Restoration saw a proliferation of intellectual and cultural currents, many of them overtly hostile to the regime or at least to the policies adopted under Charles X. The lively debate might not have been posed a real threat to political stability if a government sensitive to the opinions of the electorate and open to compromise on practical issues had been in power. However, Charles X listened to advisors who steered him toward political and ideological confrontation.²²

¹⁸ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 24.

²¹ *Ibid.* 25.

²² Popkin 86.

Martignac was dismissed from office and replaced by an *Ultra*, Jules de Polignac. Polignac's ministry defied expectations of severe reactionary action by actually enacting very little significant legislation. The ministry engaged in only one notable enterprise, the occupation of the Algerian coast. The ministry hoped that a largely successful, widely publicized military endeavor would rally the French people behind its government; it failed to do so.²³

During the period in which the Bourbon regime sought to regain some semblance of popular support, the regime's political opponents were preparing themselves to mount an organized coup. Two hundred and twenty-one liberal deputies voiced their opinions against the Polignac ministry in the election of 1830. Charles X, however, reacted by dissolving the Chamber and calling for new elections. Despite Charles' manipulation of the system, the liberals continued to gain in strength. Charles X's ministers, ever intractable as their sovereign, came down harshly on the press, implementing severe restrictions in addition to manipulating voting laws to insure their own victory. Charles' ministers had intended a coup of their own, but did not have the support possessed by their liberal counterparts.²⁴

The posting of the "July Ordinances," ordinances implementing harsher press laws and altering voting laws in favor of the monarchy, on July 26, 1830, provoked immediate protest. The original intention was simple moral opposition to the new ordinances, but liberal opposition quickly escalated into a veritable revolution:

By the second day of the crisis, events began to escape the liberal leaders' control. Many Paris employers had closed their shops, leaving the workers to congregate in the streets, where agitators stirred them to defend the cause of liberty. By the evening of July 27, a popular insurrection was under way, as barricades were

²³ Popkin 86.

²⁴ Ibid.

thrown up in many neighborhoods. The troops ordered to put down the unrest were, in many cases, more in sympathy with the rebels than with the government. After three days of street fighting, the “Three Glorious Days,” Charles X abandoned the struggle.²⁵

The aptly named “July Monarchy,” installed following Charles X’s abdication, had as its figurehead the “citizen-king” Louis-Philippe, head of the Orléanist branch of the Bourbon family. He was ushered into power by the same liberal leaders that had led the initial opposition to the July Ordinances. Louis-Philippe was heralded as the monarch who would save the nation from forces of dissension. His first move to appeal to public sentiment was the underscoring of his marked separation from the ways of his Bourbon predecessors:

The Chamber of Deputies hastily revised the constitution, and on August 9, 1830, Louis-Philippe was officially installed as king. Whereas Louis XVIII and Charles X insisted that they had granted a constitution of their own free will, Louis-Philippe accepted the principle of national sovereignty. He also restored the tricolor as the national flag, replacing the white banner of the Bourbons that Louis XVIII had brought back in 1814. The Orléanist solution appeared to satisfy the demands that the leaders of the French Revolution had made in 1789. After more than forty years of political conflict, France would now be a constitutional monarchy, similar in many ways to its British neighbor.²⁶

The liberal façade set forth by the members of the July monarchy was soon to dissipate, however. The monarchy sought limited political representation in the face of popular unrest to ensure that the masses could be contained by restricting political power to the upper classes. To curtail criticism, the regime adopted increasingly repressive measures in regard to the press, caricaturists and public gatherings. The government faced significant threats over the years from opposition forces including an uprising in Paris 1832 and a Lyonnais insurrection in 1834 but succeeded in maintaining relative control

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 88.

over the people. The government did not succeed, however, in establishing a steady, constant Parliament, witnessing 15 changes in ministry in the 1830s alone.²⁷

Baudelaire was not to return to the city he loved until 1836 when Colonel Aupick was appointed to the position of Chief of Staff for the First Division in Paris. Charles was eager to leave behind Lyons, a city whose recollection later in his life would evoke nothing but negative memories of his years spent there. He began to attend a new school, Louis-le-Grand, in March of 1836. Charles' first year at school served to set him apart as an exceptional student; he excelled most notably in Latin and Greek.²⁸ His behavior gradually began to deteriorate however, and his teachers began to comment on his erratic disposition and the general apathy he held in regard to his studies. His letters to his mother during this time confirm this malaise:

His letters bear not the slightest hint of dissimulation; spontaneity was the dominant feature of his character [...] The only aspect of this refreshingly open young man which might cause mild concern is his procrastination (nothing unusual in that) and, more especially, his feeling of distaste or disgust. The word *dégoût* often appears in his letters. Sometimes he gives no reason for this feeling, suggesting thus that it was a general *ennui*, a part of his very being.²⁹

The importance of the general ennui that Charles began to express during his years at Louis-le-Grand is fundamental to this discussion, for it provided the impetus later in his life for his search for the new and the unknown, as he himself concedes in later writings, “Tout enfant, j’ai senti dans mon cœur deux sentiments contradictoires: l’horreur de la vie et l’extase de la vie. C’est le fait d’un paresseux nerveux.”³⁰

²⁷ Ibid. 93-4.

²⁸ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 39.

²⁹ Ibid. 45-6.

³⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “Mon coeur Mis à Nu,” *Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies*. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 260.

Baudelaire's *rentrée* in 1839 would be his last at Louis-le-Grand. He managed to do quite well in his first semester of studies, working hard to apply himself to his studies, but his academics went increasingly downhill as the year wore on. Baudelaire, preferring to write poetry during mathematics class than to pay attention, found himself expelled on April 18, 1839, due to an incident involving a secret note being passed in class. Charles refused to divulge the secret of the note and treated the headmaster with brazen impertinence, going so far as to laugh in his face:

The headmaster's letter is clear enough. The episode of the secret message was the straw that broke the camel's back. Baudelaire had been tormenting his teachers for some time and this flouting of the rules was the first manifestation of what he was to call '*la conscience dans le mal*'--awareness in evil--and the first apparition of what Edgar Allan Poe described as 'the Imp of Perversity.'³¹

Charles' expulsion left him in a state of nothingness, "a sullen, stupid indolence"³² as he himself called it. His ennui seemed irremediable without some kind of external stimulation. Seeking to appease his parents and hoping for some kind of direction in life, Charles passed his baccalauréat in the summer of 1839.³³ His schooling had ended and despite all attempts to avoid it, a decision regarding a future career had to be made:

The fear of leaving school and embarking on adult life had reared its head early in 1838: it was not a pleasant thought that a career had to be chosen, that freedom was enjoyed only to be lost, that the certainties of clear obligations to family and school would vanish [...] His various reports suggest that he must often have tried the patience of his masters and friends with his 'strange' behavior. No doubt that was a way of expressing his sense of superiority and disdain for an order which he needed but considered artificial. Baudelaire sensed that once the constraints of school and legal infancy were removed, he would never be able to fit in with adult life.³⁴

³¹ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 50.

³² *Ibid.* 52.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* 54.

Charles felt the external, social pressure to assume the role of a “typical” adult in society, but it was not in his nature to do so.

Charles was hard-pressed to find a career for himself and determined to do so if only to meet to his parents’ expectations. His passionate nature, however, was truly inclined toward poetry, not toward any life his stepfather could have possibly envisioned for him. Charles enrolled in the School of Law as a temporary solution to the question of what was to become of his life, law being seen as a career choice for those without a chosen path.³⁵ A degree in law, Charles’ family argued, could provide a man with many career options and opportunities; the validity of this argument soon proved inconsequential, however, for the time Charles spent in Paris and abroad over the next few years would confirm the direction his life was to take.

The three years Charles spent in Paris, from 1839 to 1841, would prove to be the most decisive in the formation of the man whose character and soul came to be known through his poetry.³⁶ Charles was living a *vie libre* in Paris; the wantonness of his life marked in 1839 by the contraction of gonorrhea from a girl known as Sara, or simply as Louchette.³⁷ It was during these years that Baudelaire came to know himself as a man and a poet. He came into contact with the great literary names of his day, including Gérard de Nerval, Balzac, Le Vavas seur, Delatouche, Sainte-Beuve, Gautier and Esquiros. From these experiences, Baudelaire determined for himself the path that he would pursue.³⁸

Baudelaire’s years in Paris established as well the trajectory of his financial life. With a penchant for women and the life of the dandy, Baudelaire repeatedly appealed to his brother Alphonse for funds with which to pay off his debts. He insisted all the while

³⁵ Ibid. 59.

³⁶ Ibid. 71.

³⁷ Ibid. 60.

³⁸ Ibid. 62.

that he was capable of managing his affairs, if only he could be assisted this one time. It was then, in 1841, that Baudelaire's 3000 francs debt was paid, and his stepfather wrote this letter to Alphonse:

My Dear Monsieur Baudelaire,

The time has come when something must be done to prevent the complete and utter ruin of your brother. I am at last acquainted, or almost, with his situation, his ways and his habits...

In my opinion, [...] it is imperative that we save him from the slippery streets of Paris. There is talk of sending him on a long sea voyage to either of the Indies, in the hope that, with this change of scenery, removed from the bad company he keeps, and with all that he would have to study, he might hold fast again to the truth, and return to us a poet, perhaps, but one at least whose inspiration springs from better sources than the sewers of Paris.³⁹

Baudelaire had, by this time, abandoned his legal studies in the pursuit of literature and a life of carnal pleasures. This letter deepened the rift between Aupick and Baudelaire. The affair of the voyage to India was meant to be kept a secret, but Charles refused be kept in the dark. Charles was to be sent on a yearlong voyage to Calcutta as a means by which he could, his stepfather hoped, regain an admirable focus in life and not lose his soul to the dark, seductive streets of Paris.⁴⁰

Baudelaire never made it to his stepfather's anticipated destination of Calcutta. The ship was brutalized by storms at sea and was in dire need of repair upon reaching its first scheduled stop, Réunion. Baudelaire did not continue the voyage but chose instead to spend his time on the island, returning to France on February 15, 1842. :

The voyage to India was a poetic invention; but Baudelaire had been on a voyage nonetheless and a long one at that [...] The traveler may have resented the trip, but it left him with fragrant memories which, through poetry, he was able to reawaken and render without falling into facile exoticism.

³⁹ Ibid. 69.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 70.

Quand, les deux yeux fermés en un soir chaud d'automne,
 Je respire l'odeur de ton sein chaleureux,
 Je vois se dérouler des ravages heureux
 Qu'éblouissent les feux d'un soleil monotone.⁴¹

Baudelaire's time in Paris and on Réunion laid the foundations for his future as a poet. With a love of the city and all its deviant possibilities established, Charles had lost his heart to Paris. Réunion instilled in him a love of the exotic that would shine through in much of his poetry, but it was his experience of evil and sordid reality in Paris that truly inspired him:

His affair with Sara, his illness, the experience of evil, the will to incriminate himself and the desire to be a writer, the creation of a new artistic credo—all these were part of the same phenomenon. Baudelaire was not to be a mere writer, but a poet—one whose poetry would draw its very power from evil [...] As Sartre observed, the cliché 'He deserved a better life' could never be applied to Baudelaire. The poet deserved and was determined to deserve the life he had.⁴²

Baudelaire was determined to carve a legacy for himself out of words, words that drew their inspiration from the darkest corners of the human soul, corners that Baudelaire frequented while in Paris.

The July Monarchy drew to a close with the Revolution of 1848. The events surrounding the abdication of Louis-Philippe are of special interest for Baudelaire is known to have made quite a spectacle of himself during the days of the Revolution. The revolution itself arose from the French people's growing boredom and disenchantment with its government:

France was growing tired of its government. In spite of popular support for electoral reform, the King made it clear in his speech at the opening of Parliament on December 28, 1847, that there was to be no change. A protest banquet which was meant to take place in Paris on February 22 was banned. In the ensuing

⁴¹ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 81.

⁴² *Ibid.* 73.

demonstration, some cobblestones were torn up and a few shots were fired. Prime Minister Guizot called out the National Guard for the following day; but on the 23rd, the guardsmen turned against the government, crying ‘Long live Reform!’ Guizot resigned. That evening, on the Boulevard des Capucines, a clash with soldiers sparked off the revolution, which continued throughout the night. On the 24th, Louis-Philippe abdicated and a provisional government was formed.⁴³

Baudelaire seized upon the revolutionary fever as an opportune moment to voice some of his own personal opinions. He is remembered as having positioned himself behind a barricade, armed with a hunting rifle. Upon being asked if he had fired his rifle for the Republic, Baudelaire responded by repeatedly shouting, “We must go and shoot General Aupick!”⁴⁴ Baudelaire involved himself in the revolution for his own personal reasons. He did not support the Republic, or even the revolution. During the revolutionary days of 1848 Baudelaire expressed the “instinct for revolt” that was inherent in his nature, “Goût de la vengeance. plaisir naturel de la démolition.”⁴⁵ While he may have wanted to attack his stepfather, Baudelaire’s shouts were more indicative of his overwhelming hatred for the conservative order that Aupick represented and of which Charles would never be a part.

Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte was elected president of the new republic in 1848. The republican form of government was short-lived, however. Louis-Napoléon staged a coup in 1851 successfully installing himself at the head of what was to become the Second Empire. The seizure of power marks the end of Baudelaire’s concern with politics. His disgust at the thought of another Bonaparte emperor ruining the hopes of the revolution is palpable in his writings:

Ma fureur au coup d’Etat. Combien j’ai essayé de coups de fusil. Encore un Bonaparte! quelle honte! [...] Et cependant tout s’est pacifié. Le président n’a t il pas un droit à invoquer? Ce qu’est l’Empereur Napoléon III. Ce qu’il vaut.

⁴³ Claude Pichois, Baudelaire (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 155.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 160

⁴⁵ Charles Baudelaire, Mon coeur mis à nu (Geneva: Droz, 2001) 8.

Trouver l'explication de sa nature, et sa providentialité.⁴⁶

Those who try to characterize Baudelaire as a revolutionary run the risk of saddling him with a political agenda that simply did not exist. He was however, it has been shown, at the very least “openly hostile to the overwhelmingly bourgeois society of his time which stifled his aspirations and tried to destroy his work.”⁴⁷ His only true political trait was his resolute devotion to anarchic philosophy. Pichois offers his reader his conclusion regarding the influence of politics on Baudelaire:

If Baudelaire drew any conclusion from those years of turmoil, it surely is contained in these lines from ‘Le Reniement de Saint Pierre’, written at the end of 1851 and published by the *Revue de Paris* in October 1852:

--Certes, je sortirai, quant à moi, satisfait
D'un monde où l'action n'est pas la sœur du rêve...⁴⁸

With this idea of Baudelaire's desire to leave this world, a world in which action and dream have no relation, one can now begin an investigation of just what kind of world Baudelaire sought to create for himself—a fantasy world in which, perhaps, dream and action could share a more intimate relationship.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1989)178.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 2

Paris Change!

“De la haine du peuple contre la beauté.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Charles Baudelaire, Mon coeur mis à nu (Geneva: Droz, 2001) 43.

Baudelaire was a brilliant product of his times. He lived and breathed the experience of Paris as a city. In his lifetime he witnessed incredible social and political change. He lived through eras of repression and liberalism each contributing to the cultural movements of the times. Baudelaire drew his initial literary motivation and inclination from the men whose talents flourished during the formative eras of his life, but it was in the actual city of Paris that he found his true inspiration. Baudelaire's Paris is a juxtaposition of evil and beauty that is captured in the lines of his poetry. *His* Paris, however, was to succumb to forces of change that Baudelaire's fragile psyche would not be able to accept. Paris changed for him from a terrestrial paradise to a hell from which he sought to escape.

During the years that Charles was writing his most widely known work, *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris was experiencing an incredible period of change and renewal at the hands of one man, Baron von Haussmann⁵⁰. In 1851, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, known as Napoléon III, established what was to be known as the Second Empire. The Emperor's regime benefited greatly from a period of relative economic prosperity, but he utilized other tactics as well to secure his popularity. His position was improved through successful endeavors both at home and abroad. It is the domestic renewal that Louis-Napoléon instigated that is of the greatest concern here:

The rebuilding of Paris illustrated the extent and the limits of Napoléon III's promotion of economic modernization and development. Napoléon III, who fancied himself something of an architect, personally sketched plans for massive rebuilding projects and a network of widened boulevards. But the actual execution of his project was carried out by Georges Haussmann, a civil engineer and career administrator who had caught the emperor's eye by his help in promoting the plebiscite in favor of the Empire in October 1852. In June 1853, Haussmann took over as prefect of the Seine Department, and over the next decade and a half, he oversaw the transformation of the capital.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Haussmann, Georges—civil engineer, prefect of Paris

⁵¹ Popkin 119.

Haussmann's labors were conducted in a bottom up fashion. Flooding often plagued low-lying neighborhoods in Paris, and the city faced difficulties in regard to adequate clean-water supplies. Haussmann solved these problems by installing a subterranean system of sewers and water pipes. Clean water was literally piped into the city from as far as sixty miles away through the use of aqueducts.⁵²

Haussmann is credited with having literally transformed the face of Paris; he gave the city its now "characteristic" look. Haussmann laid down new, wider boulevards throughout the city. Through construction of these new thoroughfares Haussmann was able to improve urban traffic circulation. Construction of the new roads provided as well a pretext for the paving over of some of Paris's most deplorable slums. Haussmann is credited as well with finding solutions to many other contemporary urban dilemmas. The *Halles* building project, for example, supplied Paris with a centralized, and more sanitary, food market.⁵³

Haussmann's impact on the face of Paris may have proven aesthetically pleasing, but his work has often been criticized for its lack of social concern. Haussmann seems to have been concerned more with the outward appearances of his buildings than with the standard of life he was providing for future tenants:

He did not even make installation of indoor plumbing mandatory, and many tight-fisted landlords refused to pay for it. Nor did he do anything to mitigate the social effects of his massive rebuilding scheme. Poor Parisians forced to relocate found themselves unable to pay the increased rents in the new buildings and were forced into cheap housing on the outskirts of the city. Haussmann's operations thereby brought about an increase in social segregation.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Haussmann succeeded in modernizing the appearance of Paris, but no thought was given to the social impact his innovations would have. The building projects favored the wealthy and aggravated an already economically divided population.

Haussmann was not the first to attempt this type of sweeping structural change, but precedent did little to influence his visions for Parisian modernity. Haussmann had little need or concern for the past; he viewed history as irrelevant to the future and an unnecessary burden. He was a man of forward-looking vision:

[...] who saw himself as an “artist of demolition,” pragmatic, Protestant, modern, efficient, and unconcerned with ideology or history, whether past or present. [...] Haussmann planned to tear up the entire city, including the cemeteries: death (that is, the past) would have to make way for life. [...] “With Haussmann,” Pierre Véron wrote in 1867, “Paris has no time for the past.”⁵⁵

While Haussmann saw only the future upon his horizon, Baudelaire was trapped in the past. He could not free himself from his memories. He loved the city of his childhood and could not reconcile himself to the new, Haussmannian vision of the future. This sentiment reverberates throughout his poetry. Baudelaire’s *Le Cygne* reflects Baudelaire’s love of the past and his distaste for the changes he was witnessing all around him. The changes wrought upon Paris by Haussmann profoundly impacted Baudelaire and his writing:

Ce poète attaché à ses pavés [...] a bien senti qu’on lui volait son Paris, celui de sa jeunesse. Haussmann, c’est le conseil judiciaire de Paris: sécurité et rentabilité. Baudelaire proteste contre ces embellissements au nom des droites imprescriptibles d’une flânerie poétique. Ce Paris physiquement défiguré est moralement enlaidi: « Tu ne saurais croire jusqu’à quel point la race parisienne est dégradée—il s’adresse à sa mère, qui, recluse à Honfleur, a elle aussi la nostalgie de la capitale---. Ce n’est plus ce monde charmant et aimable que j’ai connu autrefois : les artistes ne savent rien, pas même l’orthographe. Tout ce

⁵⁵ Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) 180.

monde est devenu abject, inférieur peut-être aux gens du monde » (10 août 1862).⁵⁶

Baudelaire had established an extreme attachment to the Paris of his youth, and the changes to his city that he was forced to endure proved intolerable. Evidence of Baudelaire's growing disgust for the phenomenon of change is no more palpable than in his poem *Le Cygne*. An analysis of this poem demonstrates unmistakably that Baudelaire was almost entirely at odds with the new "Haussmannized" Paris of the late 1800s.

Le Cygne⁵⁷

À Victor Hugo.

I

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,
Ce Simois menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fécondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.
Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel);

Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,
Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts,
Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des flaques,
Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.

Là s'étalait jadis une ménagerie;
Là je vis, un matin, à l'heure où sous les cieux
Froids et clairs le Travail s'éveille, où la voirie
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l'air silencieux,

Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage,
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec

⁵⁶ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire/ Paris* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1994) 31-2.

⁵⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001) 161-4.

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,
 Et disait, le cœur plein de son beau lac natal:
 « Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? quand tonneras-tu foudre? »
 Je vois ce malheureux, mythe étrange et fatal,

Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide,
 Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu,
 Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide,
 Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu!

II

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
 N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
 Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
 Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m'opprime:
 Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous,
 Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime,
 Et rongé d'un désir sans trêve! Et puis à vous,

Andromaque, des bras d'un grand époux tombé,
 Vil bétail, sous la main du superbe Pyrrhus,
 Au près d'un tombeau vide en extase courbée;
 Veuve d'Hector, hélas! et femme d'Hélénus!

Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phtisique,
 Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l'œil hagard,
 Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique
 Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard;

À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve
 Jamais, jamais! à ceux qui s'abreuvent de pleurs
 Et têtent la Douleur comme une bonne louve!
 Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs!

Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile
 Un vieux Souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor!
 Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans un île,
 Aux captifs, aux vaincus!...à bien d'autres encore!

The unique qualities of Baudelaire's poem *Le Cygne* are significant and meaningful only if analyzed in a three-fold manner. One must consider the historical,

personal and poetic implications of the poem's imagery. This poem is a reflection of the changes that Paris underwent under the direction of Haussmann during the Second Empire and the attitude taken by the poet when faced with a virtually redesigned, reborn city:

Baudelaire's Paris is entirely abstract, or, rather, entirely imagined. Paris exists for Baudelaire exclusively as a state of mind, as the psychological theater of human misery par excellence. Through what the poet calls "correspondences," Paris thus becomes an allegory in which [...] humanity's wretched condition has been made even more wretched by Haussmannian modernity.⁵⁸

Le Cygne captures Baudelaire's fear and disgust when faced with the perversions wrought upon *his* city. Most remarkable in the structure and composition of this poem is the manner in which Baudelaire seems to have laid down these lines as they came to mind; the lines seem to literally have sprung from mind to page. We shall proceed here by tracing the poet's thought processes throughout the poem while examining the implications that can be drawn in regard to the changing of the city and the poet's relationship to it.

Rosemary Lloyd begins her discussion and analysis of this poem by underscoring the importance of literary and historical assimilation to the meaning of this work. In the opening lines of *Le Cygne* Baudelaire addresses himself directly to Andromache:

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,
Ce Simois menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

The figure of Andromache is drawn from classical literature, a figure described by Virgil as having been exiled from Troy after her husband's loss in battle. Lloyd develops

⁵⁸ Higonnet 273-4.

several lines of thought regarding Baudelaire's intentions when incorporating this bereaved widow into his work. The use of this historical allusion establishes a precedent of externally imposed isolation as the underlying theme for the rest of the poem. The reader is confronted at the very outset of the poem by a strong use of imagery and emotion regarding the figure of "the exile," "Andromache's function in the poem is partly to represent the suffering of the widow, exiled from the happiness of a marriage abruptly terminated, but she also functions to symbolize the human desire to hold on to memories [...]." ⁵⁹ Baudelaire addresses his opening thoughts in this poem directly to Andromache and, one can assume, that as the poem proceeds, he continues to direct his thoughts toward this literary archetype of loss and suffering. By keeping the reader in the role of spectator to a virtual dialogue between the poet and Andromache, the poet underscores the feelings of exile and alienation. This constant, if intangible, presence of Andromache serves to maintain the reader's focus on these feelings without actual, continual reference back to the initial allusion. ⁶⁰

The reader observes Baudelaire's verse move quickly from one train of thought to another. The almost stream of consciousness style developed throughout the poem by Baudelaire lends credence to Leakey's assertions that the thoughts and images captured in this poem were created and put to paper in virtually the same moment. ⁶¹ As the poet reflects on the figure of Andromache, her tears nurturing his "mémoire fertile," something rips him from his ponderings and forces his awareness to shift from his internal musings to an observation of the events taking place in his physical environs. He is confronted in his wanderings by the newness and strangeness of a city that bears no resemblance to the one that he carries with him in his mind and heart:

⁵⁹ Lloyd 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 12.

⁶¹ Felix Leakey, Baudelaire: Collected Essays, 1953-1988 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 92.

Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel);

These seemingly innocuous lines encompass the feelings of resentment and bewilderment held by some, at the time, in regard to the sweeping changes enacted by Haussmann during the 1850s and 1860s. The sentiment expressed here is not merely one of regret for the past; the implications of these lines are much more profound. Baudelaire equates the metamorphosis of Paris to the erratic and often impulsive human heart. This odd juxtaposition of the solid and timeless with the fragile and fleeting serves to call into focus the poet's distress when faced with the loss of a past with which he is so familiar and comfortable.⁶² The ostensible irrationality of such a metaphor conveys to the reader the tension felt in the poet's own soul. For Baudelaire, the changes that Paris was undergoing were concrete, tangible realities while the whims of the human heart can only be understood in the most abstract of terms. Baudelaire's linking of the concrete and the intangible conveys the poet's own views regarding the "new city." He is incapable of comprehending this new place; a city once so dear to him now exists only in the abstract realm of memory and in the poetry with which he captures that realm. Vacillating between a familiar past and an alien present, the poet and reader alike are brutally thrust into the reality of the moment.

Leakey's commentary of *Le Cygne* stresses the importance of the stream of consciousness style mentioned above. The initial invocation of Andromache's memory establishes the mood of the poem--withdrawal from society, exile, an incongruity between poet and modern world. The poem moves forward when the poet is exposed to an external stimulus.⁶³ In this instance he is torn from his reverie by the altered appearance of a once familiar part of the city. Baudelaire continues in the next stanzas to reflect upon his own memories of times past. Where new buildings and monuments have

⁶² Ibid. 93.

⁶³ Ibid. 94.

been erected, he sees only the architecture of his past. Line 17 introduces the poem's namesake, *le cygne*, which under Baudelaire's pen becomes *un signe*, emblematic of the poet's own incomprehension and impotence when faced with the incessant forward motion of the forces of modernity.

In his reminiscing, Baudelaire recalls a day when he meandered through this same area around the Louvre and the Tuileries. On that day, in the early hours of the morning, a swan kept as an attraction for passersby had escaped its cage and was free to cross paths with the wandering poet:

Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage,
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre, [...]

The poet observes the poor beast's attempts to bathe itself in a stream with no water, simply dust. The nervous actions of the swan's wings convey the creature's distress at its own situation. It is here that lost nature meets metropolis. Nature has been deprived of its source; absent of water, *le ruisseau* becomes, like the swan, another casualty of urban growth. Baudelaire describes the animal in pitiable terms. The swan, typically beautiful and graceful, is completely at odds with its current surroundings. Line 22 witnesses a change in the poet's treatment of the animal, however:

Et disait, le cœur plein de son beau lac natal:
« Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? quand tonneras-tu foudre? »
Je vois ce malheureux, mythe étrange et fatal,

Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide,
Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu,
Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide,
Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu!

Baudelaire progresses from a typical treatment of the swan as a simple creature to an anthropomorphosis of the animal to human status. The poet's attribution of human qualities to the swan is marked by its ability to speak and, furthermore, to offer reproaches against God. The swan's demands are made in the form of an apostrophe. The animal speaks to an absent deity. The swan's malcontent with its miserable circumstances underscores the image of God that Baudelaire conveys to the reader, an unmoving force that pays little heed to the desires of the beings affected.⁶⁴

The swan strains its neck and head toward the cruel sky that is ironically "cruellement bleu" in line 27. The irony of the clear sky promising fair weather lies in the swan's need for rain. As was mentioned above, there is no water in which the swan can bathe itself. In light of the reference made to *Ovide* in line 26, this can literally be taken as "eau vide." Baudelaire repeats this construction again in line 39 with "*tombeau vide*." The repetition of this same word construction underscores the fact that nature has, through no fault of her own, been deprived of that which she needs to survive. The swan has been offered only "*eau vide*" because nature has been refused her source; the poet too has been deprived of his life source, the city of his youth. The use of water imagery that is seen here is repeated often in Baudelaire's poetry and will be discussed again below. It is, however, important to note the way in which Baudelaire conceives of water as the source from which life, creation, springs. Without "water" there is nothing—no life, no dreams and no poetry. Every being must have its source.

The story of the swan comes to a close, and the poet again drifts back to thoughts of the city. In the first stanza of part II, the reader again feels a surge of the poet's awareness and emotions that were palpable at the poem's outset. It feels as if the

⁶⁴ Ibid. 97.

passionate and imperative qualities of the first stanzas subside as the poet recalls the memory of the swan; these emotions are then emphatically reintroduced in the first lines of part II. The reader is reintroduced to that same sense of confusion, energy and urgency that characterizes the first lines:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
 N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
 Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
 Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

This stanza is perhaps the most telling of the entire poem. The exclamatory “Paris change!” conveys the poet’s growing frustration with the place, or lack thereof, that he occupies in the morphing cityscape. This line echoes as well the “[...] Paris n’est plus” of line 7. While the poet’s feelings have thus far been alluded to, it is in this stanza that he reveals his complex relationship to the city. While the city is in perpetual motion around him, the poet remains unmoved and unchanged, the weight of the past keeping him immobile. He can see the changed city, but in his mind's eye he still pictures the city, as he has always known it, before the forces of change had produced irrevocable alterations. Everything he sees in Paris becomes allegory. Baudelaire implies here that everything he sees has the capacity to invoke an episode of recollection and reverie akin to what the reader bears witness to in the story of the swan. Leakey offers a similar explanation and confirmation of this Parisian allegorical impetus:

What Baudelaire means by the phrase ‘tout pour moi devient allégorie’, can be clearly enough inferred from the poem as a whole: anything and everything that he sees in Paris has the power to awaken some image in his mind, and such images, by their interconnection with others, can serve to crystallise a central emotion or idea. In that sense, all things may be said to ‘become’—i.e. give rise to—allegories (or myths, or images, or symbols); by implication, *any* part of Paris that he might choose to visit, could stir memories no less profound than those at present aroused by the place du Carrousel, and could thereby set in motion some

further train of ‘allegorical’ or ‘symbolic’ associations.⁶⁵

The power that the city exerts on the mind and soul of the poet is incredible once one can recognize and interpret it correctly. The poet, by capturing images of the city in his verse, seems to command his own environment; he is the master of his pen and can create that which is to his liking. The attribution of this creative, dictatorial power to the poet is not misplaced, for the poet does indeed possess the capacity to control what he presents to his reader. It must be understood, however, that in Baudelaire’s case, he is quite often powerless in the face of the city’s power and the control it exerts over his imagination.

Line 32, describing the weight of the poet’s own treasured memories, lends to a twofold interpretation. One can first infer that the poet seeks to convey the power of the inhibitory force of his own past to the readers. His memories prevent him from evolving at the same rate as the city around him. Additionally, this line, when taken with the stanzas that follow, also serves as bridge to what is an almost frantic final movement in the course of the poem:

Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m’opprime:
Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous,
Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime,
Et rongé d’un désir sans trêve! Et puis à vous,

Andromaque, des bras d’un grand époux tombée,
Vil bétail, sous la main du superbe Pyrrhus,
Après d’un tombeau vide en extase courbée;
Veuve d’Hector, hélas! et femme d’Hélénus!

Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phtisique,
Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l’œil hagard,
Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique
Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard;

À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve
Jamais, jamais! à ceux qui s’abreuvent de pleurs
Et têtent la Douleur comme une bonne louve!

⁶⁵ Ibid. 97-8.

Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs!

Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile
 Un vieux Souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor!
 Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île,
 Aux captifs, aux vaincus!...à bien d'autres encore!

The finality that resonates from line 32, 'Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs' is most assuredly not unintentional. The poet imposes tangibility on the reader. The reader can feel the weight of these rocks that weigh down the poet's soul. Lloyd goes so far as to suggest that the reader's imagination is meant to tend toward a very specific visual manifestation of these rocks—sharp and craggy, painful to hold both because of form and weight.⁶⁶ With this image of rocks in mind, one cannot help but accept the metaphor that Baudelaire has illustrated. His memories are not small pebbles that one can easily manipulate and transport but weighty burdens that he must bear with him in his wanderings. With this 'lourd' image in mind the reader senses a turning point in the poem that might have been anticipated at the break between parts I and II, but which in reality occurs one stanza later. The image of the poet that is promoted in this poem is that of a lonely wanderer, incapable and unwilling to assimilate himself to the world around him. He maintains his distance from society and exists in a world that is more past than present.⁶⁷ An existence in the *now* is only accomplished through an almost complete detachment from the actual surrounding world; daydreams and souvenirs allow the poet to maintain his internal solitude in the midst of a bustling metropolis. With this image at hand, Baudelaire ushers the reader into the poem's final rush of emotion with the line 'Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m'opprime':

[...] we gain a vivid sense of approaching climax; suddenly the poet's thoughts have become clear to him in their underlying and wider meaning, and with this

⁶⁶ Lloyd 13.

⁶⁷ Leakey 101-2.

line beings the long, slow, majestic unfolding of the *idea* towards which all his associations and memories have been obscurely converging. The words ‘une image’, which at first glance might seem to be referring merely to the swan which is next evoked, are revealed in retrospect to be of a much wider scope: this image that ‘oppresses’ him as he stands before the new Louvre, becomes in effect a composite of *all* those various ‘allegorical’ or ‘symbolic’ images—beginning with Andromache and the swan, but extending far beyond them—that now begin to crowd into his mind.⁶⁸

In the final stanzas of *Le Cygne* Baudelaire forces a return of the reader’s thoughts to Andromache. This repeated reference to Andromache underscores the poem’s principal theme of the exile’s relationship to his/her environment. Baudelaire, at this point in the poem, firmly establishes the link between the swan and Andromache. By qualifying the swan as ‘comme les exilés’ and then immediately launching into another address to Andromache, Baudelaire establishes a parallel between the poem’s two main characters and confirms the plight of the exile as the poem’s central theme. A personal identification with the figure of the exile is absolutely fundamental to a true understanding of the poet’s emotions in this work. The reader is made to realize that the swan and the figure of Andromache are not autonomous figures, unique in their qualities of exile, but merely two characters in a long list of society’s marginalized.

The second part of the poem serves as an emphatic enumeration of society’s exiles as Baudelaire conceives of them. He directly associates the swan and Andromache with the masses of exiles whose existences he goes on to lament. With the introduction of the ‘négresse’ comes yet another figure caught in an alien environment with no means of freeing herself from the awkward situation in which she finds herself. After the introduction of this third individual character, the poet expands his scope in the final stanzas of the poem to include *groups* of the ‘exiled’ as opposed to isolated individuals.⁶⁹ The increased use of exclamatory phrases in the poem’s final two stanzas adds to the feeling of imperativeness and frustration that the poet is seeking to convey. He truly feels

⁶⁸ Ibid. 98.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 100-1.

the pain of the outsider and infers that in this work he pities both the cases of those exiled from their native lands but those, as well, who experience alienation in a place that was once familiar but that has become foreign. The poet's compassion for those who are lost, never to be recovered, is made tangible in the meaning and syntax of the poem's final lines. Again, the use of short exclamatory phrases adds to a sense of growing anxiety and frustration on the part of poet when faced with the overpowering emotions of loss and suffering that he is experiencing for himself and for the many other lost souls. The ellipsis in the final line conveys so much to the reader; it serves to imply, in the Romantic tradition, an overwhelming of the writer's senses; he simply cannot get pen to paper quickly enough to express the frantic thoughts of his mind. Baudelaire builds in his intensity and then, when at the climax of this particular movement, it is as if he pauses, sighs, and recognizes that he can never give voice to all of the exiled and the alienated. He simply writes, in one last flourish, 'a bien d'autres encore!'.

Thus, what is to be taken from Baudelaire's poem *Le Cygne*? It is a poem that reflects the poet's own divergent attitudes and emotions in regards to the city. Encompassed in the lines of Baudelaire's poem are the poet's own feelings and sentiment. In a time of great change in Paris, Baudelaire was confronted by an alien landscape. His city had changed, but he had not. It is this feeling of isolation in the midst of a throng that the reader feels throughout Baudelaire's verse. The poet clings to his memories for lack of anything else recognizable. He is aware that it is the past that weighs him down, but he has nothing else in this foreign landscape except his remembrances of times past. He understands the pain of the countless other exiles in the world and seeks to identify himself with them, perhaps seeking solidarity in solitude.

Chapter 3

Le Plaisir qui Tue

“Vous oublier n’est pas possible. On dit qu’il a existé de poètes qui on vécu toute leur vie, les yeux fixes sur une image chérie. Je crois, en effet (mais j’y suis trop intéressé),

que la fidélité est un des signes du génie.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “ À Madame Sabatier : mardi 18 août 1857,” Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 278.

The feelings of exile and loneliness in the midst of the city that Baudelaire treats in *Le Cygne* are discussed on a more intimate level in his poem *À Une Passante*. As will be shown below, this poem takes the poet's feelings of discontent with the city, and offers a different, more intimate experience to illustrate this emotion. This poem appears to be a poem written to a woman, about a woman, and while it can be interpreted thusly, it is of a more profound importance to read the poem as a commentary on Baudelaire's relationship to his surroundings.

À Une Passante⁷¹

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit!—Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! *jamais* peut-être !
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimé, ô toi qui le savais !

If the reader considers *Le Cygne* as a hearkening back to the days of antiquity, an historical petrification, *À Une Passante* can be viewed as a poetic foray into the realm of that which Baudelaire terms modernity, "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent [...]"⁷² The previous poem analysis demonstrated the extent to which the poet felt at odds with the modern world; in this poem, the reader experiences Baudelaire's modernity, a modernity that can be captured for a moment but then dissipates. He

⁷¹ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001) 175.

⁷² *Baudelaire on Art*, " 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1859) IV. Modernity" Dept. of Fine Arts, Boston College. http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa257/baudelaire1.html

admired the beauty of the city from afar but never considered himself a true participant in the everyday goings-on of the city's inhabitants. Baudelaire's poetry contains an underlying tone of solitude and exile that is easily perceived by a conscientious reader. Baudelaire was truly a poet of the city, capturing Paris in his *Tableaux Parisiens*, but his actual role as an inhabitant of that city still begs further exploration.

À Une Passante, at first glance, is a fourteen-line sonnet describing the unrequited love affair between the poet and a woman he encounters in the streets of Paris. A preliminary examination of the poem's lines yields a description of the anonymous woman that leads the reader to infer that she is a widow; she is described in line 2 as being "en grand deuil," implying that she is still in the midst of the period of mourning after a death. This establishes a parallel between the subject of this poem and Andromache in *Le Cygne*. Images of the widow in Baudelaire's poetry serve to underscore the theme of isolation, a separation from "normal" society, which is imposed by a force beyond the exile's control. Line 2 describes as well the widow's suffering as being "majestic" in nature. By attributing an air of nobility to this individual woman's sadness, Baudelaire thereby honors the suffering of all exiles as he attempts to do in *Le Cygne*, as well, by calling attention to their individual plights. Cast out of society by circumstances beyond their control, Baudelaire's exiles are not to be pitied, but admired for their ability to shoulder the burdens of a society that will not have them but in which they are forced to live.

The descriptions of the woman's movement in line 4 add to the reader's comprehension of her character. The nobility of her mourning is mirrored in the nobility of her movement and stature. Her exhibition of the utmost grace during what one can only assume to be a very difficult and trying period in her life, invokes an image of extreme courage, of a figure capable of lifting her head and maintaining a sense of

purpose and dignity when most others would allow themselves to be swept away by their own grief. The poet's reaction to this epitome of composure and resilience is extreme in its emotional intensity. An ostensibly simple encounter has the most profound effect on the poet's emotions:

Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
 Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan
 La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

The use of the word "buvais" in reference to the poet's interaction with the woman's eyes brings to mind images of sensuality and sexuality. He does not merely gaze into her eyes but drinks from them. The reader is made to draw the implication that the poet is truly intoxicated by this anonymous widow. He is rendered powerless, made a fool, when confronted by the profundity of her eyes. The woman's eyes betray her melancholy façade. She is outwardly in mourning, but the fiery, stormy quality of her eyes reveal that she is not to be made a victim of circumstance and that she will prevail. It is this depth that the poet perceives as an onlooker. He is forever captured by it from that moment forth. His fascination is not merely with her beauty, however. The reader is also made to sense the almost erotic attraction of the poet for the anonymous woman in the line, "La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue." This line creates an interesting conflict of thought. The woman herself is a paradox, housing a gentleness that fascinates and entices and a capacity for pleasure that is deadly. This line as well reinforces the erotic undertones of Baudelaire's verse. The use of the word "plaisir" immediately evokes sexual imagery, extreme in the ecstasy it is capable of inducing. Pleasure here is presented as the end result of a satisfied curiosity. The poet, in his admiration of this anonymous love, is completely taken with the intensity of her eyes and stands as a fool before her beauty. Regardless of her magnetic hold over him, however, he is fully aware

of the possible consequences of such an infatuation. The fulfillment of desire through pleasure is tantamount to death in the poet's mind. It is this knowledge of the consequences of fulfilled desire that keeps the poet locked into his position of onlooker. If he ventures closer his experience will lose the unknown, mysterious quality that he relishes. Baudelaire lived through his dreams; to fully integrate himself into society would have meant a break with the dream world that he could not bear.

The poem's next tercet provides a bit of irony when considered in light of the final line of the second quatrain:

Un éclair...puis la nuit—Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

In the poem's second stanza, the reader is presented with a woman whose suffering is itself a source of incredible beauty for the poet. Her eyes contradict her somber appearance and intoxicate him; he can perceive the fire that lies behind the tears of mourning. By drinking in her eyes, he is held captive by his fascination and appears to welcome death at the hands of someone capable of such intense pleasure. The woman is characterized as a widow of sorts, still in the midst of her mourning period, and through this and her association with "le plaisir qui tue," she is linked with death. The first tercet does not so much contradict this link with death, granted pleasurable, but adds another, enticing dimension to the female stranger and to the poem itself.

The three lines of the third stanza shift in function from a simple description of the poet's encounter to an apostrophe, a direct address to the already departed woman. She is described as the flash of light that illuminates his life for a brief instant before he is again plunged into the darkness of his mundane, everyday existence. He addresses his love as a fugitive beauty whose gaze has brought him back to life. This is an interesting

statement considering the poet has already linked this woman twice with death. Her ability to control his death and his rebirth endow her with incredible power. The attraction the poet feels for this woman is remarkable. He does not speak to her except in retrospective apostrophe, knows nothing of her personality or her life but manages to read infinity in her eyes. He is instantly devoted to her, pledging his eternal love to her after she has already become a mere memory in his past.

The poem's final tercet makes clear the seeming irrationality of such extreme declarations of love and devotion to an unknown figure. The reader comes to learn after a reading of the final stanza that the poet is not truly in love with the woman but with the fleeting moment of ecstasy he experiences upon seeing her. She embodies Baudelaire's modernity—the fleeting, the transient. A mysterious woman he sees in the street fascinates him. The nobility of her suffering and the incredible intensity of her eyes enrapture him. He knows nothing real of the woman; he is in love with the idea of her, but he is overwhelmed by the possibility of his love for her. He continues to address the absent figure as if she were there, and it is through these lines that the reader finally realizes why the poet has been struck by an incident as banal as a chance encounter in the street; he lives in a world of maybes and what ifs:

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! jamais peut-être !
 Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
 O toi que j'eusse aimé, ô toi qui le savais !

He knows not where his mystery woman is traveling, nor does she know anything of his life, but the possibility of love between them is very real to him. It is this hope for the chance at love that fuels the poet's thoughts throughout the sonnet. The consummation of any type of physical relationship is immaterial to the poet; he is moved and inspired by that which is not. That which remains unstated here exerts an equal, if not greater, on

that which is explicitly present. This is a hard concept to fully comprehend, but it is a notion very close to Baudelaire's heart. Baudelaire's works display his fascination with the fleeting and the transitory. He seeks to explore *l'inconnu* in his works, and this poem captures that interest. The love that is dwelt upon in this poem is only imagined; it is the creation of an avid imagination. From a mere momentary glance springs the possibility of an entire love affair between two individuals, a stranger and the poet. This is consistent with Baudelaire's thoughts on the nature of modernity and beauty. Baudelaire writes, "Toutes les beautés contiennent, comme tous les phénomènes possibles, quelque chose d'éternel et quelque chose de transitoire, --d'absolu et de particulier."⁷³ Baudelaire captures this concept in this poem. The woman is fleeting and eternal. The experience lasts but a moment and yet, the timelessness of the experience is of the utmost importance.

The poet's lament in the final line of the poem provides a sense of consistency of thought. As was seen in the analysis of *Le Cygne* above, Baudelaire displays a distinct fear and distaste for the changes that have been wrought upon his city. This sentiment is seemingly contradictory to the idea of the *baudelairien* fascination with change and the unknown, but the final lament of *À Une Passante* reconciles all. The fact that the poet laments a missed opportunity for love indicates that while the unknown fascinates him, he is also very susceptible to the negative effects of change. It is perhaps characteristic of a poet's romantic nature to be infatuated with notions of ideal, mysterious love; regardless, Baudelaire proves in this instance that while he may long for the unknown in dreams, it is consistency and safety that he truly craves in his real life. Change and unknown adventure appear, for this poet, to be better appreciated from a distanced

⁷³ Charles Baudelaire, "De l'Heroïsme de la Vie Moderne," *Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies*. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 164.

vantage point. Baudelaire's poetry paints the picture of a man better suited to be an observer than an active participant. It is his destiny to write about and comment on the action of the crowd, not to be a member of it. This sentiment is echoed in Baudelaire's prose poem *Les Foules* in which he writes:

Multitude, solitude: termes égaux et convertibles par le poète actif et fecund. Qui ne sait pas peupler sa solitude, ne sait pas non plus être seul dans une foule affairée. [...] Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il; entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun. Pour lui seul, tout est vacant; et si de certaines places paraissent lui être fermées, c'est qu'à ses yeux elles ne valent pas la peine d'être visitées. [...] Ce que les homes nomment amour est bien petit, bien restreint et bien faible, comparé à cette ineffable orgie, à cette sainte prostitution de l'âme qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité, à l'imprévu qui se montre à l'inconnu qui passé.⁷⁴

Baudelaire reveals in *À Une Passante* a different side to solitude. As he reveals in the citation above, separation from the masses has its benefits. He is capable of being whomsoever he may wish and has access to places that only the solitary poet may attain. His ideal existence is an imagined one. Baudelaire feeds on his surroundings for inspiration but maintains his distance. He does not wish to break the magic of the unknown by becoming too involved with the reality of the situation.

Thus far, a rather simple, straightforward reading of Baudelaire's sonnet *À Une Passante* has been proposed. This type of analysis, however, functions merely in a superficial role. Walter Benjamin offers the reader a more complex interpretation of this poem by insisting that the character most integral to the message that the poet wished to convey is a figure that is notable not for its presence in the poem but for its absence.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "Les Foules," *Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies*. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 130.

⁷⁵ Elise Marder, *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 70.

Benjamin's choice of focus is the crowd, *la foule parisienne*. It is not the woman herself that becomes of utmost importance to the poem but the effect this encounter exercises on the poet. Benjamin thus examines this poem based not on what is immediately available for recognition to the reader but on what must be inferred--the almost tangible presence of that which is absent. As was seen in *Le Cygne*, in which the importance of the lack of water had to be inferred, so must the significance of the absent be inferred in *À Une Passante*:

As Benjamin insists incessantly, "A une passante" must be read as a negative image, in relief, as it were, through the absence of its central figure—the crowd. In "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" he introduces the poem by claiming that "the masses had become so much a part of Baudelaire that it is rare to find a description of them in his works. His most important subjects are hardly ever encountered in descriptive form." [...] "This crowd, of whose existence Baudelaire is always aware, has not served as the model for any of his works, but is imprinted on his creativity as a hidden figure [...]."⁷⁶

Benjamin thereby entreats the reader of Baudelaire's work to read with an extremely discerning eye. Benjamin presents Baudelaire's poetry as something that must be read not only for what is present but, just as importantly, for what is purposefully missing. Benjamin exercises this type of allegorical "reading in relief" when he examines the crowd as the "character" of the most fundamental importance to a true understanding of *À Une Passante*. Benjamin's method of interpretation provides the reader with a new avenue of analysis that ventures beyond a mere cursory reading of the lines. An examination of this poem along Benjamin's lines adds another layer of profundity to the analysis performed above.⁷⁷

The poem's first line, "La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait" sets the stage for the events that are to follow. The poet, a passive onlooker, is deafened by the roar of

⁷⁶ Ibid. 69

⁷⁷ Ibid.

the streets around him. The fact that the roar of the streets is bombarding his senses throws the woman that he notices into relief:

For Benjamin, the action of the poem, [...], is read in its resistance to the force of the crowd through which the passing figure passes. Instead of focusing on the figure of the passing woman, he looks at the force through which her passage can be marked. By looking past her to the crowd, Benjamin turns our attention to what must have been passing around her and hence “present” to the eyes of the one who watches her. He goes on to discuss how the erotic encounter between the passing woman and the one who watches her is facilitated, rather than hindered, by the force of the crowd. It is the presence of the crowd itself that engenders this experience of modern love.⁷⁸

The function of the crowd in this instance does not hinder his recognition of this tragic figure, but magnifies her presence amidst the throng:

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d’une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet; [...]

The crowd’s presence is so overwhelming that it nullifies itself. In the chaos of the street, the poet is immediately drawn to the statuesque, noble figure of the passing woman. Had the street been calm, it is quite possible that the anonymous woman would have passed unnoticed, but amidst the din of the multitude, her quiet nobility serves to highlight her presence. Benjamin insists that it is the crowd that creates a fertile breeding ground for the encounter that the reader witnesses in this poem:

In a widow’s veil, mysteriously and mutely borne along by the crowd, an unknown woman comes into the poet’s field of vision. What the sonnet communicates is simply this: far from experiencing the crowd as an opposed, antagonistic element, this very crowd brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid. 70.

⁷⁹ Benjamin 45.

The crowd is thus the essential, driving force behind the poet's encounter. While it is difficult to comprehend the force exerted by a "character" that is never mentioned, Benjamin's assertions lend much to a discussion of the poet's own nature.

The crowd, as is stated above, functions as the unnamed backdrop for the poet's anonymous, erotic encounter. By recognizing the crowd as an integral part of this poem, despite its deliberate exclusion, what understanding does one gain? As in painting, the background is of just as much importance to the poem as the central figures themselves, for without a backdrop, there is no context, just figures floating in space. The din of the crowd serves not to undermine the presence of the poem's two figures but to highlight them by providing a mass of people against which two *individuals* stand out. Each of these individuals is unique because of their solitude and virtual exile from society while still in the midst of it all. The widow is involuntarily separated from the crowd by her loss and her period of mourning. The poet is forever on the outskirts; it is in the nature of the poet to be reclusive, participating in the actions of society through observation and the written word. It is not the mundane and the banal goings on of everyday life that interests the poet, but moments of intensity and shock like that which is described in *À Une Passante*. Thus, the crowd thrusts the figure of the widow into the sight of the poet creating a moment that, however seemingly trivial, is seized upon by the poet's soul.

Two social exiles are raised above the confusion of the crowd by the existence of the crowd itself and exchange a fleeting glance referenced twice, firstly in lines 7 and 8 and then again in line 10:

Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
 Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan, [...]
 [...]Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître, [...]

The momentary glance that incites the creation of this poem is the catalyst for a

prolonged erotic encounter that exists only in the poet's mind. Benjamin comments that:

The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight. It is a farewell forever which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment. Thus the sonnet supplies the figure of shock, even of catastrophe...like the kind of sexual shock that can beset a lonely man.⁸⁰

Benjamin does not concern himself particularly with the woman herself but with the effect she has on the observing poet as she passes. The poem does not deal with the presence of love but of its loss and the erotic encounter that surrounds this “love at last sight.”⁸¹ It is not the woman herself that is of importance to Benjamin but the effect of her momentary presence in the poet's life. Benjamin defines the delight of the urban poet as love at last sight. From this one can infer an almost masochistic tendency inherent in the poet's nature. The poet revels in what he knows will cause him nothing but pain and suffering. The urban poet's delight in love at last sight is a perversion of the emotions love is traditionally meant to bring about in an individual. The love of the urban poet can never be enjoyed for, like Baudelaire's modernity, the moment that it is discovered, it is quite literally “past”—immediately lost through the physical act of passing and because of the passage of time.

Thus far, the physical relationship that existed between Baudelaire and his surroundings has been explored through analysis of two poems essential to an understanding of the discussion at hand. The real world in which he was forced to reside posed a threat to Baudelaire's inherently poetic soul. The chaos and brutality of the city, beautiful yet insufferable as it was, provided Baudelaire with much of the inspiration he needed for his poetry. He took his subject matter from the observations he made of the world around him. His refusal to ever fully integrate himself into the crowd as seen in *À*

⁸⁰ Benjamin, 125.

⁸¹ Marder 75.

Une Passante forced him to maintain an existence in virtual self-imposed exile from the rest of humanity. To maintain an existence in a city he did not comprehend, Baudelaire avoided the present by keeping to society's outskirts in both body and spirit. The swan in *Le Cygne* is representative of a society's exiles, the poet himself included, struggling to exist in a world that will never be a proper fit. Baudelaire sought in his life and his poetry to escape the realm of the concrete for something *au-delà*, something intangible that corresponded to this world but that was infinitely better suited to the poet's soul. After having seen Baudelaire's reality, it is now possible to examine the corresponding world he created in which his mind found asylum.

Chapter 4

La Domaine de l'Impalpable

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère.⁸²

⁸² Charles Baudelaire, "Les Litanies de Satan," Les Fleurs du mal. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001) 225.

Baudelaire's relationship to Paris was one of turbulence. Baudelaire felt himself at odds with the concrete world. He sought to escape this world by using his own imagination to create a realm apart from the harsh realities of his loathsome everyday life. In seeking to leave this world, if not in body, then at least in mind, Baudelaire created his own private universe. He conceived a realm of existence where his soul could breathe more easily once freed from the social confines that restrained it in everyday life, a realm in which dream and action were not required to maintain a rigid dichotomy. In Baudelaire's ideal world, dream and action are coupled, the imagination adds a higher, more spiritual dimension, to every aspect of the ordinary world.

As has been mentioned, one can perceive the roots of Baudelaire's skewed mentality in early childhood. Beginning in these early years, Baudelaire carried with him a certain *sentiment de solitude*.⁸³ Baudelaire himself conceded that despite the presence of friends and family, he always carried with him the sentiment that it was his destiny to be eternally alone:

La solitude de Baudelaire est, à l'origine, une solitude intérieure. Le fardeau de la vie qu'il a dû porter seul, un jour, au milieu de difficultés physiques et morales sans nombre, n'en est pas la cause, mais la conséquence logique. S'il n'a pu trouver facilement, hors de lui, des points d'appui véritables, cela tient à sa personnalité. C'est pourquoi sa solitude qui a précédé de beaucoup l'éloignement sans retour, ne trouve son explication que dans sa sensibilité et sa tournure d'esprit. C'est son individualité, en somme, qui est la cause de sa solitude et, par ricochet, de son éloignement.⁸⁴

Baudelaire's solitary nature would manifest itself later in life. He had countless liaisons with a variety of women, but he was, in his own mind, constantly alone in opposing the outside world. The reference made in the above quotation to the burden that Charles felt compelled to carry in life, hearkens back to the weighty *rocs* of *Le Cygne*. This burden

⁸³ Charles Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu* (Geneva: Droz, 2001) 12.

⁸⁴ Melançon 25.

would stay with Baudelaire throughout his life. For the most part, he was able to shoulder the weight and find different means of lessening the pain--drugs, alcohol, poetry --but there were several moments when Baudelaire proved unable to go on and attempted suicide:

Il se sent de plus en plus écartelé entre les exigences sociales qui lui sont imposées et les rêves qu'il projette sans cesse de réaliser, entre l'homme que l'on veut qu'il soit et l'homme qu'il est [...] il en vient à se penser « inutile aux autres—*et dangereux à [lui]-même* ». « Le désordre d'esprit et de vie amène à un désespoir sombre ou à un anéantissement complet » écrit-il, avant de tenter de se suicider, le 30 juin 1845.⁸⁵

Baudelaire's adult life was not a life of ease but a life of torment. Charles never felt a sense of welcome in the society he was forced to inhabit. He was always a stranger, even among friends, and thus turned inward to find a world more agreeable than this one.

Returning for a moment to Charles' childhood, one finds a child who existed in a self-imposed solitude. It was in this solitude that Charles never stopped dreaming. While the act of daydreaming is not peculiar in children, there was something particular to Baudelaire, "c'est cette habitude persistante de transformer le réel. Il prend davantage plaisir à reconstruire, à sa fantaisie, le monde qui l'entoure qu'à en créer un nouveau de toutes pièces."⁸⁶ Charles was not particularly disposed to rigorous academic study, but he spent much of his free time reading books in an effort to discover a world that did not exist on this earth but that conformed to the images he saw in his dreams:

Le rêve apparaît comme le courant souterrain qui commande toutes les réactions de Baudelaire. Il se compte parmi ceux dont « l'esprit a été dès l'enfance *touched with pensiveness* ». L'expression anglaise apporte peut-être un cachet de coquetterie et un élément de mystère qui relèvent l'idée, dans cet article sur Charles Asselineau. Mais nous savons par *Les paradis artificiels* qu'elle est de

⁸⁵ Ibid. 63.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 21.

De Quincey et qu'elle ne signifie rien d'autre, dans sa propre traduction, qu' « un cerveau marqué par la rêverie fatale ». La « rêverie fatale », c'est la rêverie qui enveloppe inconsciemment toutes choses de sa lueur déformante et leur donne ce que nous appellerions aujourd'hui un effet de halo. C'est, en quelque sorte, dans les mots de Baudelaire, « l'éclipse de l'image réelle par l'hallucination », pour pousser jusqu'à sa limite extrême l'effet déformant de la rêverie. Il semble bien que les yeux de Baudelaire se soient assez vite habitués à voir le monde « dans une atmosphère anormale et songeuse. »⁸⁷

Baudelaire wished to create a world, a universe *au-delà*, where the meaning of this world would be revealed.

Outside of his own life, Baudelaire found a base for his thoughts regarding this “other world” in the ideas of contemporary thinkers like Lavateur, Fourier and Swedenborg. These men were the principal visionaries in the illuminist movement, a movement that provided Charles with a significant source of inspiration:

Pour Baudelaire, [...], les conclusions de Swedenborg sont des postulats. Il est acquis que *le ciel est un très-grand homme* et que « tout..., dans le spirituel comme dans le naturel, est...correspondant ». Il tentera plutôt d'appliquer à ce « très-grand homme » la science des physionomies que Lavateur lui a enseignée. N'espère-t-il pas mettre ainsi à la portée de tous les hommes d'esprit l'illumination intérieure que les sociétés secrètes avaient liée à des expériences occultes ? « La démonstration » du physionomiste, croit-il, peut et doit être étendue, car son objet peut prendre les dimensions de la création qui est entièrement « hiéroglyphique », et tout poète doit devenir « déchiffreur » de symboles qui « ne sont obscurs que d'une manière relative. »⁸⁸

In analyzing the universe that Baudelaire fabricated for himself, one enters upon a world comprised entirely of dreams and symbols, or hieroglyphics as they are called above. This world is dominated by a single creative force that must be awakened in an individual's soul if one wishes to gain entrance to this rather exclusive dream world. Imagination is the force that governs all else in Baudelaire's world:

⁸⁷ Ibid. 29-30.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 12.

L'imagination crée un monde nouveau qui n'est ni naturel, ni fantastique. Il est une sorte de tiers monde issu, à la fois, de la nature et de l'imagination créatrice. D'une part, il est un monde vraiment réel par tout l'apport de la nature visible prégnante de signes et de symboles. D'autre part, il demeure un monde imaginaire par les structures nouvelles que l'imagination y introduit pour donner un sens et une valeur aux symboles et aux signes. C'est pourquoi Baudelaire n'a pu écrire que « la Poésie est ce qu'il y a de plus réel » sans ajouter aussitôt : « c'est ce qui n'est vrai que dans un autre monde ». La réalité poétique qui est en même temps la réalité de l'*homo duplex*, présuppose donc une métamorphose du monde visible. C'est ce monde métamorphosé qui devient l'univers baudelairien. »⁸⁹

Baudelaire's world was governed by the imagination. He believed that it was impossible for man to achieve a universe more profound than the one achieved through reverie with the assistance of the imagination. It is necessary that every aspect of nature is regarded as a symbol to be interpreted as more than just something real but as something that has a higher, more spiritual dimension.⁹⁰

For Baudelaire, the imagination essentially decomposes all of creation. Imagination is capable of using elements in nature as ingredients in creating a new world. The imagination, according to Baudelaire in the *Salon de 1859*, follows, “des règles dont on ne peut pas trouver l'origine que dans le plus profond de l'âme.”⁹¹ The universe created by the imagination is a direct reflection of each individual's personality. This act of creation is a composite of both object and subject; it is this *mélange* of elements that serves as the base for the baudelairien universe.

In dreams, man loses his sense of individuality; literally, one loses recognition of the “ME.” It becomes impossible to distinguish between the object and subject until, “Il ne reste plus qu'une seule réalité qui est la réalité du rêve.”⁹² For Baudelaire, dreams were the only reality that had any real value or meaning. A frequenter of the baudelairien universe does not deny the existence of reality but *does* insist on the inferiority of this

⁸⁹ Ibid. 87.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 84.

⁹¹ Ibid. 87.

⁹² Ibid. 88.

reality to the one that can be created *au-delà*:

Sans nier la réalité du monde visible avec laquelle l'imagination doit toujours composer, il atteste la plus-value de la réalité de son univers où les images et les signes sont devenus des métaphores, des analogies et des correspondances. En passant, comme le dira Paul Valéry, « d'un monde presque entièrement fait de signes dans un autre presque entièrement fait de significations », Baudelaire est entré dans un autre monde où tout est « complètement vrai ». Aussi, peut-il affirmer d'une façon péremptoire : « La vraie réalité n'est que dans les rêves ».⁹³

Dreams are of the utmost importance to achieving a realm *comparable* to that which Baudelaire himself created. One must be predisposed, as Baudelaire was, to reverie to be capable of interpreting nature's signs. For those who are not naturally inclined to deep, intense reverie, the spirit can be assisted in achieving this heightened state by the use of drugs, a practice often turned to by Charles to intensify his own experiences.. The dream-like state that the poet is capable of producing can be *mimicked* by the ordinary man by the use of mind-altering substances. The use of drugs serves merely to intensify and accelerate the experience, "Notons tout de suite que le haschisch ne provoque pas une rêverie distincte du rêve poétique. Leur ivresse et de même nature. La drogue ne fait qu'accélérer, qu'intensifier la métamorphose de la nature visible."⁹⁴ The drug produces an effect that is indistinguishable in its initial phases from the effect produced by the imagination. Much the same experience can be found as well through art and sexuality; it remains largely dependent on the individual to find that which is capable of elevating his mind to a place where imagination is allowed to rule. This is not to imply that by taking a drug any man can reside in Baudelaire's universe. The state can be mimicked, but there was something inherent in Baudelaire's soul that was given to flights of reverie without chemical assistance. The souls of artists and poets are innately more attuned to

⁹³ Ibid. 96.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 88.

interpreting nature's signs and frequenting the *au-delà*. The difference lies in what the soul is capable of once intoxicated.

The experience can be described as a type of intoxication that washes over the body, slowly producing a perceived metamorphosis of the exterior reality. External objects are viewed in a new light, illuminated by the imagination. The objects take on new colors, sounds and forms and lose their objectivity until they are reduced to mere sensual stimulations as the reader experiences in *Les Bijoux*, « Les choses où le son se mêle à la lumière. »⁹⁵ A man in this state, Baudelaire states, feels as though he is no longer *himself* but part of the *object* itself :

Pour éclairer son propos, il donne un exemple. « Votre œil se fixe sur un arbre harmonieux courbé par le vent dans quelques secondes, ce qui ne serait dans le cerveau d'un poète qu'une comparaison fort naturelle, deviendra dans la vôtre une réalité. Vous prêtez d'abord à l'arbre vos passions, votre désir ou votre mélancolie ; ses gémissements et ses oscillations deviennent les vôtres et bientôt vous êtes l'arbre. »⁹⁶

One literally loses himself to the dream. Baudelaire sought an escape, and it was in this other world that he found it. He was not merely a visitor to another realm ; he was capable of becoming, through a natural predisposition of his soul for dreaming, entirely engulfed in his second nature, his second reality.

The inherent difference between Baudelaire's universe and the drug-induced realm that the ordinary man may attain is Baudelaire's ability to couple his dream episodes with action, with the creation of a concrete legacy that is left as a trail for the ordinary man to follow. Baudelaire used his poetry as a means of communicating the existence of this alternative realm to the rest of the population who, being ruled just by action, are not aware of its presence. Even to this day, Baudelaire's poetry acts as an

⁹⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001) 249.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 90.

indicator by which his readers can gather what his world must be like. Try as he might, the ordinary man cannot gain access to Baudelaire's own, personal world because it sprung from his own, personal imagination. Drugs, wine, women, art...these things can aid man in achieving a facsimile of Baudelaire's dream-state, but it is the legacy of his poetry that allows the reader full access to his realm.

Baudelaire gave some explanation as to what it is in man that places restrictions on his ability to attain this higher realm. It is necessary that man be able to recognize and understand his own double nature if he wishes to gain access to the other world; drugs alone will not suffice. Baudelaire calls this double nature inherent in man *l'homo duplex*:

Il y a, dans *l'homo duplex*, un tiraillement intérieur que Baudelaire attribue à « l'incessant mécanisme de la vie terrestre, taquinant et déchirant à chaque minute l'étoffe de la vie idéale ». La dualité est ainsi reculée aux profondeurs de la vie. Au cœur de l'homme, la lutte est déjà engagée sur l'initiative de la vie terrestre qui s'oppose à la vie idéale.⁹⁷

The dualistic construction of man's nature is understood through a series of oppositions. Man is engaged in a constant battle between flesh and spirit, action and intention and reality and dream. Man therefore, comprised of these opposing elements, essentially lives two lives, *la vie terrestre* and *la vie idéale*.⁹⁸

The idea of Baudelaire's ideal linking of action and reverie has been mentioned above. The real world, for Baudelaire, imposed a harsh dichotomy between dream and action, the one could not elicit the other. To understand Baudelaire's perspective one must understand that for him, action and dream were not diametrically opposed. Baudelaire's use of language was his *action*, and this action was precipitated by dreaming and imagination. It seems that members of the real world are not capable of a full

⁹⁷ Ibid. 67.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 65.

comprehension of this notion. Dreaming is quite often an idle exercise, producing nothing concrete, but when one understands that language and art, poetry and painting are true *actions*, Baudelaire's need to be in a realm where the two are linked becomes entirely clear.

Baudelaire's poetry sprung from the constant dualistic battle that waged within him and the duality of man's nature that he saw all around him:

Il y a dans tout homme, à
Toute heure, deux postulations
Simultanées, l'une vers Dieu,
L'autre vers Satan. L'invocation
à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un
désir de monter en grade; celle
à Satan, ou animalité, est une
joie de Descendre. C'est à cette dernière que doivent
être rattachés les amours pour les femmes et les conversations
intimes avec les animaux,
chiens, chats, etc....;
Les joies qui dérivent de ces
Deux amours sont adaptées
à la nature de ces deux amours.⁹⁹

It is this battle that creates man's dualistic nature; Baudelaire was unable to reconcile these two opposing forces in real life. By retreating into his imagination, and then into his poetry, Baudelaire was able to have these two worlds coexist relatively harmoniously in one body.

Each of man's separate natures lives out its own existence in the same body. The terrestrial, realistic aspect of man's nature concerns itself with the goings on of day-to-day life :

⁹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, Mon cœur mis à nu. (Geneva: Droz, 2001) 19.

L'homme naturel, en effet dans ses luttes pour la vie comme dans ses recherches de satisfaction, se contente du monde visible et immédiat. Il est évident que les nécessités et les besoins de l'organisme le contraignent à demeurer au niveau des préoccupations matérielles et présentes. Manger, boire, dormir et se chauffer, ainsi que Baudelaire les énumère, sont autant de réponses à des besoins qui s'expriment physiquement et en un temps donné. Par ailleurs, il nous dit que « le goût de plaisir nous attache au présent ». [...] Il est physique ; il est immédiat.¹⁰⁰

Natural pleasure, as Baudelaire qualifies it, reinforces man's connection to the present. It also imposes the restrictions of time and space that rule man's terrestrial existence. These restrictions have the capacity to stifle a man's spirit and create a prison out of the body if they are not counterbalanced. Man is capable of surviving if he engages only his terrestrial nature, but for those, like Baudelaire, who seek something more, escape is possible by engaging the second nature—that of the spirit and the imagination :

L'imagination du poète est une faculté de voir ; ce qui explique que « l'imagination active » perçoive tout, sans raisonnements, sans déductions. Elle peut, par son œil poétique, extraire le caractère poétique de toutes choses, parce qu'elle introduit « de la poésie dans toutes les fonctions de l'art ».¹⁰¹

By utilizing the imagination as a viewer through which one can perceive a new world, Baudelaire was able to create his own *au-delà*. The *imagination active* is the means by which dream and action can be united in Baudelaire's world.

Baudelaire believed that the world that is visible to man, the real world, is a world of signs. Man is incapable of appreciating the significance of the real world signs without being in the realm of dreams. In passing from this world to the other, the imagination follows the path indicated by the sign.¹⁰² In following the direction indicated by the natural signs, imagination constructs an idealistic version of the real world. The

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 77.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 82.

¹⁰² Ibid. 87.

imagination stays loyal to the orientation of the original sign:

[...] les signes et les images sont à la portée de l'homme naturel. Ils le sont parce qu'ils font partie de l'univers visible. Nous n'inventons rien dans cette affirmation puisque c'est Baudelaire lui-même qui écrivait: « Tout l'univers visible n'est qu'un magasin d'images et de signes. » L'imagination créatrice ne consiste donc pas en une sensibilité à ces images et à ces signes. [...] Elle n'est pas, par contre, la « fantaisie », créatrice d'êtres invraisemblables sans attaches avec l'univers visible. L'imagination de l'artiste est celle qui choisit de « tirer l'éternel du transitoire ». Elle ne crée pas un idéal imaginaire, pur de toute la limaille de sa ciselure. Au contraire, tout ce qu'elle crée est lesté d'une épaisseur de modernité. « Cet élément transitoire, fugitif, dont les métamorphoses sont si fréquentes, vous n'avez pas le droit, nous avertit Baudelaire, de le mépriser ou de vous en passer. [...] L'imagination créatrice ne remplit donc pas une fonction de récurrence, et son but n'est pas de créer un idéal pur, sans vêtement naturel. Au fait, elle ne crée rien du tout. [...] Le travail de l'imagination consiste à reconstruire le monde. Elle ne crée pas ses matériaux, elle les recueille dans la nature visible.¹⁰³

This imaginary world is not entirely illusory; it maintains its basis in reality. The imagination does not destroy the old world and create its replacement; it simply adds a new dimension and value. It is difficult to comprehend the creation of this world. An understanding comes from a willingness to accept that things are not merely as they appear. Baudelaire calls this the “domaine de l'impalpable et d'imaginaire où tout [...] ne vaut que par ce que l'homme y ajoute de son âme.” If one desires to attain this world, it is imperative that one let the imagination dictate the course and incorporates one's own soul into the construction.¹⁰⁴

The role of the imagination in Baudelaire's construction of this new universe can be likened to the effect of an illuminating light. The imagination allows man to see new images and feel new emotions. The goal of the imagination is to attribute to everything in the real world a significance that is unattainable without imagination and dreams. Baudelaire sought to convey that there exists a world, his world, where the natural and

¹⁰³ Ibid. 83-4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 97.

the imaginary are superimposed.

Chapter 5

Un Silence d'Éternité

“Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là: c’est l’unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l’horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. [...] Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise.

Mais enivrez-vous.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Charles Baudelaire, “Enivrez-vous,” Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 148.

For Baudelaire, the natural world that is visible to man is constituted of symbols that man must interpret. Baudelaire believed that all of nature was hieroglyphs, which indicated the existence of the other world that he so desperately sought. With imagination, man can decipher the symbols that exist all around him. After deciphering these symbols, and only after, it is possible to construct what Baudelaire called “la véritable réalité spirituelle.” This is why Baudelaire believed that true reality lay only in dreams; man needs an altered, heightened mental state in order to be able to decode nature’s symbols.¹⁰⁶ While the real world is a world of action, Baudelaire’s idealistic construction joins action with reverie to create a spiritually “superior” plane of existence.

There are perhaps no better examples of Baudelaire’s corresponding world to be found than in his works *Rêve Parisien* and *La Chambre Double*. Each illustrates the construction of the above-discussed alternate realm and its destruction by the intercession of reality.

Rêve Parisien¹⁰⁷

À Constantin Guys

I

De ce terrible paysage,
Tel que jamais mortel n’en vit,
Ce matin encore l’image,
Vague et lointaine, me ravit.

Le sommeil est plein de miracles!
Par un caprice singulier,
J’avais banni de ces spectacles
Le végétal irrégulier.

Et, peintre fier démon génie
Je savourais dans mon tableau
L’enivrante monotonie

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 98.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Ed. Frédéric de Scitivaux. (Paris : Larousse, 2001) 188-90.

Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau.

Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades,
C'était un palais infini,
Plein de basins et de cascades
Tombant dans l'or mat ou bruni;

Et des cataractes pesantes,
Comme des rideaux de cristal,
Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
A des murailles de métal.

Non d'arbres, mais de colonnades
Les étangs dormants s'entouraient,
Où de gigantesques naiads,
Comme des femmes se miraient.

Des nappes d'eau s'épanchaient, bleues,
Entre des quais roses et verts,
Pendant des millions de lieues,
Vers les confins de l'univers;

C'étaient des pierres inouïes
Et des flots magiques; c'étaient
D'immenses glaces éblouies
Par tout ce qu'elles reflétaient!

Insouciant et taciturnes,
Des Ganges, dans le firmament,
Versaient le trésor de leurs urnes
Dans des gouffres de diamant.

Architecte de mes féeries,
Je faisais, à ma volonté,
Sous un tunnel de pierreries
Passer un océan dompté;

Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
Dans le rayon cristallisé.

Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
De soleil, même au bas du ciel,
Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel!

Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
 Planait (terrible nouveauté
 Tout pour l'œil, rien pour les oreilles!)
 Un silence d'éternité.

II

En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
 J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis
 Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme,
 La pointe des soucis maudits;

La pendule aux accents funèbres
 Sonnait brutalement midi,
 Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
 Sur le triste monde engourdi.

Baudelaire's *Rêve Parisien* is an excellent example of his "escapist" themed poetry. As discussed above, Baudelaire created in his life and works an entirely alternative realm of consciousness. This alternate universe proved much more tolerable than the harsh reality of Baudelaire's actual life in Paris.

An initial reading of Baudelaire's *Rêve Parisien* reveals it to be centered on a flight from reality facilitated by, in this particular instance, a dream. The first stanza sets the mood for the rest of the poem. The poet is fascinated by the dream world that he is forced to depart upon waking. The poem incorporates images of the painter and the architect in addition to the poet. These images indicate to the reader that again, in this imaginary realm, dreaming is linked to the creation of something substantive. Each of these figures leaves behind his own legacy, his own language. Be it a beautiful building, a tableau or a poem, Baudelaire is stressing the active, creative aspect of imagination throughout this poem. He is in the throes of reverie, and yet he is creating. The reader must also be aware that the existence of the poem itself is physical evidence of the poet's

action. His use of language has been captured on paper, a testament to the poet's ability to reconcile action and reverie.

In the first lines of the poem, the morning causes *ce terrible paysage* to dissipate leaving the poet to delight in only the vaguest of memories:

De ce terrible paysage,
Tel que jamais mortel n'en vit,
Ce matin encore l'image,
Vague et lointaine, me ravit.

He is left with only an image, but that image has already, for the reader, been captured as text. The fleeting vision has been pinned down by the poet in text as part of his legacy to the reader. In his dreams, the poet envisions a landscape that is unknown to any other human being. The world of his dreams is unique to the poet's own personality but through his poetry, he has created a language that is readable by countless others. The capturing of his dreams in text allows for unrestricted access to his dream world. He has fashioned, in his dream, an alternate city, a dream city that dispenses with all that the poet finds wrong with the city of his waking life.

The third stanza establishes the poet as the sole creator of this dream realm. The miraculous nature of sleeping and dreaming has allowed the poet to assume almost godlike powers in the creation of his own world. The proud artist is intoxicated by the monotony of his creation:

[.] peintre fier de mon génie,
Je savourais dans mon tableau
L'enivrante monotonie
Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau.

Line 11 describing the poet's love of consistency is confusing due to the poet's choice of the word *monotonie*. One typically associates monotony with boredom and lethargy but, as was seen in *Le Cygne*, Baudelaire was himself terrified and disgusted by the changes Paris was undergoing at the time. He thus directly opposes *his* ever-changing, dynamic reality with a much more static fantasy.

Baudelaire continues in the following stanzas to describe the city he has created in his dreams. Line 13 calls the city "Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades". The use of Babel as a comparison for the poet's creation proves quite interesting in light of an understanding of the reference's biblical origins. Babel is the subject of Genesis 11:1-9:

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.¹⁰⁸

The relevance of this biblical reference to Baudelaire's poem has several dimensions. One must first comment again on the centrality of language. It functions here as something tangible and forceful as it does in poetry. Language is capable of assuming a concrete form, powerful in its capacity to exert its influence. The city's construction is a laborious process that yields a glorious testament to man's strength and will, much as

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 11:1-9 KJV

Baudelaire's dream city is a testament to his genius and creative power. The people constructed the tower of Babel as a means by which they could achieve a status equal with that of the Lord. The tower is a concrete representation of this biblical paradox. Created and adored by their God, the people nonetheless seek to surpass divine creation by their earthly endeavors. The people's hubris results in their being cast into confusion by their Lord who makes them incapable of understanding one another, and they are scattered across the globe. The overbearing pride for which the people of Babel are punished is very much present in the character of the poet. The people considered themselves to be capable of an act worthy of God; this same type of pride is seen constantly throughout the poem as shall be shown below. However, the reader is given the distinct impression that while the poet is marveling at his glorious masterpiece, he is also very much aware of the perversity of his creation and its impending destruction; in this way, he differs from the ignorant inhabitants of Babel. The fates of both Babel and poet are mirrored in the final stanza of part I where the realization is made that this world has "Tout pour l'œil, rien pour les oreilles!" As was the case in Babel, the perfection of the visual is perverted by the failure of the aural.

The dream world, despite the looming onset of reality, appears to the poet as *the* idyllic metropolis. In his world, everything is geometrically uniform, complemented by the presence of the numerous bodies of water described, even in their fluidity, in oddly static terms. This imagery emphasizes the balance that Baudelaire sought to achieve in life. He sought a "static-ization" of the changing, turbulent world around him. Interesting to note is the incorporation of crystal and metal in the fifth quatrain:

Et des cataractes pesantes,
Comme des rideaux de cristal,
Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
A des murailles de métal.

Benjamin offers an interesting perspective on the phenomenon of the incorporation of glass into architecture:

These ‘marvelous illusions’ involved, in particular, the use of glass to produce, through transparency and reflection, forms of perspectival play and optical phantasmagoria, the ‘*fata morgana*’ of the modern metropolis. Although Benjamin was enthusiastic about the radical promise of glass architecture in overcoming the dismal seclusion of the bourgeois interior, the new visibility provided by the glass of the arcade was of a fundamentally different order. The arcade was an example of, not an antidote to, private space, a locus of the exclusive and of exclusion.¹⁰⁹

Glass adds an air of exclusivity to this realm. As with Benjamin’s arcades, glass is used here to indicate that this world is very much a private space, a space not physically accessible to just anyone. Also, the incorporation of crystal creates the impression of fragility. One can thus infer that while the world is protectively encased, the solitude that reigns can easily be penetrated and broken. This same stanza references the use of metal as well. Sartre’s comment on Baudelaire’s use of metal imagery reflects upon the entirety of the poem, revealing the motivations behind Baudelaire’s imagery:

C’est que le métal et, d’une façon générale, le minéral lui renvoient l’image de l’esprit. Par suite des limites de notre puissance imaginative, tous ceux qui ont, pour opposer l’esprit à la vie et au corps, été amenés à s’en former une image non biologique, ont nécessairement eu recours au règne de l’inanimé : lumière, froid, transparence, stérilité. De même que Baudelaire retrouve dans les « bêtes immondes » ses mauvaises pensées réalisées et objectivées, le métal le plus brillant, le plus poli, celui qui laisse le moins de prise, l’acier lui paraîtra toujours l’objectivation exacte de sa Pensée en général. S’il a cette tendresse pour la mer, c’est que c’est un minéral mobile. Brillante, inaccessible et froide, avec ce mouvement pur et comme immatériel, ces formes qui se succèdent, ce changement sans rien qui change et parfois, cette transparence, elle offre la

¹⁰⁹ Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) 131.

meilleure image de l'esprit. Ainsi, par haine de la vie, Baudelaire est amené à choisir dans la matérialisation pure des symboles de l'immatériel.¹¹⁰

Metal is thus representative of Baudelaire's love of the eternal and unchanging; it symbolizes his views on life as does his depiction of the ocean. He loves the ocean for its ability to ceaselessly change without ever actually being altered. Both metal and water possess, as well, the ability to reflect the spirit in its best light, a quality to which Baudelaire obviously clings.

The utilization of the water imagery serves as well to illustrate another of the dream city's interesting characteristics; the city of Baudelaire's dream contains elements of the eternal and the endless:

Des nappes d'eau s'épanchaient, bleues,
 Entre des quais roses et verts,
 Pendant des millions de lieues,
 Vers les confins de l'univers.

The water in the poem spreads out for millions of miles towards the edge of the universe. These lines attribute to the dream city a quality of expansiveness and infinity that the true Paris lacked. Baudelaire's Paris was oftentimes suffocating and oppressive to the poet's soul; the city created in his dreams compensates for reality in the extreme. *Le Cygne* shows that Baudelaire identifies with the uncaged swan. The creature has been set free to roam what is a seemingly endless terrain, and yet, it finds itself completely at odds with its newly attained freedom. In much this sense, Baudelaire incorporates the feeling of never ending space to demonstrate his ability to exert control over his environment, even if only in a dream. As the "swan," Baudelaire is incapable of navigating his environment, but in his dream world even the most overwhelming liberty is manageable; he has also attained that which was lacking in *Le Cygne*, an infinite source of water. The infinite

¹¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Baudelaire. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947) 125.

qualities of the water provide as well an amorphous backdrop against which the geometry of the architecture is thrown into relief.

Baudelaire's use of water conveys the existence of an eternal source from which creation can spring. This eternal source is repeatedly embodied in water imagery, but it is actually representative of poetry itself--the water, in its function, is poetry. In poetry, Baudelaire found an endless resource. His imagination filled him with images and ideas, and it was through poetry that he was able to give form to his creation. Without that outlet, it might have been impossible for Baudelaire to link reverie and action. Poetry provided the means by which his action could take form and be left behind as a path for the reader to follow.

Returning to the poem itself, most noticeable is the absence of any type of living organism save the poet. The poet underscores the fact that in his world he has done away with the irregularity of living things in exchange for the uniformity of stone, metal and water in lines 7 and 8, "J'avais banni de ces spectacles/ Le végétal irrégulier". One can again draw a parallel between this imagery and the imagery of *Le Cygne*. Baudelaire clings to that which is cold and lifeless. Like the swan's cage, the safety of materials like stone and metal precludes the isolation he feels when surrounded by living beings. Incapable of identifying with mankind, Baudelaire has turned to the inanimate as a means by which he can feel comfortable. Baudelaire is the ultimate master of his dream universe. Here, he is capable of creating and dictating at his whim. The reader can view this dream as the ultimate in wish fulfillment. All of the problems of Baudelaire's life that have been discussed above make no appearance in this dream realm except if they are incorporated to exhibit his newly achieved, however fleeting, dominance over them.

The final four stanzas of the poem's first section serve to create a feeling of buildup towards a moment of climax. The poet asserts again and again his mastery over

this universe of his own, personal creation. Architect of his own fantasies, the poet succeeds in bending even the oceans to his will. The forcing of the ocean through a tunnel casts the idea of water imagery in this poem into another light:

Architecte de mes féeries,
Je faisais, à ma volonté,
Sous un tunnel de pierreries
Passer un océan dompté;

Here, Baudelaire is forcing that which has previously symbolized the endless and eternal into a tunnel. The ocean has been dominated. Baudelaire has again imposed control on an element of fluidity and change. The ocean with its unpredictable nature is at once a symbol of the poet's newfound freedom in dreams because of its endless qualities and nevertheless an example of how, even in dreams, the poet's soul tends toward the static:

Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
Dans le rayon cristallisé

Baudelaire introduces an interesting twist to his perfect world in the final two stanzas of part I:

Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
De soleil, même au bas du ciel,
Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel!

Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
Planait (terrible nouveauté
Tout pour l'œil, rien pour les oreilles!)
Un silence d'éternité.

His world receives no celestial light. There are no stars and no evidence of the sun's existence; each object is illuminated by an inner fire. The sun can be understood here to

represent a guiding, nurturing force, perhaps God, perhaps some other being, but regardless, it is indicative of creative power and control; this force has been eliminated from Baudelaire's world. The poet is the sole master in this realm, bowing to no one. There is, as well, no sound in this world. This fact harkens back to the Babel reference in which sound was an element of confusion and a destructive force. Silence bears down upon the poet in all its terrible nothingness. He has chosen to eliminate the presence of living things and has forced the water to retreat. He is left with a beautiful world bereft of sound, which, while bizarre, seems appropriate.¹¹¹

The fear of the eternal that has been discussed above manifests itself again in the silence; the *silence d'éternité* is overwhelming. It is at this point that reality makes her intercession. Dreams are silent. The mind creates visual images but no true sound. The reader realizes at this moment that the poet has recognized the illusory nature of his world and must return to the world in which he has left his body, a world in which time and history weigh as insufferable burdens on the soul. The dream ends, and the escape has been terminated. Lloyd provides the reader with a concise summary of what has been accomplished through the dream:

The structure of the escape seems pretty clear: setting out on the inspiration of wine or hashish, opium or art, the poet induces a dream of powerful splendor that abruptly ends, dropping him back into a bleak, grim world of limits and constraints. Those limits seem all the more constricting in comparison with the vast and unearthly beauties just conjured up, the play of light on liquid [...] the sense of infinite space and time against which the architecture imposes its meaning. But there is a gritty courage in Baudelaire's determined response and in his refusal to let himself be overwhelmed by the dull realities of the daily routine; he analyses their causes and seeks out the esthetic lessons that can be extracted from them.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Lloyd 88.

¹¹² Lloyd 88.

As Lloyd describes above, the poet is abruptly ripped from his dream world and forced to again confront the reality of his life. Part II of the poem reveals the terrible reality of the coming of daylight and the abandonment of the poet's glorious construction:

En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
 J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis
 Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme,
 La pointe des soucis maudits;

La pendule aux accents funèbres
 Sonnait brutalement midi,
 Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
 Sur le triste monde engourdi.

His eyes open, filled with fire; this echoes the line above in which he describes the personal fire that illuminates his creations and functions as a substitute for the sun. The poet himself contains that same *feu personnel*; the remnants of the fire's brilliance is visible in his eyes upon waking. He is forced to recognize the disparities between the world from which he has just departed and the world in which he now finds himself. He is physically aware of the worries of everyday life creeping back into his soul.

The real world, which makes its entrance into the poem during the final stanzas, is completely at odds with the dream world. The poet is forced to look upon the horror that is his life with no hope of ever achieving the creation of a world like that of his dreams. Baudelaire sets up another opposition between dream and reality when he describes "La pendule aux accents funèbres/ sonnait brutalement midi [...]". It is this sound of time that rips him from his dream. The absence of sound that had proven so inexplicably marvelous in the dream city is sharply contrasted with the brutality of the cuckoo clock chiming noon. The presence of the clock opposes the timelessness of the

other realm as well; in the world of dreams the poet, in his infinite power, created eternity while in reality he is forced to obey the chiming of the clock.

Chapter 6

La Vie, l'Insupportable, l'Implacable Vie!

“Et pendant quelques instants je m’obstinai à vouloir comprendre ce mystère; mais bientôt l’irrésistible Indifférence s’abattit sur moi, et j’en fus plus lourdement accablé qu’il ne l’étaient eux-mêmes par leurs écrasantes Chimères.”¹¹³

¹¹³ Charles Baudelaire, “Chacun sa Chimère,” Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 124.

The idea of the construction of a new world is depicted as well in Baudelaire's prose poem *La Chambre Double*. This prose poetry takes up the same theme of escape to an alternate world that is seen in *Rêve Parisien*:

La Chambre Double¹¹⁴

Une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement *spirituelle*, où l'atmosphère stagnante est légèrement teintée de rose et de bleu.

L'âme y prend un bain de paresse aromatisé par le regret et le désir.—C'est quelque chose de crépusculaire, de bleuâtre et de rosâtre ; un rêve de volupté pendant une éclipse.

Les meubles ont des formes allongées, prostrées, alanguies. Les meubles ont l'air de rêver ; on les dirait doués d'une vie somnambulique, comme le végétal et le minéral. Les étoffes parlent une langue muette, comme les fleurs, comme les ciels, comme les soleils couchants.

Sur les murs nulle abomination artistique. Relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un blasphème. Ici, tout a la suffisante clarté et la délicieuse obscurité de l'harmonie.

Une senteur infinitésimale du choix le plus exquis, à laquelle se mêle une très légère humidité, nage dans cette atmosphère, où l'esprit sommeillant est bercée par des sensations de serre chaude.

La mousseline pleut abondamment devant les fenêtres et devant le lit ; elle s'épanche en cascades neigeuses. Sur ce lit est couchée l'Idole, la souveraine des rêves. Mais comment est-elle ici ? Qui l'a amenée ? quel pouvoir magique l'a installée sur ce trône de rêverie et de volupté ? Qu'importe ? là voilà ! je la reconnais.

Voilà bien ces yeux dont la flamme traverse le crépuscule ; ces subtiles et terribles *mirettes*, que je reconnais à leur effrayante malice ! Elles attirent, elles subjuguent, elles dévorent le regard de l'imprudent qui les contemple. Je les ai souvent étudiées, ces étoiles noires qui commandent la curiosité et l'admiration.

A quel démon bienveillant dois-je d'être ainsi entouré de mystère, de silence, de paix et de parfums ? O béatitude ! ce que nous nommons généralement la vie, même dans son expansion la plus heureuse, n'a rien de commun avec cette vie suprême dont j'ai maintenant connaissance et que je savoure minute par minute, seconde par seconde !

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 !

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.

Et puis un Spectre est entré. C'est un huissier qui vient me torturer au nom de la loi ; une infâme concubine qui vient crier misère et ajouter les trivialités de sa vie aux

¹¹⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "La Chambre Double," *Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies*. Ed. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. (New York : Dover Publications, 1992) 118-22.

douleurs de la mienne ; ou bien la saute-ruisseau d'un directeur de journal qui réclame la suite du manuscrit.

La chambre paradisiaque, l'idole, la souveraine des rêves, la *Sylphide*, comme disait le grand René, toute cette magie a disparu au coup brutal frappé par le Spectre.

Horreur ! je me souviens ! je me souviens ! Oui ! ce taudis, ce séjour de l'éternel ennui, est bien le mien. Voici les meubles sots, poudreux, écornés : la cheminée sans flamme et sans braise, souillée de crachats ; les tristes fenêtres où la pluie a tracé des sillons dans la poussière ; les manuscrits, raturés ou incomplets ; l'almanach où le crayon a marqué les dates sinistres !

Et ce parfum d'un autre monde, dont je m'enivrais avec une sensibilité perfectionnée, hélas ! il est remplacé par une fétide odeur de tabac mêlée à je ne sais quelle nauséabonde moisissure. On respire ici maintenant le ranci de la désolation. Dans ce monde étroit, mais si plein de dégoût, un seul objet connu me sourit : la fiole de laudanum ; une vieille et terrible amie ; comme toutes les amies, hélas ! féconde en caresses et en traîtrises.

Oh ! oui ! le Temps a reparu ; le Temps règne en souverain maintenant, et avec le hideux vieillard est revenu tout son démoniaque cortège de Souvenirs, de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d'Angoisses, de Cauchemars, de Colères et de Névroses.

Je vous assure que les secondes maintenant sont fortement et solennellement accentués, et chacune, en jaillissant de la pendule, dit :--« Je suis la Vie, l'insupportable, l'implacable Vie ! »

Il n'y a qu'une Seconde dans la vie humaine qui ait mission d'annoncer une *bonne nouvelle*, la bonne nouvelle qui cause à chacun une inexplicable peur.

Oui ! le Temps règne ; il a repris sa brutale dictature. Et il me pousse, comme si j'étais un bœuf, avec son double aiguillon.—« Et hue donc ! bourrique ! Sue donc, esclave ! Vis donc, damné ! »

This work is another example of the transformation of reality into dream. It is interesting to note here that again stagnation, "l'atmosphère stagnante," is treated in favorable terms while dynamic change is noticeably absent. The passing of time, as was seen in the previous analyses, is highly unfavorable. The utmost pleasure can be achieved in this room through idleness and reverie. Idleness, in this case, functions as a cleansing material, washing away regret and desire. With the passage of time comes irremediable change and irrevocable loss.

The importance of silence, seen in *Rêve Parisien*, is repeated again in Baudelaire's prose. The fabrics in the room "parlent une langue muette." Sound is only described in pleasurable terms when it is absent. Everything in the room is languid and

surreal, transformed by the narrator's dreaming. Baudelaire attributes to every object in the room a higher, spiritual quality that he alone can recognize through his dreams.

Baudelaire's room contains, as well, the figure of the Idol. She has been brought to the room and placed on the bed by some unknown force. Baudelaire is completely enraptured by the beauty of his Idol. Special attention is drawn to her eyes:

Voilà bien ces yeux dont la flamme traverse le crépuscule; ces subtiles et terribles *mirettes*, que je reconnais à leur effrayante malice! Elles attirent, elles subjuguent, elles dévorent le regard de l'imprudent qui les contemple. Je les ai souvent étudiées, ces étoiles noires qui commandent la curiosité et l'admiration.¹¹⁵

The focus on the depth of the Idol's gaze is akin to the stress placed on the anonymous woman's regard in *À Une Passante*. The poet stands transfixed by the woman's eyes, and he revels in the moment. He says that he savors the moment "minute par minute, seconde par seconde!" With this one simple phrase, the poet has completely shattered the mystery and wonder of the chamber.¹¹⁶ By commenting that he is aware of the passing seconds, the poet has introduced a temporal constraint into a previously endless, eternal and uninhibited realm. Much as the clock does in *Rêve Parisien*, the mention of time in this instance introduces the destructive force of reality:

The eternal enemy, Time, [...] surges triumphantly back into the room, bringing with him the trivial demands and exigencies of the quotidian. Now the eternity that holds sway is one of boredom and ugliness, the perfume that seemed otherworldly is merely that of stale tobacco and nauseating damp, and whereas the dream room contained no artistic representations, leaving the imagination free to wander, now the traces of mundane reality are everywhere.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Lloyd 82.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 83.

The reader experiences the same sense of isolation and distance from the real world in this work as was commented upon in *Rêve Parisien*. The room is depicted as if the product of an ideal dream. One cannot lose sight of the fact, however, that, from the outset, the poem's title implies the room has a second, darker, side:

Et ce parfum d'un autre monde, dont je m'enivrais avec une sensibilité perfectionnée, hélas ! il est remplacé par une fétide odeur de tabac mêlée à je ne sais quelle nauséabonde moisissure. On respire ici maintenant le ranci de la désolation. Dans ce monde étroit, mais si plein de dégoût, un seul objet connu me sourit : la fiole de laudanum ; une vieille et terrible amie ; comme toutes les amies, hélas ! féconde en caresses et en traîtrises.

The stark reality of the room, revealed at the end, is transformed by the poet's imagination, into a dream. Imagination takes the misery of the real room and builds an idealized version of it in the poet's mind.¹¹⁸ The double chamber is constructed in the exact same fashion as Baudelaire's personal universe, discussed above:

L'homme, contraint par l'espace, vit dans un « monde étroit » où « le temps règne en souverain ». Ce réduit de l'univers visible est tout de même un magasin d'images et de signes : les meubles sont sots, les dates, sinistres, le temps exerce « sa brutale dictature » et la senteur évoque « le ranci de la désolation ». L'homme naturel ne reste pas impassible devant ces images et ces signes. Il éprouve des sensation de « dégoût » et d' « éternel ennui ». Il est piétiné par un « cortège de Souvenirs, de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d'Angoisses, de Cauchemars, de Colères et de Névroses ». C'est sa vie terrestre dans une chambre réelle que l'imagination créatrice n'a point transformée. Il suffit que cette dernière donne « une place et une valeur » nouvelles à ces éléments pour que ce « taudis » devienne un paradis.¹¹⁹

The implications of this work are evident. The disgust the poet feels when confronted by the reality of his life prompts an episode of reverie that results in the construction of a

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Melançon 90-1.

more ideal room.¹²⁰ This is precisely what Baudelaire sought to achieve throughout his life in Paris. The city lost the allure of paradise and became instead a noisy, unfamiliar hell. Baudelaire sought recourse to poetry and women, but it was the state achieved through dreaming, and intensified by drugs, that allowed him to truly escape *la vie terrestre*. The creation of Baudelaire's own realm of consciousness was necessitated by his incompatibility with the world around him. As with the majority of his relationships, Baudelaire knew the most incredible ecstasy and the most suffocating depression in his relationship to Paris:

Sa correspondance est un long contrepoint de cris d'amour et d'exclamations haineuses: « maudite ville », dont il a « horreur », où il mène une « cruelle vie »-- « Horrible vie ! Horrible ville ! »--où il dépense trop, et perd les neuf dixièmes de son temps, où la face humaine le tyrannise, où l'on est « rissolé » en été, couvert de boue en hiver, qu'il ne peut traverser qu'en dédommageant ses créanciers, « où tout se répète comme dans un village », où les « bons mots [...] de la stupidité parisienne » ont plus de succès que le meilleur de ses poèmes—Paris son « enfer », le mot revient plusieurs fois sous sa plume, et il a raison d'écrire à sa mère le 23 décembre 1865 : « je soutiens que Paris n'a jamais été juste envers moi, --que jamais on ne m'a payé, en estime, non plus qu'en argent, CE QUI M'EST DÛ ». ¹²¹

Baudelaire's poetry offers the reader a unique window into a troubled soul. Baudelaire was not an easy man to understand nor has he become any more comprehensible after more than a century has passed. He grew up in a time of almost constant political upheaval and tremendous social change, but his soul belonged to the past. His dislike of change made him incompatible with the real world. It seems he was simply not made to live during such dynamic times. This sentiment is made evident in his poetry as his desire to attain something more, something beyond the banality of everyday existence.

¹²⁰ Lloyd 91

¹²¹ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire/ Paris* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, éditions paris-musées, 1994) 27-8).

Baudelaire sought to escape the real world for a world of his own creation. Through a variety of means Baudelaire “elevated” his consciousness to a point at which he was able to perceive an *au-delà*, a realm in which imagination ruled and the painful banality of his existence was dulled. His is a realm of beauty, intoxication, calm and quiet. Baudelaire’s creation reflected the inadequacies and disappointments of his waking life. His dream realm incorporated all that he could not find in the real world. The desperation when faced with reality that is present in Baudelaire’s poetry is indicative of a *need* to escape. Baudelaire could not shoulder the burden of a sober existence. The world, with its changes and its dearth of baudelairien beauty, was intolerable. The realm of existence that Baudelaire created for himself was truly the only means by which he could survive reality. The world of *Le Cygne* and *À Une Passante* mandated the creation of the world of *Rêve Parisien* and *La Chambre Double*. Two worlds, superimposed on one another, one concrete and one a mere concept--one a reality and one the fabrication of a brilliant, yet tortured soul. Beauty may be fleeting in Baudelaire’s world, but the moments spent *au-delà* justify the existence of the real world. If reality exists only so that imagination may build upon it, the reality must be suffered.

Baudelaire’s *esprit* did not dwell among the inhabitants of Paris. He inhabited a psychological island of exile, separated from the city he once knew but always loved. Exiled from his own city by the forces of change and modernity, Baudelaire fled to his own kingdom, a world built according to his whim which, when visited, enabled him to endure the harshness of his earthly existence.

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