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**SENSE AND SCENT:  
AN EXPLORATION OF OLFACTORY MEANING**

Edited by  
**Bronwen Martin, Felizitas Ringham**

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## **CHAPTER IV**

The Smell of God:  
Scent Trails from Ficino to Baudelaire

*Nathalie Wourm*

God has a smell. Or rather, our sense of smell can bring us to a deeper knowledge of God. This is one aspect of a theory which runs through much of European history from the Renaissance onwards, with fluctuating intensity and with fundamental variations. It has been referred to, principally, as the theory of signatures, the theory of universal analogy, and the theory of correspondences, and is originally derived from Plato's philosophy of Ideas. The most common thread of the doctrine is that there are correspondences between the material and the spiritual worlds and that the material world can therefore be read like a book, revealing the secrets of the spiritual world. Another common thread of the doctrine is that the senses, which diffusely allow us to experience the material world, can be united as one, enabling our complete grasp of spiritual harmony, of the ideal world. The senses have usually figured highly in the doctrine of correspondences in general, as enabling this leap from the material to the spiritual. But individual senses have enjoyed varying degrees of attention throughout time. Smell has not been the most popular of them, but it is markedly emphasised by two users of the doctrine, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist, theologian and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, and the French Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire.

What I attempt here is a short history of the idea of a spiritual scent, from the Neoplatonist thinkers of the fifteenth century to the present day.

We have all seen angels, but few of us know what they smell like. The perfume of angels, of God's own thoughts, of heaven's blossoms and of all manner of spiritual things, is available to us on earth, according to a number of philosophers, mystics and poets. The journey through minds of the theory of correspondences has obscure beginnings, but is a consequence of the Platonic hierarchy of body and soul, of a sensible world and an ideal world, and of the principle of the inherence of the non-corporeal in the

corporeal. The theory relates to a quest for the spiritual meaning which is contained in each sensible object, positing that there exists a conduit between the divine and the earthly. Deriving partly from Aristotle and Plotemy's cosmology, the foundations of the theory of correspondences appear in the works of Marsilio Ficino, the fifteenth century Florentine who began the modern tradition of Neoplatonism. Ficino elaborates the idea of a world soul inherent in the cosmos, and of a system of analogies and influences between the celestial, the natural and the human worlds, which is accessible to our understanding.<sup>1</sup> Ficino distinguishes six faculties of the soul relating to cognition, for which he establishes a hierarchy based on their distance to God. Reason resembles God and is therefore closest to him, while sight and hearing follow as the other superior faculties of the mind, because their cognitive reach is far superior to that of the three other senses. Smell is the highest ranking faculty of the body because it can apprehend things from a distance less immediate than that of taste and touch. Ficino uses the Platonic view of man as a little world, a microcosm, corresponding analogically to the universe, the macrocosm, to explain how the sense of smell, situated between the ears and the tongue, as though between air and water, pertains to vapors which are a mixture of air and water.<sup>2</sup>

Ficino's revival of Platonist and Neoplatonist philosophy contributed to spreading the core belief in an analogy between the body of man and the cosmos, and between the visible world and the spiritual realms. This latter view that there are open channels between the material domain of perception and the celestial world is the one that concerns us most, as it lays the emphasis on the role of the senses in the exploration of divine meaning. However, we shall see later that Swedenborg fuses the two concepts by also drawing an analogy between the body of man and the spiritual world, which is of interest to us because he uses, for instance, the physical description of a human nose to describe a particular region of heaven. It is important to mention also, that the Neoplatonist cosmology had found its way into the Kabbalah, so that there exist two sources of the theory of correspondences. The early endorsers of the doctrine tended to be influenced by both, as did its first major exponent, the sixteenth-century Swiss physician

and alchemist Paracelsus.<sup>3</sup> The correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm are used extensively in Paracelsus' medical and philosophical works.<sup>4</sup> But Paracelsus is of little concern to us here insofar as he shows no particular interest in the role of the senses in connection with the theory.

The first obvious occurrence of the idea of a spiritual scent is to be found in the works of seventeenth-century German theologian and mystic Jacob Boehme, who was influenced both by Paracelsus and the Kabbalah.<sup>5</sup> In *The Signature of All Things* (1622), Boehme develops the principle that God is inherent in everything and acts on all things. Thus, his signature is to be found in nature, and the spiritual essence of things manifests itself externally in nature, so that nature becomes the language of God. Man can attain knowledge of the spiritual nature of things in the signature. Smell is used as one instance of such signature, and is therefore regarded as conveying spiritual understanding to man: 'an example of which you have in bushes, and other thorny and pricking briars, out of which notwithstanding a fair well-smelling blossom grows; and there lie two properties therein, viz. a pleasant and unpleasant; which overcomes, that shapes [forms or marks] the fruit'.<sup>6</sup> There is nothing elaborate in the book about the correspondences of smell, but on two particular occasions Boehme allows us to intercept a whiff of heaven as part of the intricate alchemical and cosmological discourse which is central to his system:

And paradise springs up [or opens], for the Sulphur and the salt in the Sulphur are here transmuted in the paradise, and the paradisaical joy puts itself forth in the smell and taste. This is now the head or knob of the blossoms, wherein the corn grows; the lovely smell is in one part paradisaical, viz. from the divine power, from the liberty; and on the other part earthly, according to the outward sun, and the outward world.<sup>7</sup>

Here, we have a clear example of spiritual scent, which is made available to us in nature, enabling us to catch glimpses of the eternal world. In the following quotation, we have another mention of the wonderful scent of the spiritual world, from the standpoint of heaven this time:

Thus likewise is the eternal generation of the holy mystery in great power and reprocreeation [or paradisical pullulation] where one divine fruit of the great love-desire stands with another in the divine essence; and all is as a continual love-combat or wrestling delight; a blooming of fair colours, and a pleasant ravishing smell of the divine Mercury, according to the divine nature's property, a continual good taste of love from the divine desire.<sup>8</sup>

Swedenborg and Baudelaire, the two principal proponents of the idea of a spiritual scent, did not, however, draw the elements of their doctrine of correspondences directly from Boehme. In the case of the Swedish thinker, Leibniz's *Monadology* (1714) had the most bearing.<sup>9</sup> It is essential to point out that Swedenborg was an extremely complex and obscure figure, around whom a large number of myths have been woven. It has now become clear that he was more influenced by the mainstream corpus of seventeenth and eighteenth century anatomical and philosophical works than by esoteric traditions.<sup>10</sup> The significance of Leibniz for Swedenborg is only relevant as far as the theory of correspondences as a whole is concerned. Leibniz does pick up scent as one of the senses necessary to man's understanding of the soul, in his theory of the Monads.<sup>11</sup> But it is clearly not possible to infer from this that Swedenborg's elaborate description of the correspondences of smell comes from Leibniz. This is likely to be an original development of the doctrine, possibly a direct outcome of the eighteenth-century perceptual revolution in Europe, which enhanced the status of the sense of smell in people's consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Swedenborg was a scientist and theologian, who experienced a mystic vision in which Jesus Christ commissioned him to disclose the hidden, spiritual meaning of the Bible. This he did with great zeal, interpreting verse by verse, word by word, the books of Genesis and Exodus over a period of seven years, in his *Arcana Cœlestia* (1749-1756). For this purpose, he claimed to have been given open access to heaven and hell, and to have frequent conversations with the angels. References to various smells and their spiritual meaning are dispersed throughout the volumes, but in one particularly relevant section entitled 'Continuation of the Subject Concerning Correspondence with the Grand Man;

Especially on the Correspondence of the Smell and of the Nostrils Therewith', the spiritual regions are described in terms of the physical description of a nose.<sup>13</sup> The societies of spirits which are found in the nose province of heaven correspond to people whose perception in the temporal life was of inferior quality in comparison with those who are in the part of heaven corresponding to the eye. Spirits of the nose region who infiltrate themselves in the eye region so as to gain perception of the world below (which is only available from the eye), are ensnarers who have no conscience and correspond to mucus, because they are cast down in the same way that mucus is expelled from the nose.<sup>14</sup> Swedenborg uses the concept of 'spiritual odour' to explain how God turns this region of heaven into scent so that it can be apprehended by people in the material world below:

These spheres, when it pleases the Lord, are also changed into odours; the odour itself is made very sensible. The reason why those spheres are changed into odours, is, because odour corresponds to perception; and inasmuch as perception is as it were spiritual odour, hence also the odour descends.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, spiritual odours are described as follows:

those from the perception of good are most grateful, exhaling as it were from the fragrant flowers of a garden, and from other perfumes, with such agreeableness and also variety, as is ineffable; they who are in heaven are in the spheres of such odours. But the odours from the perception of evil are most ungrateful, being fetid and stinking like those which arise from putrid waters, from excrements, and from dead bodies, and having a filthy smell like mice and vermin: they who are in hell are in the spheres of such stench; and what is wonderful, they are not sensible of the horrid smell, yea, those stench are delightful to them, and when they are in them, they are in the sphere of their delights and dainties.<sup>16</sup>

Foul smells denoting evil souls are particularly detailed. For instance, harbourers of scandal against the Lord smell of stinking water, the stupid are characterised by the stench of teeth and of burnt bone or horn, robbers and murderers have a cadaverous

odour, adulterers smell of excrement, while cruel adulterers smell both excremental and cadaverous.<sup>17</sup>

Swedenborg enjoyed tremendous popularity in late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century France, and the doctrine of correspondences came to be regarded as the Swedish thinker's own creation. In fact, it was still possible to publish articles demonstrating that he had not invented the doctrine in 1970s France.<sup>18</sup> But a recent book about Swedenborg and French literary culture argues that few people had actually read the detail of his works, and that Baudelaire, who is often seen as the main propagator of what is perceived to be Swedenborg's doctrine, had most probably had very little contact with the Swede's works.<sup>19</sup> There were many secondary sources that Baudelaire was more likely to have known, among which Balzac's *Séraphîta* (1835) is clearly fundamental.<sup>20</sup>

*Séraphîta*, a philosophical novel set in the ethereal landscape of Norway, is to a large extent an exposition of Swedenborg's theology, and integrates the theory of correspondences. The mountainous landscape in which the protagonists evolve is symbolic of the ambiguous spiritual state of the androgynous character, Séraphîta-Séraphîtüs, which is halfway between the earthly and the celestial. Séraphîta-Séraphîtüs has already left the realm of human existence, but has not yet reached her celestial destination. In this mystic novel, Balzac not only explains the theory of correspondences, he also uses it as part of his imagery, and occasionally the concept of a spiritual scent makes its way into the text. Thus, from the top of the symbolic mountain in a dreamlike Norwegian landscape, Séraphîtüs describes how he can 'breathe the thoughts of God like a perfume'.<sup>21</sup> Heaven is referred to more than once as a perfumed region, as the 'spheres of perfumes and light'.<sup>22</sup> And the unexpected perfume of an open flower in the middle of winter, or an unlikely whiff of warm air charged with the scent of larches, birches and incense, are meant to represent the presence of the celestial in the earthly.<sup>23</sup>

In *Séraphîta*, Balzac describes the analogy between the body of man and the cosmos: 'Comme l'a dit Swedenborg, *la terre est un homme*' [As Swedenborg said, *the earth is a man*], and then goes on to expound the idea of the seer as someone who finds within

himself 'des yeux plus perçants que ne le sont les yeux appliqués aux choses de la terre' [eyes more piercing than are eyes applied to earthly things].<sup>24</sup> More than once, Balzac quotes *Arcana Cœlestia*:

*les effets terrestres étant liés à leurs causes célestes, font que tout y est CORRESPONDANT et SIGNIFIANT. L'homme est le moyen d'union entre le Naturel et le Spirituel.*

[*terrestrial effects being linked to their celestial causes, mean that all there is CORRESPONDENT and SIGNIFICATORY. Man is the means of union between the Natural and the Spiritual*].

And then Balzac develops:

Les Esprits Angéliques connaissent donc essentiellement les Correspondances qui relient au ciel chaque chose de la terre... Ainsi, pour ces Esprits, tout ici-bas porte sa signifiante... Quand un homme est disposé à recevoir l'insufflation prophétique des Correspondances, elle réveille en lui l'esprit de la Parole.<sup>25</sup>

[*Angelic Spirits therefore know essentially the Correspondences which link to the heavens each thing on earth... Thus, for these Spirits, everything here below carries its significance... When a man is disposed to receive the prophetic insufflation of the Correspondences, it awakes within him the spirit of the Word*].

Towards the end of the novel, two of the characters experience the mystic harmony:

La lumière enfantait la mélodie, la mélodie enfantait la lumière, les couleurs étaient lumière et mélodie, le mouvement était un Nombre doué de la Parole; enfin, tout y était à la fois sonore, diaphane, mobile... ils trouvèrent le principe des mélodies en entendant les chants du ciel qui donnaient les sensations des couleurs, des parfums, de la pensée.<sup>26</sup>

[*Light was begetting melody, melody was begetting light, colours were light and melody, movement was a Number endowed with Speech; in short, everything there was at the same time sonorous, diaphanous, mobile... they found the principle of melody when they heard the songs of heaven which gave the sensations of colours, perfumes, and thought*].

It is certain, in this context, that the idea of a spiritual scent

could have been handed down to Baudelaire by Balzac rather than directly by Swedenborg. The much quoted passage usually used to support the idea of a direct influence from Swedenborg to Baudelaire, could be a virtually verbatim rendition of the above extracts from *Séraphîta*. In 'Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains' (1861), Baudelaire writes:

D'ailleurs Swedenborg... nous avait déjà enseigné que *le ciel est un très-grand homme*, que tout, forme, mouvement, nombre, couleur, parfum, dans le *spirituel* comme dans le *naturel*, est significatif, réciproque, converse, *correspondant*... Si nous étendons la démonstration... nous arrivons à cette vérité que tout est hiéroglyphique, et nous savons que les symboles ne sont obscurs que d'une manière relative, c'est-à-dire selon la pureté, la bonne volonté ou la clairvoyance native des âmes. Or qu'est-ce qu'un poète (je prends le mot dans son acception la plus large), si ce n'est un traducteur, un déchiffreur?<sup>27</sup>

[Indeed Swedenborg... had already taught us that *the heavens are a great man*; that everything, form, movement, number, perfume, in the *spiritual* as in the *natural*, is significatory, reciprocal, converse, *correspondent*... If we extend the demonstration... we come to this truth that everything is hieroglyphic, and we know that symbols are only obscure in a relative way, that is to say according to the native purity, good will or clairvoyance of souls. And what is a poet (I am taking the word in its largest sense), if not a translator, a decipherer?]

There were, of course, other propagators of the doctrine, such as Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Charles Fourier and Alphonse Constant, who have all contributed somewhere along the line to the formation of Baudelaire's concept of the correspondences.<sup>28</sup> And it is likely that other poets, such as Gérard de Nerval and Théophile Gautier, who is almost as attentive to the sense of smell as Baudelaire, played a role in the transmission as well.<sup>29</sup>

So when Baudelaire evokes the 'perfume of Angels' in a sonnet to the Muse, it is clear that his image is charged with the weight of a long-lasting philosophical tradition: 'Que diras-tu ce soir, pauvre âme solitaire...' is a poem celebrating an ideal woman in both the vulgar and Platonic senses. The woman acts as the

conduit between the physical world and the spiritual world, which is a source of inspiration for the poet. Thus, her glance is divine, her flesh is spiritual, and her perfume angelic:

Que diras-tu ce soir, pauvre âme solitaire,  
Que diras-tu, mon cœur, cœur autrefois flétri,  
A la très-belle, à la très-bonne, à la très-chère,  
Dont le regard divin t'as soudain refléuri?

– Nous mettrons notre orgueil à chanter ses louanges:  
Rien ne vaut la douceur de son autorité;  
Sa chair spirituelle a le parfum des Anges,  
Et son oeil nous revêt d'un habit de clarté.

Que ce soit dans la nuit et dans la solitude,  
Que ce soit dans la rue et dans la multitude,  
Son fantôme dans l'air danse comme un flambeau.

Parfois il parle et dit: «Je suis belle, et j'ordonne  
Que pour l'amour de moi vous n'aimiez que le Beau;  
Je suis l'Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone.»<sup>30</sup>

[What will you say tonight, poor solitary soul,  
What will you say, my heart, heart which was once withered,  
To the very-beautiful, to the very-good, to the very-dear,  
Whose divine glance has suddenly reflowered you?

– We will put our pride in singing her praises:  
Nothing is worth the sweetness of her authority;  
Her spiritual flesh has the perfume of Angels,  
And her eye puts on us a dress of clarity.

Whether it be in the night and in solitude,  
Whether it be in the street and in the multitude,  
Her ghost in the air dances like a torch.

Sometimes it speaks and says: “I am beautiful, and I order  
That for the love of me you love only Beauty;  
I am the guardian Angel, the Muse and the Madonna”.]

Baudelaire plays on the idea of physical desire for a woman, to present a purely Platonic attraction to the aesthetic ideal that she conveys. And indeed, the spiritual world for him here, is a

combination of the Christian idea of heaven and of the Platonist concept of Ideas. The woman or Muse allows him to see more clearly the angels, but also the idea of beauty. In one of his pages on the sense of smell in Baudelaire, Jean-Paul Sartre notes this ambiguity often found in the poems, between the carnal attraction to the woman and the quest for a world beyond:

[B]ien souvent on a l'impression qu'il 'respire' les femmes plutôt qu'il ne fait l'amour avec elles. Mais les parfums ont pour lui, en outre, ce pouvoir particulier, tout en se donnant sans réserves, d'évoquer un au-delà inaccessible. Ils sont à la fois les corps et comme une négation du corps, il y a en eux quelque chose d'insatisfait qui se fond avec le désir qu'a Baudelaire d'être perpétuellement ailleurs.

[Very often he seems to 'breathe' women rather than make love to them. But perfumes have for him, as well, this particular power, while giving themselves unreservedly, to evoke an inaccessible beyond. They are at the same time body and like a negation of body, there is in them something which is unsatisfied and which mixes with Baudelaire's desire to be perpetually somewhere else].<sup>31</sup>

And Sartre quotes 'La chevelure':

Comme d'autres esprits voguent sur la musique / Le mien, ô mon amour! nage sur ton parfum.<sup>32</sup>

[As other minds sail on music / Mine, o my love! swims on your perfume].

Perfumes are omnipresent in Baudelaire's poetry – one critic refers to the phrase 'le parfum des Anges' as a cliché<sup>33</sup> – and the sense of smell is not always used in correlation with the theory of correspondences. Baudelaire also sometimes builds on the doctrine, using olfaction as a route to heaven, but to his own idea of heaven. 'La chevelure' is a poem where the scent of a woman's hair transports the poet to a paradisiac location in the Indian Ocean. The details depicted make the place ambiguously real for there is, in counterpoint, another text about eternity, infinity and a forgotten world: 'des souvenirs dormant dans cette chevelure' [memories asleep in this hair], 'tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt' [a whole distant world, absent, almost dead], 'un

eblouissant rêve' [a dazzling dream], 'un ciel pur ou frémit l'éternelle chaleur' [a pure sky where quivers the eternal warmth], 'infinis bercements' [infinite rocking], 'l'azur du ciel immense et rond' [the azure of the sky immense and round], 'l'oasis où je rêve' [the oasis where I dream], 'où je hume à longs traits le vin du souvenir' [where I smell in long draughts the wine of memory]. Memory, here, can be taken literally as the remembrance of a past event (the poet had actually been on a voyage to the location described), but also as the evanescent recollection of eternity, glimpses of a lost paradise.

It is paradoxical, then, that Baudelaire's celebrated poem 'Correspondances', which must have largely contributed to keeping the name of Swedenborg alive in France in the twentieth-century, should owe so little to the Swede and so much to the German Romantic E.T.A. Hoffmann.<sup>34</sup> 'Correspondances' introduces another trend of the theory of correspondences, which we have not mentioned thus far. It is sometimes referred to as 'horizontal correspondences' – and opposed to the 'vertical correspondences' which characterise the analogical trajectory from the earthly to the celestial. In this case, we are dealing with a fusion of the senses, occurring on one earthly plane. The phrase can be misleading, though, for this is not simply synaesthesia, it is a type of synaesthesia which allows one to catch a glimpse of eternal harmony and unity, and so to gain access to some spiritual truth too. Baudelaire actually makes this similarity clear by describing both types of correspondences concomitantly in the sonnet. The first stanza presents nature as animated and holding some hieroglyphic meaning of a spiritual kind (it is a temple). The other three stanzas are equally concerned with such profound truths, distant and tenebrous, but these are brought about by the experience of a transference of the senses of smell, sight, hearing and touch. Perfume is, in this poem too, the preferred medium to evoke the leap from the world of the senses to the world of infinity, perhaps because of its particularly obvious ethereal nature, which suspends it between the palpable and the immaterial.

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;

L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.  
Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.  
Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
– Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,  
Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.<sup>35</sup>

[Nature is a temple where living pillars  
Sometimes let out confused words;  
Man goes through it as through forests of symbols  
Which observe him with familiar glances.  
Like long echoes which in the distance merge  
Into a dark and profound unity,  
Vast as night and as clarity,  
Perfumes, colours and sounds answer each other.  
There are perfumes fresh like the flesh of children,  
Soft as oboes, green as meadows,  
– And others, corrupt, rich and triumphant,  
Having the expansion of infinite things,  
Like amber, musk, benzoin and incense,  
Which sing the transports of the spirit and the senses].

Baudelaire himself disclosed what is clearly the main source of this correspondence of synaesthesia in a piece on colour in his *Salon de 1846*, where he provides a translation of a passage from Hoffmann's tales:

Ce n'est pas seulement en rêve, et dans le léger délire qui précède le sommeil, c'est encore éveillé, lorsque j'entends de la musique, que je trouve une analogie et une réunion intime entre les couleurs, les sons et les parfums. Il me semble que toutes ces choses ont été

engendrées par un même rayon de lumière, et qu'elles doivent se réunir dans un merveilleux concert. L'odeur des soucis bruns et rouges produit surtout un effet magique sur ma personne. Elle me fait tomber dans une profonde rêverie, et j'entends alors comme dans le lointain les sons graves et profonds du hautbois<sup>36</sup>

[It is not only in dreams, and in the light delirium which precedes sleep, it is also awake, when I hear music, that I find an analogy and an intimate reunion between colours, sounds and perfumes. It seems to me that all these things were begotten by the same ray of light, and that they must reunite in a wonderful concert. The smell of brown and red worries produces mainly a magical effect on myself. It makes me fall into a profound daydream, and I then hear as in a distance the low and profound sounds of the oboe].

Baudelaire expands on the idea of corresponding synaesthesia in a piece on Richard Wagner published in 1861. The idea is that sense transference or synaesthesia, the notion that, for instance, sound can suggest colour and vice-versa, is a result of a unity inherent in the world, 'depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité'<sup>37</sup> [Since the day God proclaimed the world as a complex and indivisible whole]. In itself, it is analogical to divine cohesion, and an illustration of it.

Synaesthetic correspondences involving smell were not anything particularly original in France by the time Baudelaire used them. Senancour, a French contemporary of Hoffmann, had actually proposed the idea that it is possible to smell sounds, in his novel *Oberman* (1804).<sup>38</sup> In a footnote, he also mentioned the idea of a harpsichord of colours, regretting the fact that no one had thought of a harpsichord of odours. This may have been an allusion to the innovative works of the Père Louis-Bertrand Castel who, in 1725, had dreamt up the details of a harpsichord producing colours instead of music.<sup>39</sup> He was also credited for extending this concept to a harpsichord of all the senses, including a harpsichord of perfumes, which Senancour may not have been aware of.<sup>40</sup> A few years later, another ecclesiastical figure, the Père Polycarpe Poncelet, described how he tried to establish a music of scents. The idea was that because of the analogy between the senses, smells, like sounds, must have something like harmonic

tones. He described in detail his difficulty in achieving such an aim as he discovered that there was a dearth of vocabulary relating to the nature of smells. He only found two *tones* in the gradation of smells, the sweet and the foul. Other than that, he found that smells were all referred to in descriptive terms, such as the smells of the rose, of the jasmine:

J'ai insinué plus d'une fois que je soupçonnois une analogie complete entre tous les sens, & j'ai conclu qu'ils devoient tous avoir leur progression harmonique... [L]es odeurs doivent avoir leurs tons harmoniques, ainsi que le son, les saveurs, les couleurs. Persuadé de cette analogie, je me promettois d'ébaucher les principes d'une Musique olfactive, comme j'avois ébauché la gamme de la Musique du goût, mais en examinant le projet de plus près, je me suis trouvé dans un embarras dont je ne compte pas sortir, non pas que les Odeurs n'ayent tout ce qu'il faut pour établir une harmonie entre des tons variés à l'infini, mais soit pénurie du côté des langues qui manquent de termes pour exprimer ces tons primitifs, soit négligence du côté des Physiologistes, qui ne les ont point encore observé [sic], je n'ai trouvé que deux termes qui énoncent deux tons ou deux odeurs primitifs [sic], le suave & le fœtide; les autres dénominations sont toutes spécifiques ou plutôt dérivées des noms des corps odorans, comme l'odeur de fleurs d'Orange, l'odeur de Rose, l'odeur de Jasmin, &c. ce qui est aussi insuffisant pour caractériser les Odeurs primitives, que si je disois le son d'un Orgue, d'un Violon, d'une Flute, pour caractériser les sons primitifs, ou bien la couleur de Bois, d'Ecarlate, d'Ardoise, pour désigner les couleurs primitifs [sic], ou bien enfin le goût de Poivre, de Sucre, de Vin, &c. pour indiquer les saveurs primitives.<sup>41</sup>

[I have suggested more than once that I suspected a complete analogy between all the senses, and I concluded that they must all have their harmonic progression... Smells must all have their harmonic tones, as much as sounds, tastes, colours. Convinced of this analogy, I promised myself I would sketch out the principles of an olfactory Music, as I had sketched out the scale of a Music of tastes, but on examining the project more closely, I found myself in a quandary which I do not expect to get out of, not that smells do not have everything needed to establish a harmony between tones

which are infinitely varied, but whether it be due to a dearth of languages which lack words to express these primitive tones, or to negligence on the part of Physiologists, who have not yet observed them, I found only two words which enunciate two tones or two primitive smells, the sweet and the foul; the other denominations are all specific or rather derived from the name of the odorous objects, such as the smell of an Orange blossom, the smell of a Rose, the smell of Jasmine etc. which is as insufficient to characterise primitive smells, as if I said the sound of an Organ, of a Violin, of a Flute, to characterise primitive sounds, or again the colour of Wood, of Scarlet, of Slate, to designate primitive colours, or finally the taste of Pepper, of Sugar, of Wine, etc. to indicate primitive tastes].

In 1755, when Poncelet wrote his *Chimie du goût et de l'odorat*, a new awareness of smell was developing, brought about by recent scientific theories.<sup>42</sup> He was approaching virtually unknown territory, and his bewilderment is understandable. Smell did not tend to be described extensively before then. As we saw in relation with the theory of 'vertical' correspondences, the concept of a spiritual scent was never really considered with any degree of elaboration before Swedenborg, right in the middle of the eighteenth century. And the notion that our noses can bring us closer to God may never ever become meaningful again. It is the stuff of books and of museums. In April 2002, as part of the fourth European festival of museums whose theme was, this year, the five senses, *Le Monde* was recommending a visit to the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* of Aix-en-Provence where people would be able to breathe the scents escaping from an *orgue à parfums*.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Ficino, *Platonic Theology Volume I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). See in particular books III & IV.
2. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (tr. Sears Jane, Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), pp.84-7.
3. Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: S. Karger, 1958), pp.213-27.
4. See in particular his *Astronomia Magna*.
5. John Joseph Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), pp.22, 100-101.
6. Jacob Boehme, *The Signature of All Things and Other Writings* (Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1969), p.88.
7. *ibid.*, p.82.
8. *ibid.*, p.213.
9. On Leibniz's influence on Swedenborg, see Inge Jonsson, *Swedenborgs Korrespondenslära* (Stockholm & Göteborg & Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), p.403.
10. *ibid.*, p.394.
11. G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.271.
12. See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination* (Picador, 1994).
13. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia: or Heavenly mysteries contained in the sacred Scriptures, or Word of the Lord, manifested and laid open* (tr. J. Clowes, London, 1840-1866), 4624-4634.
14. *ibid.*, 4624-4627.
15. *ibid.*, 4626.
16. *ibid.*, 4628.
17. *ibid.*, 4629-4632.
18. See Brian Juden, 'Que la théorie des correspondances ne dérive pas de Swedenborg' in *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 11, no.2 (1973), pp.33-46.
19. Lynn R. Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg & French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York

Press, 1996), pp.2 and 49 in particular.

20. *ibid.*, p.43. See also Nicolae Babuts, 'Baudelaire et les Anges de Swedenborg' in *Romance Notes* (21, n°3, 1981), pp.309-12.

21. Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie Humaine XI, Etudes philosophiques, Etudes analytiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p.744.

22. *ibid.*, pp.755, 789, 796.

23. *ibid.*, pp.764, 789, 834.

24. *Séraphita*, p.827.

25. *ibid.*, pp.779-80.

26. *ibid.*, pp.855-56.

27. Charles Baudelaire, 'Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains' in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p.471, See Balzac, pp.778-79 in particular.

28. The extent of their influence is largely the subject of Wilkinson's book.

29. Juden, p.44

30. *Œuvres Complètes*, p.65.

31. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p.202.

32. *ibid.*

33. Graham Robb, *La Poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française* (Paris: Aubier, 1993), p.308.

34. See how Sartre associates Baudelaire's sonnet and Swedenborg, for instance, pp.206-07.

35. *Œuvres Complètes*, p.46.

36. *ibid.*, p.232.

37. *ibid.*, p.513.

38. Senancour, *Obermann* (Paris: E. Droz, 1931), p.147.

39. See *Mercur de France* (November 1725), pp.2552-577.

40. Attributed to Joseph de Laporte, *Esprit, Saillies et Singularités du P. Castel* (Amsterdam & Paris: Vincent, 1763), p.369.

41. Polycarpe Poncelet, *Chimie du goût et de l'odorat, ou Principes pour composer facilement, & à peu d frais, les liqueurs à boire, & les eaux de senteurs* (Paris: P.G. Le Mercier, 1755), pp.237-39.

42. See Corbin, p.56: 'From about the middle of the eighteenth century, odors simply began to be more keenly smelled. It was as if thresholds of tolerance had been abruptly lowered... All the evidence suggests that scientific theory played a crucial role in this lowering of thresholds'.

43. Emmanuel de Roux, 'Le Printemps des musées fête les cinq sens' in *Le Monde* (6 April 2002).