volupté

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 4, Issue 1, June 2021
Ends of Worlds

ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Publication: 21 June 2021

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.v.v4i1.1543.g1656

volupte.gold.ac.uk

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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Preface

Despite the continuing global pandemic and the imposition of new conditions for teaching and research, there have been some upsides to what can only be described as the end of the academic world as we knew it. Working via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Cisco Webex platforms has become part of the daily routine, and what once seemed to be a rather sterile and uninspiring interface has become a useful way of collapsing time zones and meeting colleagues from all corners of the globe. There have been some really excellent and enjoyable online decadence events, including a series of *Zooming Decadence* seminars hosted by the Centre of Victorian Studies at Exeter University (UK), 'Jeudis' on Oscar Wilde and on Vernon Lee (run by the British Association of Decadence Studies), a NAVSA roundtable on *Decolonising Decadence* in spring 2021, and a series of ground-breaking seminars on contemporary decadent live art and performance as part of the AHRC-funded Staging Decadence: Decadent theatre in the long twentieth century project at Goldsmiths, University of London, not to mention a smorgasbord of single online events on topics as various as Djuna Barnes' mushrooms, Salomé on Sunset Boulevard, Emilia Pardo Bazán's Anglophilia, and 'aesthetic' theatre costume in the long nineteenth century. Leaning back on our office chairs waiting for the host to start the meeting, sipping a Dirty Mabel, perhaps, or a Long Blue Shadow, courtesy of Melanie Hawthorne's Renée Vivien Cocktail Hour, we have been able to travel without actually going anywhere at all.

This issue of *Volupté* captures the increasingly internationalist flavour of decadence studies bringing different material, theories, and perspectives to bear on a field that not too long ago was a subsidiary of late-Victorian and fin-de-siècle literary-historical studies. Literary history remains the principal driver of decadence studies, but the field is shifting and expanding with new research that cuts across disciplines and subjects, languages and cultures. As the presentations at the *Decolonising Decadence* roundtable demonstrated, this is the moment, perhaps, for reflecting on a more 'diffusionist model' of decadence studies, one that de-centres the European origin story, stimulating multiple origin stories that explore decadence in terms of networks, patterns, delineations, vectors, and influences that resonate across different geographical and temporal zones. Contributors to this issue invite us to see decadence in precisely those heterogeneous terms and from the comfort of our screens we travel from the colonial West Indies to the polar cold of the *Purple Cloud*, from Machen's occult, oriental London to the Antipodes. Ends of worlds indeed.

Our creative section (thanks to Jess Gossling for her initiative) is a fulsome bilingual celebration of a figure who will undoubtedly always remain at the heart of decadence studies, whether it moves along traditional literary-historical or emergent 'diffusionist-model' axes: Charles Baudelaire. We have gathered together thirty-one appreciations of his life and work, ranging from personal and pedagogical reflections by writers, artists, fellow-poets, and teachers, focused, critical ruminations on particular poems, themes, and uses of language, and creative responses, including André Naffis-Sahely's translation of Abdellatif Laâbi's *Casablanca Spleen*, and Adam Thorpe's short story 'Disturbance'. Our 'Baudelaire Appreciations' paint rich and complex portraits of the man, his work, and lasting influence.

Huge thanks to our contributors, to Sam Branton and Peter Coles for allowing us to reproduce their artworks, and to our Guest Editor, Ellis Hanson. Best wishes from the *Volupté* team to all our readers for a safe summer.

Jane Desmarais
Editor-in-Chief
21 June 2021

Ends of Worlds
An Introduction by the Guest Editor

Ellis Hanson

Cornell University

> 'The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come", and the eyelids are a little weary.'
> (Walter Pater, 'Leonardo da Vinci', in *The Renaissance*)

The phrase about the 'ends of the world' is familiar enough, not just to readers of the Bible, where it appears amid dire warnings about temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:11, but of course also from Pater's quintessentially decadent description of the *Mona Lisa*, where the biblical quotation is taken splendidly out of context to evoke a modern sensibility, the very 'symbol of the modern idea',[1] as he writes, a sweeping together in the knowing countenance of a Renaissance portrait all human temptations, all spiritual and worldly aspirations, whole networks of global trade and cultural exchange extending back much farther than those mere thousand years, extending not just to various nations and continents, but also to the depths of the sea and the secrets of the grave. Pater evokes one fallen empire after another as he deftly, if improbably, refigures Mona Lisa as a pearl-diver, a silk-trader, a goddess, a mother, even a vampire. At the droop of that weary eyelid, he is reminded that 'modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life.'[2] So many ends of worlds in a sublimely weary eyelid! Decadence is ostensibly a theory of the end of a world, but it has a way of collecting worlds without end. Pater elsewhere challenges us to see the visible outlines of the face as 'a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it',[3] extending indefinitely, beyond imagination – and yet continuing to twitch and vibrate like delicate nerves, transmitting messages we can scarcely begin to read.

How might we read the ambiguity of the phrase 'ends of the world' in such a formulation? Ends in the sense of culminations, ambitions, distant locations? Given the punishing moral severity

of the biblical context for this phrase, we might begin with its apocalyptic overtones, ends as ultimate conclusions finally unveiled, the realization of a divine logic, the complete destruction of the known world and its replacement by an alternative we could hardly imagine on our own. A singular event of course, but it is tempting to think of it as plural, an end with many endings that assume new beginnings, a hardy perennial, almost a breath of spring each time its whiff of fire and brimstone is ritually evoked. The decadent in us likes to skip to the final chapter of the Gospels, relish the imagery and the phrasing of our damnation, and of course reread and reimagine: decadence as 'apocalyptic overtures',[4] to use Richard Dellamora's phrase, at once erotic and musical, a seductive refrain for a changing occasion and a new audience.

If the teaching of decadent literature now has taught me anything, it is that my students often have an intense appreciation for apocalypse that is less religious than environmental, an unprecedented sense of political urgency and existential dread about climate change, pandemics, and mass extinction, that makes the readings for a course on decadent literature seem either unbearable or indispensable, depending on one's capacity for irony. How did it feel to read Edgar Allan Poe's decadent tale 'The Masque of Red Death' during Covid lockdown? When you are even more aware than Charles Baudelaire of the human causes of climate change and environmental collapse, how would you fail to recognize yourself in his 'hypocrite reader', who would 'devastate the earth' in one great opiated yawn of ennui?[5] How do you read *Against Nature*, with its resounding proclamation, 'Nature has had her day',[6] when you already suspect it might literally be true. Would it seem urgent then to read less decadent literature, or more?

My own candidate for most decadent novel of the current century is DBC Pierre's *Lights Out in Wonderland* (2010), which pays explicit homage to Baudelaire, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, and especially J.-K. Huysmans. The main character, an overeducated and underemployed addict named Gabriel, has just escaped from a rehab clinic, and joins forces with an old friend named Smuts, an adventurous chef who specializes in hosting adventures in extreme gastronomy. Gabriel, who is nothing less than the damaged archangel of

the piece, has decided he wants to commit suicide, but not just yet. This decision changes his whole outlook on life. He feels himself to be in a Master Limbo, as he calls it, an overextended sensual present that is late capitalism itself in all its suicidal glory. The novel culminates in an orgiastic banquet, one of the most disturbing and ingenious parties in all of literature, which takes place at the Tempelhof, the vast abandoned airport built by the Nazis in Berlin. Pierre writes,

> And here waiting for the greatest bacchanal since the fall of Rome, waiting for the feast of Trimalchio, Des Esseintes's last stand, Dorian Gray's big night out, waiting for the spiritus of Salomé, Abbé Jules, Caragiale, Baudelaire, Hlavacek, Mirbeau, and Tonegaru, we smoke cigarettes at the curbside and bask in the cool sun.[7]

The frequent namechecking of touchstones of literary decadence amid all his recipes for cooking endangered species reminds us, again, how apocalyptic irony still has bite. In a line reminiscent of the concluding prayer of *Against Nature*, Pierre writes,

> We will all be destroyed whether we like it or not. I say let's like it. May this small book of certainties from a short life be your compass in a decadence, your mentor in times of ruin, your friend when none is near. And may its poking from your pocket be a beacon to all who share our spirit in these end times.[8]

Whether this beacon in end times is leading us away from a disaster or toward one may be unclear, but it was in a similar spirit that I decided to host a conference on decadence last year. I gave it the title 'Fin du Globe: Decadence, Catastrophe, Late Style', in honor of Dorian Gray's French sigh of ennui over a revision of the phrase *fin de siècle*: "'I wish it were *fin du globe*," said Dorian with a sigh. "Life is a great disappointment.'"[9] I suppose I was tempting fate with my title. Because of the Covid pandemic, life was a greater disappointment than usual last year, and it was with yet another sigh that I had to cancel the conference and announce the 'Fin du "Fin du Globe"'. The selection of essays here are expanded versions of talks that were proposed for that conference, and so I have at least the pleasure of hosting the conference issue of a journal, if not the event itself. I also had the pleasure of reading several dozen proposals that gave me a broad survey of current debates in the field. The ecocritical and postcolonial approaches were especially plentiful and fresh, as were arguments about literature and images created after 1900. Especially given the national reckoning on American racism and police brutality that summer, discussions of

race would have come even more to the fore at the conference, and so it made still more sense to intensify racial focus for this issue of *Volupté* by gathering together the essays about the globalization of decadent aesthetics and its communication across continents and temporalities, especially as an anti-racist or anti-colonial critique. Despite the title 'Fin du Globe', many of the proposals were far from apocalyptic, and some were even rather hopeful about the power and beauty of that transcontinental conversation – a perverse sort of beacon after all.

So I shifted the title somewhat to 'Ends of Worlds', with its ambiguous suggestion not just of apocalypse and global catastrophe, but also of world-connections and world-building in a decadent mode. 'Ends', we might say, in the sense of conflicting political goals or ambitions in a pluralistic meeting of 'worlds', in all the personal and geopolitical richness of that term. Many worlds with many ends, each world serving as the distant vanishing point for others and raising the question of those disorienting reversals of perspective so essential to decadent cosmopolitanism. To embrace the 'ends of worlds' also invites a certain valorization of remoteness and belatedness. The outpost may serve as retreat, as critical distance, rather than mere dislocation. The late arrivals have a myriad of pasts to contemplate, perhaps with a sense of relief at what they managed to miss. The essays here are a contribution to the study of decadent orientalism as well as decadent anti-colonialism. Decadence is inevitably a theory of empire and its collapse, though the trope itself seems inexhaustible despite its penchant for self-destruction. 'Nero and Narcissus are always with us',[10] as Wilde reminds us. Edward Gibbon and Oswald Spengler are always with us too. At the conference we would have discussed their latest incarnation, Ross Douthat, whose book *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (2020) is a bracing survey of the lapse of contemporary American culture into mediocrity and stagnation.[11] Decadence as a social theory still has traction as a demeaning epithet, but one would never know from this book that it has also been an important inspiration to the artistic and intellectual avant-garde for the past two centuries.

The essays here engage with that decadent aesthetic inspiration, specifically with regard to imperial and postcolonial things that fall apart. In *Beginning at the End* (2018), Robert Stilling has deftly summed up the paradoxes and challenges of decadent aesthetics as a critique of colonialism:

> Despite the propensity of early anticolonial writers to view decadence in the arts primarily as a symptom of the historical decadence of various imperial formations, as disillusionment with postcolonial regimes set in, postcolonial writers and artists were increasingly willing to make use of the fin-de-siècle decadents' most critical and oppositional tools, their wit, satire, paradoxical formulations, attention to form, resistance to realism, sexual dissidence, and revisionist approach to history, to critique what they saw as the failures of postcolonial societies. In the process, postcolonial artists submitted texts by Baudelaire, Pater, Wilde, Huysmans, Henry James, and the writers of the *Yellow Book* era to new scrutiny, discovering new uses for the social radicalism of what seemed like a thoroughly outmoded aestheticism.[12]

In his essay for this occasion, Stilling further elaborates on this thesis with an argument for two West Indian poets, Walter MacArthur Lawrence and W. Adolphe Roberts, as figures of colonial protest who engaged the aesthetic language of the decadent tradition as an oppositional poetics, not simply an imitation of an earlier generation of European artists. Neil Hultgren, in his essay on the most apocalyptic of the texts under consideration here, discusses M. P. Shiel's 1901 fantasy novel, *The Purple Cloud*, a bizarre narrative of the surviving witness of a polar expedition that discovers a vast, devouring whirlpool, as well as a spreading, purple cloud capable of exterminating life on the planet. Hultgren discusses the whirlpool as a particularly decadent figure for convolutions of time and geography, and he relates it to Shiel's own complicated racial politics in his narrative of world destruction. Suvendu Ghatak also considers fantasy fiction in his discussion of the occult 'Oriental garden' in Victorian London in Arthur Machen's novella *N*. The puzzled witnesses to this uncanny, impossible, genre-bending garden offer a decadent rereading of the landscape of London that literally includes its imperial frontier as a ghostly trace that defies explanation. Thomas Vranken discusses a very different instance of the colonial reception of London. He seizes on Wilde's numerous witticisms at the expense of Australia to consider not just the meaning of Australia for Wilde, but the meaning of Wilde for Australia and the figuration of the technology of communication between opposite ends of the Victorian world.

Gathering just these few essays from the conference that never happened makes me regret all the more that the pandemic kept us from meeting in person last year, along with the authors of dozens of other fascinating proposals whose topics and approaches have gone unmentioned here. The choices for this issue are indeed only one focus among a great variety of ideas proposed for the conference, and there is even an accidental focus that I was working to avoid, namely the exclusive attention to literature by men in English even though, obviously, the study of decadence has a long tradition of criticism about other arts, other languages, and other genders. From my work on this project, however, I can at least assure you that, despite this difficult year of new maladies, the study of decadence is showing surprising signs of wellness.

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[1] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 80.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 150.
[4] Richard Dellamora, *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
[5] Charles Baudelaire, 'To the Reader', in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 7.
[6] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 20.
[7] DBC Pierre, *Lights Out in Wonderland* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), unpaginated.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 30.
[10] Oscar Wilde, 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young', in *Complete Works*, p. 1245.
[11] Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).
[12] Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 12.

Imperial Shame, Magnificent Decay
Decadent Poetics and the Colonial West Indies

Robert Stilling

Florida State University

In the introduction to *The Poet of Guiana*, a selection of works by Walter MacArthur Lawrence published posthumously in 1948, the editor, Patrick H. Daly, identifies Lawrence as 'the leader of the Aesthetic movement in Guiana because of the high regard he had for literary purity as such'. Daly praises Lawrence, who was born in British Guiana 1896 and died in 1942, as 'the most intellectual and urbane Guianese poet of his generation', known for his 'chaste, strenuous, athletically supple and pure verse'. And though Lawrence was 'prone to excess emotional fervour and long, complex sentences […] his poetry generally has euphony'. Daly describes Lawrence's talent as being 'like a delicately strung instrument: the higher it is the deeper is its possessor's sensitivity'. While Daly stipulates that 'hypersensitivity' in an artist is abnormal, he echoes Walter Pater by defending Lawrence on the grounds of 'temperament'. Lawrence's 'sensitivity claimed as its ancestry merely the artist's temperament […]. He would have been less than an artist – and more than an artist – had his art not been agonised by profound sensitivity'.[1] In describing Lawrence as an artist agonized by sensitivity but not hypersensitive, graceful yet prone to emotional excess, Daly locates Lawrence's poetry on the line between aestheticism and decadence, between refinement and an abnormal over-refinement. This is a distinction Daly affirms by identifying Lawrence with the virtuosity of Algernon Charles Swinburne while disavowing Swinburne's more scandalous traits:

> We consider Lawrence to have been the first of the moderns in this country, but his contact with the final, spiritual moments of Victorianism, and the influence of his masters, Swinburne (that is Swinburne's desirably effective orchestration without Swinburne's irreligion) and Wordsworth, gave him strength and uniformity.[2]

In declaring Lawrence to be the 'first of the moderns', whose strengths as a poet are nevertheless founded on a lingering Victorianism, Daly unwittingly damned his subject with well-

intentioned praise. While Lawrence was well known in the West Indies from the 1920s to the 1940s, his reputation suffered in the postwar period as literary and political paradigms shifted away from the Victorians, with their whiff of imperialism, toward literature committed to the cause of anticolonialism. Daly sought to shore up Lawrence's reputation with whatever prestige still attached to aestheticism, appealing directly to a privileged class of readers educated at the West Indies' best schools, claiming that Lawrence 'wrote his name into educated acceptance as the Poet of Guiana', and comparing the Georgetown schools he attended to Eton and Oxford.[3] But it was this framing of *The Poet of Guiana* that made Lawrence an easy target for later anticolonial critics who dismissed his work as a relic of the *ancien régime,* praising it only for those moments when Lawrence exhibited a nascent national consciousness, but dismissing Lawrence's antiquated Victorianism.

The problem of talking about a twentieth-century aestheticist movement in anglophone Caribbean poetry is the problem of talking about poetry that is dismissed as derivative of a period in late-Victorian verse that was already seen as a 'nostalgic indulgence […] irrelevant to the modern world', especially in the wake of modernism.[4] Such poetry in the Caribbean, which succeeded the Romanticism of earlier nineteenth-century poets such as the Guianese poet Egbert 'Leo' Martin (1861-1890), is viewed as doubly irrelevant in histories of Caribbean literature for failing to fit a postcolonial critical narrative that prizes anticolonial sentiment, foregrounds black cultural consciousness, and values a more organically transformative poetics, seeing strict lyric formalism as hopelessly imitative, decadent, and politically disinterested.[5] In histories of Caribbean literature, terms such as aestheticist, decadent, and Parnassian, or an association with Swinburne, have often served as critical shorthand for the kind of literature characteristic of the tail-end of empire before independence movements drove a desire for new national literatures.[6] As a consequence, the emergence of decadent and aestheticist modes in early twentieth-century Caribbean writing has largely been ignored or poorly understood. Making matters more difficult, much of this writing is accessible in only a handful of special collections libraries. Unsurprisingly, such early twentieth-

century Caribbean writing has rarely made it onto the radar of scholars of decadence and aestheticism, whose own scholarly histories are still catching up to the more geographically expansive work currently being done in the field.[7] Even recent work demonstrating that aestheticist and decadent writing continued to flourish well into the era of modernism has yet to take stock of those colonial writers who witnessed first-hand the decline of empire that European decadents so often imagined.[8]

But to account for all the ways in which such poetry has been dismissed is not to describe what this poetry was actually doing or why it was felt to be appropriate for its time. In this article, I will discuss the work of two West Indian poets, the Guianese-born Lawrence and the Jamaican-born poet W. Adolphe Roberts, who wrote self-consciously aestheticist and decadent verse, singing hymns to beauty that protest the conditions of imperial decline. Such poetry does not represent an organized movement so much as it represents the literary affiliations of two poets who found a still-viable oppositional poetics in the example of decadent and aestheticist writing. For Lawrence and Roberts, aestheticist and decadent verse provided a means to decry the evident decline of Britain's colonies, oppose colonial administrations, critique the greed of a still-powerful planter aristocracy, and promote West Indian political autonomy, even if these writers remained nostalgic for empire or stopped short of calling for political independence. A turn toward decadent and aestheticist modes of writing enabled these West Indian poets to formalize in verse a recognition of the apparent irrelevance of the colonies within an imperial scheme characterized by political and economic neglect, and to protest specific constitutional reforms that abrogated the rights of colonials to self-government. Aestheticism's defence of art for art's sake and its disdain for commodification suited these poets' interest in measures of value outside the economic order of a liberalized global marketplace. The oppositional poetics of decadence likewise allowed for expressions of beauty that defied a lack of collective political purpose. Moreover, these poets positioned their verse not as a species of Victorian imitation, but as a rival to free-verse modernism.

As Matthew Potolsky has noted, the political leanings of decadent writers are often a moving target and can swing from one extreme to another. Swinburne, for example, 'began his career as a fervent republican and advocate of the Risorgimento, but later became a no-less fervent panegyrist of the British Empire'.[9] Despite the decadents' reputation for seeking refuge from the real world in the cloistered realm of the aesthetic, their appreciation of beauty could just as easily indicate a rejection of the corruption of modernity. As Richard Dellamora has commented, 'decadence is always radical in its opposition to the organization of modern urban, industrial, and commercial society.'[10] Marion Thain has similarly argued that the flourishing of aestheticist lyric at the fin de siècle might be read as a self-conscious response to the perceived irrelevance of the lyric genre to urban, capitalist modernity.[11] Such verse engaged modernity, paradoxically, by appearing to turn away from it.

The aestheticist and decadent writing that emerged in the West Indies, however, had to grapple with a different but related set of problems, namely emancipation, economic liberalization, and the loosening bonds of empire. As Christopher Taylor has argued, since works of liberal political economy such as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* pointed out the burdensome costs of maintaining an empire, the West Indian colonies came to be seen as an economic millstone around Britain's neck. As Parliament reduced tariffs meant to protect the colonies and opened British trade to new markets, the price of sugar collapsed. With the additional loss of forced labour after emancipation, West Indian plantations largely ceased to be profitable.[12] White planters, fearing a violent uprising on the part of the formerly enslaved, abandoned the colonies in droves, leaving scenes of ruination and dereliction.[13] As Taylor describes it: 'As the profitability of the West Indian colonies declined, British capital and British imperial attention shifted from the West Indies to more remunerative sites within empire, such as India, or to sites beyond it, such as Cuba and Brazil.'[14] As Britain lost interest in the welfare of its West Indian colonies and failed to fulfil ties of moral obligation, '"[neglect]" was the name West Indian writers gave to […] the divestment of economic capital, political care, and popular concern from the colonies that had once been

considered the crown jewels of the British Empire.'[15] As Britain's West Indian colonies languished, West Indian writers increasingly represented themselves as the subjects of imperial neglect:

> From elite plantation owners to their emancipated ex-slaves, from Tory protectionists to mulatto socialists, West Indians across the lines of race and class strove to render legible the subtle institutions of neglect and, by so doing, to recompose empire as a political world bound to accord meaning and value to West Indian lives – whatever the economic value of the West Indies.[16]

Taylor finds little evidence of anticolonial nationalism in nineteenth-century West Indian writing. Rather, he finds 'an intense fealty to the British Empire, on one hand, and an emergent investment in the hemispheric Americas, on the other'. West Indian writers 'insisted on being considered […] rights-bearing subject of an expansive imperial polity.'[17] They produced 'normative' fantasies of how 'the empire should work to sustain West Indian life' even as they despaired at the 'recognition that British attentions were going elsewhere'.[18] Even as the political autonomy of black nation states became increasingly thinkable, empire loyalism persisted into the twentieth century.[19] As colonials felt themselves to be increasingly irrelevant to the new economic order, they sought non-economic measures of value. Nevertheless, Taylor emphasizes that 'West Indian writers never posited literature as possessing an autonomous, self-evident value.' The nineteenth-century literature of imperial neglect 'is almost entirely, unapologetically indifferent to literariness.'[20]

This began to change as the influence of the aesthetic and decadent movements seeped into the work of West Indian poets such as Lawrence, Robert, and the 'Parnassian' Jamaican poet and translator Vivian Virtue (whose work I do not have space to examine here).[21] As Daly tells it, the emergence of an aesthetic movement in British Guiana, for example, followed the failure of Guianese poetry since the 1830s to grapple with the reality of emancipation. Daly observes that over the course of the nineteenth century, Guianese poetry was 'overcast' by the 'indecorously intruding fact' of slavery, which had clouded Guianese 'culture at every stage […] sedimenting into the nerve centres of contemporary art'.[22] He observes that emancipation was an 'obsession' of nineteenth-century Guianese poets who nevertheless ignored the 'determination of the slaves to

be free', either by casting emancipation as the will of God or by discounting enslaved West Indians' long history of revolt: 'Thus, when early poets were not singing of emancipation as a condescending gift from a despotic plutocracy born to subjugate, they were sniggering about [Christianity]'. Where, Daly asks, 'are the great odes commemorating the bloody slave revolts of 1763' or 'the East Coast insurrection of 1823[?]'. It was only with the emergence of the aesthetic movement that poetry began to exhibit 'the epiphany of national pride'.[23] Lawrence thus distinguished himself from the 'decorously decadent generation who had been bred on the rank and unwholesome matter of the early emasculators – the strawberry-and-cream-doggerelists' who turned a blind eye toward the reality of post-emancipation society.[24] Daly suggests that post-emancipation Guianese poetry had grown decadent by refusing to face up to the legacy of slavery. It took the indecorousness of the aesthetic movement to finally grapple with these long-ignored realities. Rather than turning away from reality, aestheticism offered the possibility of cultural realism.

Despite this development, the poetry of Lawrence and Roberts's generation has often been represented as a mere curiosity. Edward Baugh, for example, writes that

> [s]uch interest as their work can hold now is almost exclusively historical. […] It is as if one of their chief aims was to show that natives of the colonies could write verse like that which poets of the "mother country" had written.

Citing Lawrence's 'Morning Ode', Baugh caustically remarks: 'But perhaps the trouble was not so much the fact of imitation as the relative feebleness of the imaginations which were imitating'.[25] It is true that there is no shortage of stock imagery in Lawrence's conventionally cross-rhymed quatrains in 'Morning Ode'. Nevertheless, such poetry is notable for turning a European aesthetic that often fantasized about the tropics toward the task of local description, hybridizing aestheticism with a New World artistic vision:

> A new world's in the making right before my seeing eyes,
> And light and colour riot all around—
> From yonder blazing sundawn painting pictures in the skies,
> To this bejewelled carpet on the ground.[26]

While redundancies such as 'seeing eyes' and 'sundawn' might provoke criticism that Lawrence is generating syllables to fit the metre, Lawrence's ornate phrasing, however clichéd, insists on itself as an act of real-world observation. It also colours daybreak with just a hint of decadent twilight in the echo of sundown in 'sundawn'. More importantly, Lawrence identifies his South American coastal colony as itself a work of art in the very process of its making as it is painted and bejewelled before his eyes. He deploys aestheticism as a metaphor for how the idea of a nation comes into consciousness: through an act of aesthetic poiesis. But despite the hope 'Morning Ode' finds in Guiana's dawn as a nation, poems such as 'Stream' identify the mechanisms of imperial neglect: parliamentary meddling over trade policy and the bureaucratic officiousness of customs officers who 'enforce every nice little point of the law'. In 'Stream', Lawrence wonders who can think of the glory of Guiana's natural beauty (the 'falling or washing' of a stream) when burdened by the 'insatiate' material needs that seem the sole concern of the empire, as '[w]hen the lords of the port and the princes of trade and commerce contend over pratiques and dues, | And would-be Disraelies and Gladstones wax warm, advancing their anti-reciprocal views'.[27]

Lloyd Brown is more sympathetic to Lawrence, arguing that 'the *universal* significance of his national theme has important implications for the subsequent development of national consciousness in West Indian poetry'.[28] But if Lawrence's poetry helps develop a national consciousness, it does so by registering the consequences of imperial 'inaction', as in 'Guiana', a poem written to mark the centenary of the colony's consolidation under British rule in 1831, an anniversary cast here as Guiana's fin de siècle:

> The Day dies down and the Century ends in gloom grosser far than the night's
> That descend when day of the sunshine is done as wane the warm westerly lights,—
> In gloom that falls on thy soul as a pall more cold than the sea's inner heart;
> And the death-like hold of a century-old inaction is playing its part.[29]

Lawrence develops a national consciousness here by attributing decadent subjectivity to the poem's object of address, Guiana itself, as a 'soul' shrouded in gloom. The twilight that falls on

Guiana at the century's end is the twilight of national ambition, which negatively registers the persistence of such national ambition.

Brown singles out 'Guiana' as passionate and effective, if marred by 'occasional pretentiousness ("tenebrious sky") and clichés ("flickering flame")'.[30] Nevertheless, Lawrence deploys such decadent clichés toward a new end, to express the abjection rendered by imperial neglect:

> The years—lost years that the rest of the World had filled with the treasures of Time,
> Have bequeathed thee nought but a name that to claim, were just a magnificent crime,—
> Have left thee less than the dust of decay piled up to Imperial shame;
> And the light that lighteth Ambition's rough road has paled to a flickering flame.
> But Hope, high up the tenebrious sky, o'ershines the inglorious Night.
> And a cry goes up (and the voice is the voice that speaketh of impotent might)
> From gods, not men,— what a people are here! Guiana, they're hoping again,
> For the cry goes up from the deepest despair: God give us a chance to men![31]

Here, Lawrence mixes iambs and anapests in a rhythm reminiscent of Poe's 'Annabel Lee', doubling up ballad stanzas in long heptameter lines that also recall Swinburne's typically echoic phrasing ('years, lost years', 'light that lighteth', 'the voice is the voice'). The poem laments a century of misrule and market liberalization that left Guiana behind even as the accumulation of wealth continued elsewhere. In presenting the 'decay' of the colony as a mark of shame against the empire, the poem appeals to the conscience of empire in an effort to strengthen, not abandon imperial ties regardless of economic interests. The colony longs for a chance at manhood through a moral claim to recognition, for it is only as a subject of empire that such manhood is deemed possible.

If Swinburne is known for 'remorselessly self-involved prosodic spectacle[s]' that dramatize the diffusion of subjectivity into language, Lawrence does not quite pull off the same feat.[32] He nevertheless maintains an incessant musicality that threatens to overwhelm its subject just as the hollowing out of imperial subjectivity has left 'Guiana' an empty 'name'. The lyric subject diffuses into a universalist cry *de profundis*. If Lawrence's exhortatory verse sometimes pales to a flickering flame, its 'impotent might' reflects what many West Indian colonials felt to be the

impotent political condition of the colonies. Brown finds in such poetry 'a spirited national call for purpose' not unlike that of Derek Walcott, but he laments the lack of anti-imperial sentiment: 'Lawrence is still constrained to counterbalance his anticolonial themes with the pervasive imperial loyalties of the early twentieth century'.[33] This is because, for Lawrence, opposition to colonial neglect was perfectly compatible with empire loyalism, and the prosodic histrionics of his verse demanded attention for renewed claims to imperial subjecthood.

While British Guiana was consolidated under British rule in 1831, its constitution reflected the vestiges of Dutch colonial law until 1928 when the constitution was abolished and the British reconstituted Guiana as a Crown Colony, allowing for direct rule by the British government. Thus '1928 became known as the year of the rape of the constitution'.[34] As Raymond T. Smith explains:

> superficially, [1928] appeared to be a struggle on the part of Guianese to hold on to the limited political rights they had, and to try to establish the rights of Guianese citizens as against the dictates of the Colonial Office. There are undertones of a conflict between the interests of the mainly English-owned sugar industry and the interests of a professional and merchant class with a strong desire to open up the interior of the country. But the elected members of the Combined Court [a former governing body] were not social revolutionaries; one cannot detect any advocacy of complete social reorganization. They were educated gentlemen for the most part, identifying themselves with the existing English rulers, and arguing their fitness to govern on the grounds that they constituted a Europeanized élite.[35]

While Lawrence's major poems written for Guiana's 1931 centenary lament a hundred years of squandered promise, much of the anger in his poetry can be attributed to the immediate fact of the colony's constitutional loss of autonomy, an action taken in part at the behest of the white planter minority. As A. J. Seymour comments, 'Lawrence had the courage to sing what he calls the Rape of the Constitution and Guiana at the Cross-roads'.[36] The consequence of these reforms included a narrowing of government activity to economic development and the abrupt loss of political representation by a rising middle class of white, black, 'coloured', and Asian merchants and professionals. As the educated son of a sawmill manager and a Creole with African ancestry, Lawrence would have been among those privileged West Indians newly disempowered by the constitutional reforms.

Daly gives Lawrence credit for acknowledging that emancipation occurred only after a long struggle of resistance by the colonies' enslaved populations. However, in poems such as 'Guiana: Allegory', Lawrence displaces the possibility of black revolution, long feared by white planters, onto the suffering body of Guiana, figured as an innocent white maiden and child of nature who revolts against an apparent conspiracy of white planter aristocrats and foreign powers. That is, Lawrence leaves black revolt out of the picture. In the poem, Guiana, on the arms of Time, is set upon by 'silver-tongued' orators and 'despoilers' who rob her of her native jewels, 'usurping every right she dared to claim'.[37] To protect her, Time lulls the maiden to sleep, and she becomes a sleeping beauty, enduring long years entombed in the 'deep, depressing gloom' of cold marble as in 'some great mediaeval sepulchre'.[38] 'Yet through it all, serenely, undisturbed, Guiana sleeps […] uncrowned, unthroned', until she suddenly wakes her from deathlike slumber:

> Then, like a frenzied spirit rising with a spirit's might—
> To life a new but wild Galatea sprung,
> Her bare, disjewelled arms, like polished copper in the night,
> In righteous wrath above her head upflung
> Her unbound hair behind her streaming as she flies along
> As though her long pent passions lent her wings,
> Thrice steeled, her fragile frame upon that high-bred robber throng,
> Now blind to every fear, Guiana flings.[39]

She is beaten back into submission, 'crushed beneath the heel | Of Power', but what interests me here is how Lawrence renders an opposition between the purity of art and the degradation of colonial neglect in a distinctly Gothic mode.[40] Guiana is cast as both Gothic revenant and Galatea possessed of her own agency. She is not the statue carved by Pygmalion into his silent ideal of a woman, warmed to life by Aphrodite for his pleasure, as in Ovid's myth, but an image of artwork itself springing to life from the tomb. Her purity left her helpless. Helpless, she becomes a statue. Once made into art of ambiguous race – her arms are polished copper – she rises in revolt against the 'high-bred robber throng' who hijacked the colonial government.[41] The maiden not only embodies the nation, as Galatea she also embodies the revolt of art against the corruption of the state.

While Lawrence plots Guiana's loss of autonomy as the endpoint of a hundred years of decline since the days when Guiana was 'decked in splendour', his poetry represents a response to constitutional reforms that had only recently placed the economic interests of the sugar and mineral extraction industries over the rights of middle-class imperial subjects of various races to control their own destiny.[42] Though Lawrence calls out the 'noble throng' with 'pale' faces 'whose souls are steeped in wrong', he hardly calls for a revolution or independence.[43] Rather, his critique of Guiana's colonial decadence calls for a restoration of creole self-governance, figured by a chaste but vulnerable maiden, within the imperial system.

Brown ultimately casts Lawrence's Swinburnism as incompatible with the goals of political and literary independence:

> But notwithstanding Daly's enthusiasm for the imitations of Swinburne's work, the truth is that Lawrence fails to develop his undeniable potential because he devoted so much of his talent to churning out replicas of Wordsworth and Swinburne. For example, 'Kaieteur' [a Romantic landscape ode] shows flashes of intense feeling that is the main strength of 'Guiana', but on the whole it is merely a mechanical imitation of Swinburne. On balance, however, his much abused potential makes him an apt representative of the achievements and failures of his generation. Like their more accomplished nineteenth-century predecessors they combine an underdeveloped but promising vision of a West Indian destiny with a slavish loyalty to the literary heritage and political hegemony of the British Empire.[44]

Here I am reminded of Quentin Crisp's quip that 'if at first you don't succeed, failure may be your style'.[45] If Lawrence failed to live up to the anticolonial telos of later critical narratives, then perhaps failure is his style, and the stylization of failure the main achievement of his generation. In any case, the understandably urgent ideological imperatives of later postcolonial criticism have come at the cost of any explanation for such verse as Lawrence's other than that of 'mechanical imitation' and 'slavish loyalty', despite the historically specific conditions of colonial decline and constitutional reform these poems protest. And if Lawrence's overstuffed metres are excessive, Daly assures us this is deliberate. Lawrence 'retained a uniformity and stability' against the 'disintegrating' forces in Guianese poetry. Moreover: 'He had to work […] against the petticoated puerilities and rhodomontade of the mad moderns, the sex-crazy moderns whose muse is a minx

and little better than a strumpet'.[46] That is, Daly poses Lawrence's metrical uniformity, his 'mastery of – and his enslavement by – metre' against the lurid musings of free-verse modernism.[47] There is also the possibility that Daly is speaking of Lawrence's own poetic tendencies. He writes that he hopes to publish Lawrence's collected works 'unexpurgated'.[48] This never happened, and one wonders what petticoated puerilities remain in the archive.

Seymour notes how Lawrence was 'partly ashamed' at 'the new manner of writing' he attempted in his poem 'Futility', in which he felt his art had been 'prostituted'.[49] With its evocation of posthumous regret and its cliché image for the ephemerality of attachment (dead flowers strewn on a grave), the poem might easily be mistaken for one by Ernest Dowson.

> The flowers are dead on the grave and a sad sight lay;
> My token of love, you had thought and your heart had bled
> As you laid them so tenderly there and behold in a day
> The flowers are dead.
>
> […]
>
> And as vain your love too long in the heart hid away.
> Then, some of it shown in a smile or kind word said
> Much more would have meant than tributes you now would pay
> The flowers are dead.[50]

Even if Lawrence felt such verse catered too much to modern tastes thematically, the lyric style he crafts – a sort of anapestic sapphic stanza that out-Swinburnes Swinburne – remains a deliberate formal throwback in an era of modernist free verse.

Baugh remarks that W. Adolphe Roberts was 'no less derivative than his contemporaries'. However, he 'was more gifted than they, with a reasonably good ear for the melodious and richly sensuous line. He is a by-product of the English "decadent" school of the 1890s and could have held his own in that company'.[51] Indeed, Roberts's three volumes of poetry, *Pierrot Wounded* (1919), *Pan and Peacocks* (1928), and *Medallions* (1950) were written in a decidedly decadent mode. Roberts (1886-1962) was a prolific writer of novels, histories, and verse who worked briefly in France as a reporter during the Great War and spent much of his career in New York before returning to Jamaica late in life. His poetry is perhaps best considered alongside that of Edna St. Vincent Millay,

a Greenwich Village Bohemian who, as Sarah Parker has shown, presented 'an alternative to modernism' by 'reworking decadent forms and themes'.[52] Roberts was closely acquainted with Millay from around 1918 to 1921 and was an early promoter of her work. Like other decadents in the age of modernism, Roberts understood how queerly anachronistic it was 'to be 1890' in the 1920s, as Carl Van Vechten put it.[53] Among the admiring references to the Yellow '90s in Roberts's autobiography, he recalls his acquaintance with Richard Le Gallienne, the so-called 'Golden Boy' of the 1890s, calling him a 'minor' decadent poet and 'voluntary exile' who had become a 'habitué' of the New York café scene: 'I have never known a man who belonged more definitely to an age before the one we lived and moved in than did Richard Le Gallienne'.[54] Roberts nevertheless continued to publish Le Gallienne's poems in the magazines he edited.

Roberts was not shy about his distaste for free-verse modernism and conventional Victorian verse. In his autobiography he recalls a disagreement with Millay, who regarded Tennyson and Housman as poetic innovators. Roberts insisted that Swinburne was the greater innovator, telling Millay: 'Many of Swinburne's poems are in new metres, many employ new rhyming schemes, others distill fresh values from words. The language is richer in effects because of him'.[55] When Roberts read Swinburne to Millay, she responded, 'That is but sound', describing Swinburne's poetry as purely musical and, as music, 'inferior to Chopin'.[56] They also disagreed about the new 'free verse school' promoted by Amy Lowell. Millay was more tolerant than Roberts, despite her proclivity for formal lyrics. Roberts does praise Millay's free-verse poetry, but he denied that Millay had 'established a case for the discords produced by the freaks of our day'.[57] As if to prove his point, he dedicated a series of villanelles to Millay in *Pierrot Wounded* and invented a unique sonnet-like stanza for her in *Pan and Peacocks*. *Pierrot Wounded* is a mixed bag of Parisian decadence, commedia dell'arte, and pro-French wartime jingoism. It includes a translation of Gabriele D'Annunzio. For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on the more sophisticated 1920s works in *Pan and Peacocks*.

In 'The Celt', which is dedicated to Millay, and in two other poems inspired by her, 'Tiger Lily' and 'Vale', Roberts employs an unusual 14-line stanza for which I have not found a precedent. The lines vary in metre from pentameter to dimeter and trimeter. The unusual rhyme scheme features both cross-rhyme and couplets, buries a triple rhyme in lines 7-9, and recalls its A-rhyme in the eleventh line, while trochaic inversions halt whatever momentum builds in the shorter lines. The effect is lighter yet more plaintive than a typical sonnet.

> This is the sorrow of our Celtic hearts,
> Lonely and fey:
> Grieving that the old mystery departs,
> We pass for mummers in ignoble marts
> And learn to say
> The words of everyday.
> Drunken with dreams, we know the joy thereof;
> But, though we strove,
> We might not turn from beauty's quest to love.
> Before the banners of lost wars are furled,
> April's first flower starts,
> Vagrant and sad,
> Our feet to find where magic may be had
> About the world.[58]

The poem mourns the disenchantment of the world and its language, trailing intimations of lost Celtic magic (Millay was of Irish descent). For the 'we' that is the subject of the poem, everyday language is an acquired speech. They pass silent as mummers in the ignoble marketplace, an act of refusal at the reduction of language to economic utility. If we presume the 'we' of this poem to be lovers and fellow poets (this is how Roberts describes his relationship with Millay), then each poet's singular commitment to beauty ultimately leaves both parties on separate paths as art takes priority over romantic love. If there is significance to Roberts's use of this off-kilter form here, it may be that the form refuses to mouth the language of the 'ignoble marts'. Rather, it flaunts its idiosyncrasy, refusing the neat closure of a love-sonnet, but also answering the provocation of free-verse modernism with an artfully unconventional stanza that Roberts formalizes through repetition (the stanza repeats three times in 'Tiger Lily'), setting its metrical 'feet' toward whatever magic may still be had in lyric.

As the editor of *Ainslee's* magazine, an inexpensive monthly that published poetry as filler in the spaces between short fiction, Roberts was aware how little money poetry earned in the literary marketplace. *Pan and Peacocks* was published after a period when Roberts had edited two failed magazines, one a cheaply produced fiction magazine,[59] and another a literary quarterly, *The American Parade*, that Roberts founded in 1926 in hopes of appealing to an elite readership. Both projects folded after a year, leaving Roberts to freelance work.[60] It is no surprise then that Roberts's lyrics often advertise their own refusal of the ignobility of the marketplace, raising poetry up as a source of value for its own sake. This can be seen in 'Villanelle of Immortal Youth', which refuses not just the everydayness of the market, but the progress of time: 'We have declared allegiance to the Spring | And raised her temple in this urban mart. | December shall not find us sorrowing'. Instead of bowing to the market, it is '[t]o jewelled pipes of Pan we dance and sing'.[61] Roberts turns his opposition to the 'urban mart' into a collective ritual, the worship of lyric in an attempt to revive a lost world. Or, as Roberts writes in another villanelle: 'Our hearts were pagan and the quest old'.[62]

For Roberts, the inspiration for such a quest can be found in Swinburne. His autobiography includes a bizarre account of a 1923 trip to London in which he traced Swinburne's daily walk up Putney Hill and had the uncanny sensation of 'watching him with an inner eye as he followed the same route long ago', perceiving Swinburne's 'frail body and sloping shoulders' just ahead of him. Roberts then finds himself drawn to a bench where he finds the letters 'A. C. S.' carved into the seat, leaving him to wonder whether he 'had been in communication with the disembodied ego of Swinburne' or whether, having gone to Putney 'with a receptive attitude', he had rather 'thrown [his] mind open to a flood of telepathic suggestions from survivors who had known him in the flesh'.[63] Whatever the case, his 'Villanelle of the Master's Praise (Algernon Charles Swinburne)' proudly follows in Swinburne's footsteps, praising Swinburne in the same epideictic mode that Swinburne used to praise Baudelaire:

He tuned our pipes before dark death befell.

We are but silver, he a golden gong.
We bring our best in greeting and farewell.[64]

As Potolsky has argued, it was Gautier and Swinburne who 'first [defined] decadence as a project, as a cultural and political stance organized around judgments of taste and expressions of appreciation.' Swinburne's elegy for Baudelaire, 'Ave atque Vale', for example, which Roberts alludes to ('greeting and farewell'), made 'admiration itself a central preoccupation for the decadent movement'.[65] It was through such acts of appreciation that the decadents posited themselves as part of a transnational aesthetic elite. In 'Villanelle of the Master's Praise', Roberts counts himself among a cosmopolitan community of poetic mourners: 'His is the music that we strive to swell | With halting voices that he sweeps along'. The speaker wonders whither Swinburne's spirit had gone, whether to Olympus (presumably) 'where the immortals dwell', or to Hades among the 'fields of asphodel', or to some other place. The speaker calls on the female spirits Swinburne gave voice to, Sappho, Proserpine, Faustine, Dolores, and Fragoletta, to intercede on the speaker's behalf and bear his lyric homage to Swinburne: 'Speak to him, Sappho, lest he hear us wrong […] I, a frail voice, have brought a villanelle. | Bear it to him, Faustine, among the throng'.[66] The villanelle is self-reflexive in that the poem we are reading, which is pleading that a poem be carried to Swinburne, is the poem the speaker hopes will be carried to Swinburne, making the plea to be heard by the dead master identical with the act of homage itself. In seeking to communicate with the dead, the poem binds together a community of Swinburne's admirers. Nonetheless, Sappho and her cohort constitute an elect group whose selective judgment and intercession are necessary to lift a 'frail voice' from among the 'throng' lest that voice be misheard. The dramatic speakers Swinburne inhabited in his poetry thus become his ears in death, selecting which tunes can be piped across the boundary of the living and the dead. The female figures Swinburne immortalized, in a way, become the editorial gatekeepers and couriers of the underworld.

Roberts repeatedly figures beauty as a rare thing in modern life, a 'gem in pawn, | Save only to […] alien rogues'.[67] Those enthralled to beauty also stand witness to the decadence and

degradation of society, as in the sonnets that open *Pan and Peacocks*. These sonnets plunge the reader into the excesses of ancient Rome and pay homage to a pre-modern, pagan world whose beauty awaits restoration by latter day adherents. The first poem, 'Peacocks', recalls the scene of Pompey's third triumph after his conquests in Asia. The poem draws on Plutarch's life of Pompey, which describes this rival to Julius Ceasar at the height of his popularity parading royal captives from Eastern Europe and the Orient through the streets of Rome. Plutarch goes on to recount Pompey's political demise and assassination (he was stabbed in the back by a former lieutenant upon seeking safe harbour in Egypt).[68] In Roberts's sonnet, the 'peacocks' are Pompey's captives, who bear their defeat with haughty contempt for their captors:

> They came from Persia to the sacred way
> And rode in Pompey's triumph, side by side
> With odalisques and idols, plumes flung wide,
> A flame of gems in the chill Roman day.
> They that were brought as captives came to stay,
> To flaunt in beauty, mystery and pride,
> To preen before the emperors deified,
> Symbols of their magnificent decay.
>
> Then there was madness and a scourge of swords.
> Imperial purple mouldered into dust.
> But the immortal peacocks stung new lords
> To furies of insatiable lust.
> Contemptuous, they loitered on parade—
> Live opals, rubies, sardonyx and jade.[69]

Roberts's 'peacocks' resemble orientalized dandies. In Baudelaire's terms, the dandy is 'the supreme incarnation of the idea of Beauty transported into the sphere of material life'.[70] Even conquered natives can represent 'the last spark of heroism amid decadence'.[71] Lawrence's captives are living gem-like flames who flaunt their plumage in defiance of a martial display that is little more than a mark of the excesses of empire. Indeed, it is not clear whether they are symbols of their own 'magnificent decay' or the emperors'. Nevertheless, the captives display an 'immortal' beauty that outlasts their captors. As Roman fortunes take a downward turn from the martial triumph of the octave to the 'madness' and strife of the sestet, the beauty of these captives only hardens with the closure of the final couplet. These hostages from the East become precious gems

while the imperial purple moulders to dust. The 'insatiable lust' they provoke has its own racialized decadent pedigree, recalling the Latin title of Baudelaire's poem '*Sed non satiata*', which describes the speaker's insatiable lust for his lover, an 'ebony sorceress'.[72] Baudelaire's title further recalls Juvenal's Sixth Satire, which describes the insatiable lust of Messalina, wife to the Emperor Claudius, who worked at a brothel each night only to leave in the morning unsatisfied.[73] Though Pompey's captives drive their captors to insatiable lust in 'Peacocks', they remain cool, loitering on parade. Pompey's Rome, despite its recent triumph, is shown to be decaying amid its own desires. Beauty, held captive to empire's martial imperatives, reigns eternal even in defeat.

Roberts's sonnet 'Matriarchy', a political allegory that heralds the restoration of a pre-democratic, pre-Christian order figured as female, could serve as a coda to Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine':

> Their dull democracies commence to wane.
> Cooped in their capitals of steel and stone,
> The ape, the tiger and the hog have grown
> Thick through the neck and atrophied of brain.
> So the wheel turns, and your day comes again.
> Magnificent in tyranny, alone,
> You will loll back on your pomegranate throne
> And teach man how an empress shows disdain.
>
> I shall make songs to greet you. I shall bear
> Roses and subtle perfumes for your hair,
> I shall not fear that you will bid me go.
> For though you spurned all others, you would spare
> Swinburne and Keats and Baudelaire and Poe,
> Pan and his troop of fauns and poor Pierrot.[74]

In *Pierrot Wounded*, Roberts had used the tiger to represent the primitive violence that terrorized man's ape forefathers and from which Europe's leaders had not freed themselves as they found themselves plunged into a war.[75] The hog in 'Matriarchy' presumably represents greed or some other quality of the world's atrophying democracies. We can guess that the magnificent tyrant is Proserpine, queen of the underworld returned to her pomegranate throne as Swinburne predicted: 'But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide in the end'.[76] As in Swinburne, she is the representative of an older order, but also the muse of death and melancholia as she was for Keats,

Baudelaire, and Poe, with Pan and Pierrot as her attendants. But there's an odd temporality to the turn here. While Proserpine's restoration seems assured in the octave ('your day comes again'), the sestet reveals that restoration to be an event that lies in the future ('I shall make songs to greet you'). Roberts again conflates the poem in hand with the promise of a future poem. In the closing couplet, Roberts places himself within the decadent lineage of acolytes upon whom Proserpine has bestowed favour. Queen of the dead, she is the patroness of a perennially revenant poetry that survives the failing politics of the moment. Her tyranny is a foil to the dullness of modern democracy and the democratization of poetry. If the poem seems alarmingly anti-democratic, it is worth noting that during Roberts's brief stint as a war reporter he witnessed an artillery attack that left a soldier's chest blown open in front of him.[77] His disillusionment with the atrophy of political leadership hardly makes him unique among poets who survived the Great War, nor would such reactionary politics be out of place in the decadent lineage he hails.

Another sonnet, 'Orgy', stages the scene of Roman decadence again, this time in the memory of a speaker who asks a lover to recall an orgy they witnessed:

> Do you remember at the Roman feast
> How the burnt incense eddied in thick whirls
> Above the roasted peacocks and the pearls
> Melting in wine? Do you recall the creased,
> Enormous jowls of the Priapic beast
> Who spent his lust upon the dancing girls?
> Their bruised white bodies and their tumbled curls?
> The slobber foaming at his lips like yeast?
>
> Lolling behind the curtains, we looked down
> And watched the bloated gluttons roll and crown
> Their heads with vine leaves, wilted in the steam.
> Epicurean, beautiful, unchaste,
> Once only did we turn about to taste
> A kiss too merciless for them to dream.[78]

What makes this poem decadent is not the orgy worthy of Petronius, but the Epicurean restraint of the voyeuristic couple who look down on the orgy from above, aloof, savouring a kiss that the bloated gluttons lack the discernment to appreciate. There are any number of accounts of such scenes of excess in Pliny, Suetonius, Juvenal, the Augustan Histories, and so forth. The melting of

pearls in vinegar or wine is a recurring emblem of excess from Cleopatra to Caligula.[79] What matters is the speaker's coolness toward the scene of gluttony and their delectation in the memory of a kiss enjoyed in contempt of that gluttony. As in Villiers's *Axël*, the dream of this kiss is superior to gross experience.

If there's a politics to be extrapolated from Roberts's decadent verse, it hardly fits the charge of blind empire loyalism that critics such as Baugh and Brown reflexively ascribe to Roberts's allegedly Swinburnian imitations. (Despite his admiration for Swinburne, Roberts's poetry sounds more like that of Symons or Dowson). Rather, for Roberts, the Epicurean appreciation of beauty, and the identification with an aesthetic elite that carries the flame of a lost, pagan world, allows poetry to stand apart from the everyday world and its politics, intrigue, backstabbing, pointless warfare, and material gluttony. Roberts calls forth a kind of dandiacal beauty in a Baudelairean sense as a fragment of eternal beauty in dialectical relationship with the real world, opposing the world but reforming itself in relation to the world, adapting a decadent poetics to new historical contexts.

Roberts does take an explicit position in favour of West Indian self-government in his later prose. After *Pan and Peacocks,* he wrote a number of novels and histories that furthered the cause of national liberation in the West Indies. In his 1950 volume *Medallions,* he pays homage to Cuban poet and independence leader José Martí. In 1933 he published a statement on 'Self-Government in Jamaica' that opposed Jamaica's status as a Crown Colony.[80] In the statement, Roberts notes that Jamaica largely administered itself for its first two-hundred years under British rule. After the Morant Bay revolt in 1865, however, the planter class, which had vociferously opposed emancipation and feared a violent black uprising, petitioned to become a Crown Colony, allowing for direct rule by Britain:

> The truth was, that the legislators of 1865 abandoned their powers, asked for and got a Crown Colony, because they doubted their ability to control the huge Negro population. They thought in terms of a Jamaica owned by the white minority, and for ever to be so preserved.

There being no 'democratic opinion' in 1865 'to restrain the planters', Jamaica drifted into political slumber, showing

> almost unparalleled indifference to their country's destiny. Culturally and politically, the people of Jamaica have been dormant. They have developed a natural individualism, because that is a gift of God to all human entities; but it has almost no public expression.[81]

Roberts argues that it is long past time that Jamaica reassert its right to self-government. He heaps scorn on the self-interested planters and laments the political torpor into which his country had fallen. While I do not take the sonnets in *Pan and Peacocks* as specific political allegories for Jamaica's status as a Crown Colony, one could argue that there are common threads between Roberts's critique of Jamaica's dormant political status and poems that display their contempt for the failure of imperial systems, the waning of democratic sentiment, and the lapse of a ruling class into gluttonous self-interest. These were the same political failures evident in the planter aristocracy's willingness to forgo their own political rights in order to defend a culture grounded in white supremacy and horror at the prospect of black-majority government.

If the political loyalties and literary affinities of poets such as Roberts and Lawrence do not quite fit the anticolonial politics of a later generation of critics of West Indian literature, it should be clear by now, I hope, that the charges of empire loyalism and dead-end Victorian imitation at the very least need to be complicated. Such an undertaking is necessary if one is to understand the significance of decadent and aestheticist writing during this important early-twentieth-century moment in Caribbean literature and to sketch that moment's continuity with the postcolonial writing that followed from it (if only to repudiate it). The charge of mechanical Swinburnian imitation belies a more nuanced set of aesthetic commitments and political imperatives. Indeed, the reflexive dismissal of these poets' Victorianism ignores the way aestheticism and decadence enabled an oppositional poetics that must be read in the colonial context from which it emerges, and which ought to prod scholars of aestheticism and decadence to consider the range of critical positions opened by greater attention to colonial writing within a more geographically expansive conception of the field. Rather than regarding poets such as

Lawrence and Roberts as failed branches in the evolution of a West Indian poetics, it may be time to try to understand such poets on their own terms as self-consciously modern artists who set out to capture political failure, neglect, and decline in verse that deliberately opposed the modernist trends of their era and adopted a pose of disdain toward the literary marketplace. Given that even these poets' detractors acknowledge such writing to have been the most representative poetry of its era, we should take these poets seriously enough to examine their work for what it was, not just for what post-independence critics hoped it might have been.

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[1] P. H. Daly, [Biography], in Walter MacArthur Lawrence,*The Poet of Guiana, Walter MacArthur Lawrence: Selected Works*, ed. by P. H. Daly (Georgetown: Daily Chronicle, 1948), pp. 5-17 (p. 8).
[2] Ibid., p. 9.
[3] Ibid., p. 8.
[4] Marion Thain, *The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism: Forms of Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 1.
[5] While Manu Samriti Chander has examined how Martin drew on 'tropes associated with Wordsworth, Keats, Poe, and other English and American Romantics', adapting Romanticism to forge local communities of readers, no similar project has been systematically undertaken with regard to aesthetic and decadent Caribbean writing. See Manu Samriti Chander, *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 42.
[6] During the era of decolonization, anticolonial criticism routinely associated the notion of art for art's sake with the art and literature of dying European empires, measuring a new poetics of national consciousness against the over-refinements of a senescent and exhausted civilization. An axiomatic association of art for art's sake with the decadence of European culture is evident throughout the work of anticolonial thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Aimée Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Chinua Achebe, and Michael Thelwell. See Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 1-36.
[7] See Alex Murray, 'Introduction: Decadent Histories', in *Decadence: A Literary History,* ed. by Alex Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 9-12.
[8] See Kate Hext and Alex Murray (eds) *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).
[9] Matthew Potolsky, 'Decadence and Politics', in *Decadence: A Literary History,* p. 153.
[10] Richard Dellamora, 'Productive Decadence: "The Queer Comradeship of Outlawed Thought": Vernon Lee, Max Nordau, and Oscar Wilde', *New Literary History*, 35.4 (2004), 529-67 (p. 529).
[11] See Thain, *The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism*, pp. 1-18.
[12] Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp. 1-32.
[13] For an example of how decadent modes of writing captured scenes of ruination and fears of black rebellion in fin-de-siècle West Indian epic poetry, see Robert Stilling, 'Warramou's Curse: Epic, Decadence, and the Colonial West Indies', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43.3 (2015), 445-63.
[14] Taylor, *Empire of Neglect*, p. 3.
[15] Ibid., p. 1.
[16] Ibid., p. 5.
[17] Ibid., p. 14.
[18] Ibid., p. 6.
[19] Ibid., p. 236.
[20] Ibid., p. 12.
[21] Edward Baugh describes Virtue as an 'aesthete' and 'Parnassian', with an 'air of a man single-mindedly cultivating his own dream of a world'. See Edward Baugh, *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1971), p. 6.
[22] Daly, p. 10.

[23] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[24] Ibid., p. 12.
[25] Baugh, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 5.
[26] Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, pp. 15-16.
[27] Ibid., p. 29.
[28] Lloyd W. Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, 2nd edn (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 27.
[29] Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 22. The possessive apostrophe in 'night's' is in the printed text, although 'nights | That descend' would make more sense grammatically. We have chosen to follow the printed text here.
[30] Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 27.
[31] Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 22.
[32] Jerome McGann, 'Introduction', in Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
[33] Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, pp. 26, 28.
[34] Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 55.
[35] Ibid., p. 56.
[36] A. J. Seymour, 'Introduction to the Poetry of Walter MacA. Lawrence', *Kyk-Over-Al*, 2.6 (1948), 35-38 (p. 36).
[37] Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 40-41.
[38] Ibid., p. 41.
[39] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
[40] Ibid., p. 43.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., p. 38.
[43] Ibid., p. 40.
[44] Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 28.
[45] Nigel Kelly, *Quentin Crisp: The Profession of Being* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011), p. 170.
[46] Daly, p. 9.
[47] Ibid., p. 10.
[48] Ibid., p. 15.
[49] Seymour, 'Introduction', p. 36.
[50] Quoted in Seymour, 'Introduction', p. 36.
[51] Baugh, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 6.
[52] Sarah Parker, 'Burning the Candle at Both Ends: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Decadence', in *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, ed. by Kate Hext and Alex Murray, p. 137.
[53] Carl Van Vechten, 'Ronald Firbank', *The Double-Dealer*, 3.16 (1922), 185-86 (p. 185).
[54] W. Adolphe Roberts, *These Many Years: An Autobiography*, ed. by Peter Hulme (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2015), p. 213.
[55] Ibid., p. 222.
[56] Ibid., p. 223.
[57] Ibid., p. 224.
[58] W. Adolphe Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1928), p. 41.
[59] *Brief Stories*, published by Harper's.
[60] Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 230-32.
[61] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 25.
[62] Roberts, 'Villanelle of the Golden Fleece', in *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 26.
[63] Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 242-44.
[64] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 23.
[65] Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 47.
[66] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks,* p. 23.
[67] Roberts, 'Villanelle of Dalliance', in *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 27.
[68] Bernadotte Perrin, trans., *Plutarch's Lives* (London: W. Heinemann, 1917), pp. 115-325.
[69] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks,* p. 11.
[70] Charles Baudelaire, 'Further Notes on Edgar Poe', in *The Painter of Modern Life*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1995), p. 99.
[71] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' in *The Painter of Modern life*, pp. 28-29.
[72] Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1993), p. 55.
[73] Juvenal, Satire VI, lines 114-135, in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. by G. G. Ramsay (London: W. Heinemann, 1961), pp. 92-93.
[74] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 12.
[75] Roberts, 'Tiger and Ape', in *Pierrot Wounded* (New York: Britton, 1919), p. 8.
[76] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine', in *Major Poems and Selected Prose,* p. 103.
[77] Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 194-95.
[78] Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks,* p. 13.

[79] James Grout has helpfully compiled instances in 'Cleopatra and the Pearl', in *Encyclopedia Romana* (1997-2020) <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/miscellanea/cleopatra/cabanel.html> [accessed 16 June 2021].
[80] This statement was originally published as an appendix to Roberts's *Sir Henry Morgan: Buccaneer and Governor* (New York: Covici Friede, 1933). Roberts felt it important enough to include it in his autobiography.
[81] Roberts, *These Many Years*, p. 265.

M. P. Shiel, the Decadent Vortex, and Racial Anxiety[1]

Neil Hultgren

California State University, Long Beach

Decadent literature is unique in that it purports to confront the realities of nature as it was imagined in the late nineteenth century – nature that, like language, had proven itself deaf to human concerns and unwilling to uphold its end of the mimetic bargain that the Romantics had struck with it. If nature had shifted, over the course of the nineteenth century, from Wordsworth's nurturing and unbetraying presence to Tennyson's harpy, then decadent writing registered this shift and attempted to make sense of the new identity of nature and the hard truths that accompanied it. Recent criticism by scholars such as Dennis Denisoff and Benjamin Morgan has explored the relationship between decadent literature and nature through an ecocritical lens, whether in relation to paganism (Denisoff) or scalar understandings of the globe (Morgan).[2] Amidst this recent convergence of ecocriticism and decadence, whether via what Denisoff describes as 'Pagan animism and ritual de-individuation' or what Morgan explores as a 'spatial scaling-up' of literature in discussions of global climate change, human subjectivity has, somewhat inevitably, slid into the background.[3] Ecocriticism, in its efforts to think through the effects of human agency on climate change and imagine a future for the earth that is not based on humanity, has by necessity turned towards unique ways that science fiction and fantasy writers explored extended and collective kinds of subjectivity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ursula K. Heise predicts that 'The larger-than-life hero or single protagonist may decrease in importance, since epic-style narratives over the last century have tended to shift the major narrative actants from individual human characters to collective and sometimes nonhuman actors'.[4]

Yet the turn away from the single protagonist's subjectivity risks our overlooking and ignoring some of the most potent aspects of the literature of the late nineteenth century, and, alternatively, ignoring variants of current ecologically oriented fiction that, like Jeff VanderMeer's

Southern Reach trilogy (2014) and his *Borne* novels and novellas, are striking to readers in part because of the unique contortions of consciousness that they perform as narrators and characters struggle to conceive of a dynamic and unsettled planet. It is for this reason that M. P. Shiel's (pen-name of Matthew Phipps Shiell, 1865-1947) apocalyptic 'last man' novel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901), alongside some of his other works of the late nineteenth century, is worthy of additional attention. While Shiel clearly draws on literary techniques such as the sublime, pathetic fallacy, and what would later be called cosmic horror to represent nature, his work is not reducible to any of these different techniques, and it frequently foils – whether deliberately or not – our attempts to disentangle human consciousness from the planet.[5] Shiel's late-Victorian texts explore the ways in which the earth is frequently used as a marker to delimit human consciousness and, even more clearly, to mark the demise of subjectivity, the limit at which subjectivity becomes impossible.

Shiel, Poe, and the Whirlpool

The hydrological phenomenon of the whirlpool, while not representative of all complicated intersections of human subjectivity with the terrestrial in Shiel's oeuvre, serves as a fascinating example of the ways that Shiel's texts entangle conceptions of the human with the non-human world. Since at least Walter Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* (1873), decadent writing has been fascinated by the notion of flux and change which has, in certain cases, been connected to one specific phenomenon of such flux, the whirlpool. Pater opens his conclusion by commenting that our 'physical life is a perpetual motion' of natural elements: 'the passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain under every ray of light and sound'.[6] When Pater turns to describing 'the inward world of thought and feeling', he comments that 'the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring.'[7] Because the flux of blood and brain tissue emerges in Pater's prose prior to the whirlpool of thought and feeling, Pater implies that the experiences of consciousness align with material

corporeal processes, while the whirlpool reference suggests that the earth provides the metaphors that in part enable this alignment.

Shiel's background made him especially sensitive to such metaphors. As a writer born on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, home to the Soufrière Hills subduction volcano, Shiel grew up in an environment where devouring flames and unsettling earthquakes were as likely to be a part of lived experience as they were metaphors for physical, mental, and emotional processes. In one version of his autobiographical portrait, 'About Myself', Shiel described the 'passionate woes', 'despondent manias', and 'tantrums' of Montserrat's vulcanism, observing pithily, '[n]o one born in such a place can be quite sane'.[8] Shiel's works do not simply remind readers that water and flame have physical existence outside of our minds; they suggest that water and flame can represent the collapse of human consciousness just as much as they can represent its vivid life. The *Oxford English Dictionary* sheds light on the figurative power of hydrology in depicting mental states during the nineteenth century, as it cites Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836) as the first example in which *maelstrom* refers not to a literal whirlpool but to '[a]ny state of turbulence or confusion; a swirling mass of small objects'; Carlyle describes Teufelsdröckh's laugh as a 'billow in that vast world-Mahlstrom of Humour', a phrase that, given the history of the word *humour*, may or may not pertain to a discussion of something more abstract than liquid.[9] As both the example from Pater and the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry on the word *maelstrom* indicate, nineteenth-century British scholars were in part responsible for the expansion of the whirlpool and vortex beyond the hydrological phenomena into psychological metaphor.

The whirlpool is a unique hydrological phenomenon in part because, even in places where whirlpools are known to form, they are temporary. Brief in terms of human time, they are intermittent and transitory, appearing and disappearing in ways we can see. Observers of whirlpools may emphasize their predictable and periodic circular movement, yet witnesses also note the violence and disorientation they create in those who may be caught up in their motions. Within the late Victorian period, the whirlpool both hearkens back to the sublime stupefaction

provoked by cataracts and mountaintops in Romantic writing and anticipates the turn towards geometric abstraction in the work of the Vorticists.[10] Whirlpools as vertical phenomena also serve as gateways not simply to death and destruction but to the depths of the sea and, in certain imaginative works, to the interior of the earth itself. Though nature writer Robert Macfarlane notes that Edgar Allan Poe's description of the whirlpool in 'A Descent into the Maelström' (1841) is 'nautically preposterous', he acknowledges that 'Poe's story partook of widespread nineteenth-century fascination with the idea of an actual global underland to which certain entrance points existed'.[11] In a way that unintentionally echoes Shiel's writing, Macfarlane also notes that the actual maelstrom near the Lofoten Islands does not resemble a funnel but that its 'rough circle' connects to 'lines of foam' similar to 'the arms of a spiral galaxy'.[12] As Shiel adopts the mythical funnel shape of the whirlpool from Poe, he anticipates Macfarlane in imagining correspondences among the revolutions of the whirlpool and other revolutions in nature. Shiel does not reference the structure of the galaxy, but he frequently implies ways in which the circular motion of a whirlpool might suggest planetary motions, most notably the earth's rotation. Whirlpools sit at the intersection of the terrestrial and the galactic, concrete and the abstract, imaginable and the unimaginable, interior and exterior, and mental and physical. Within decadent literature – a kind of writing dependent on analogies of the human mind, the literary work, language, and the so-called natural world – the whirlpool signals both the necessity and instability of such analogies, and at the same time reminds us of the sometimes logical and sometimes arbitrary switching points between different discourses related to decadence.

While much has been written about geographic and geologic phenomena in Shiel's writing,[13] critics have had less to say about the recurrence of the whirlpool in Shiel's fiction. Yet not only was Shiel's work part of the understanding of the whirlpool I describe here, but it was also a way in which anxieties about race were interwoven with fears of mental disintegration and the dynamic nature of the earth. Though *The Purple Cloud* offers perhaps the most sophisticated sense of the whirlpool as a central structure for the contemplation of the intersection between the

natural world, human subjectivity, and racial difference, Shiel's fiction of the 1890s had relied on the whirlpool both as a plot device and as a vehicle for metaphysical speculation. His April 1895 story in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, 'Huguenin's Wife', one of the first that Harold Billings connects to Shiel's turn towards supernatural fiction,[14] concludes with the revelation that the soul of the narrator's friend's wife has transmigrated into a murderous feathered cheetah. A storm and an undefined geological catastrophe accompany this revelation, such that the story's setting, the island of Delos, disconnects from the earth's crust and begins, allegedly, to float. The narrator observes the geologic events that bring this about: 'a multitude of deep, smooth, conical openings, edged with grey, glowing scoriae'; he notes that '[t]he deep, – without billow or foam or ripple – luminous far down with phosphorescences – rushed, like some lambent lamina yoked to the fiery steeds of Diomedes […] towards the island.'[15] Through description so ornate that it becomes vague, this passage depicts the collapse in the earth's crust followed by rushing water. In Shiel's 1896 Viking story for *Cassell's Family Magazine*, 'The Spectre-Ship', the whirlpool is described more clearly and more closely resembles that of Poe's 'A Descent into the Maelström'. Gurth Hermodsson, the nephew of the Viking Sigurd, plots to usurp the Viking's position in his absence and marry Sigurd's young ward. At the story's climax, after Gurth has murdered the unsuspecting Sigurd, and the Viking's burial ship has been set ablaze and launched, the ship mysteriously pursues Gurth, ignites Gurth's ship, and forces the panicked Gurth to steer his own craft into 'one of the huge whirlpools which swirl in frothy frenzy' off the coast of Norway.[16] The whirlpool removes the villain from the story and from the known world, reestablishes the social order in which Sigurd's ward marries his son, and, by completing the pursuit of Gurth by the burial ship, fulfils a seer's prophecy that Gurth must 'beware of the dead'.[17] The whirlpool is Shiel's tool for bringing his story to a close and providing its plot with a melodramatic conclusion.

Shiel's 'Vaila', part of the second short story collection he published in John Lane's Keynote series, *Shapes in the Fire* (1896), aligns the Norwegian setting of 'The Spectre-Ship' with the ornately incoherent geology of 'Huguenin's Wife'. Located on the island of Vaila off the

Norwegian coast, the ancestral home of the narrator's friend, Harfager, sits at a confluence of lakes adjacent to the sea, surrounded by plunging waterfalls. In the climax of the story, when Harfager's mother and aunt perish and Harfager himself descends into madness, a nearby tempest causes the chains that hold the palace to the island to snap and the entire mansion begins revolving. The narrator's reaction to the revolving Norwegian abode initially mimics Harfager's ecstasy at the fulfilment of an age-old prophecy that portends his family's destruction, but it quickly turns to horror as, in a moment reminiscent of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), the narrator escapes just in time to witness the mansion's collapse.

The whirlpool also appears in two longer works penned by Shiel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *The Yellow Danger* (1898), Shiel's excessive take on the invasion novel genre, a Norwegian whirlpool again appears, this time to eliminate the antagonists of the story at its dénouement, though what was the fulfilment of a prophecy in 'The Spectre-Ship' becomes here a self-conscious act of genocide perpetrated by the British naval hero, John Hardy. Before Hardy infects with cholera 150 million Chinese warriors who have invaded continental Europe, he decides he must execute twenty million Chinese prisoners of war who have been captured on barges just prior to invading the British Isles. Hardy's fleet tows the twenty million warriors to Norway and consigns them to the maelstrom, where they are consumed and, from the perspective of the novel, disappear.[18] Published three years later, *The Purple Cloud* avoids the direct representation of Norwegian whirlpools, though it frequently draws on the rotational frenzy displayed at the conclusion of 'Vaila' and reimagines the violent whirlpools of the earlier stories as an eerie 'circular clean-cut lake' of wheeling fluid that the protagonist, doctor, and eventual explorer, Adam Jeffson, finds at the North Pole.[19]

Shiel's whirlpools take on extra resonance in relation to his significant debt to Poe's fiction. Shiel first encountered Poe's works when he was seventeen, and, though he later downplayed their significance, they impacted nearly every aspect of his artistic output.[20] Three of Poe's works anticipate Shiel's representations of whirlpools. Poe's early story, 'MS Found in a Bottle' (1833),

culminates with its unnamed narrator, a passenger on the ancient ghost ship, *Discovery*, 'plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool' in a storm at the South Pole.[21] Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), ends with an event that echoes the fate of the *Discovery*, though it is less precise in its rendering of actual hydrological phenomena: after a lengthy and increasingly bizarre journey, Pym reaches the South Pole and, before sighting an ambiguous white figure, encounters a 'chasm' and a 'cataract'.[22] The conclusion of *Arthur Gordon Pym* unites representations of race and hydrological phenomena. Poe's most detailed rendering of a whirlpool, however, locates the phenomenon not at the South Pole but nearer to the North, as a fisherman tells the narrator about his near demise in a whirlpool that periodically forms off the Norwegian coast in 'A Descent into the Maelström'. Poe's exactitude in locating the story – the fisherman is noted for his 'particularizing manner' – places it at 68 degrees latitude near the Lofoten islands, a detail that Shiel would later make more particular when noting in *The Yellow Danger* that the British leave the barges of Chinese prisoners in the whirlpool miles north of 67 degrees and 48 minutes latitude.[23] Unlike the narrator of 'MS Found in a Bottle', Poe's fisherman survives to detail the nuances of his psychological experience: his awe about the vortex as 'a manifestation of God's power', '*amusement* in speculating upon the relative velocities' of objects floating in the whirlpool, and elements of horror, though the horror is largely experienced by his brother, also a fisherman, who dies partly because the experience makes him 'a raving maniac through sheer fright.'[24] 'A Descent into the Maelström' is Poe's most cerebral examination of strange hydrological phenomena, but it is also, of the three works described here, the most vivid example of what Matthew A. Taylor calls the 'posthuman ecology' of Poe's writing, or its 'radical, often fearful decomposing of normative conceptions of discrete humanity and bounded individual identity'.[25]

Bestial Subjects in a Vortical Universe

The posthuman ecology that Taylor describes, with its 'fearful decomposing', might be understood as gaining traction and prominence in the late nineteenth century, long after Poe's death, because

of Darwin's discoveries and the 'basic scientific reality' that Allen MacDuffie, in his discussion of Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), sees as accompanying such reality: 'the dwarfing vistas of Deep Time, the corporeality of human consciousness, the inevitable extinction of the species, life, the planet itself'.[26] In *The Purple Cloud*, however, Shiel's storytelling locates posthuman horror not in the vast swathes of temporality that become observable due to time travel but in one of the novel's more mystical moments as Adam Jeffson finally reaches the North Pole as part of a worldwide competition for a cash prize. Having murdered some crewmates and abandoned others, Jeffson reaches the Pole to find a circular lake that frightens him because it is sexualized and apparently in pain:

> The lake, I fancy, must be a mile across, and in its middle is a pillar of ice, very low and broad; and I had the clear impression, or dream, or notion, that there was a name, or word, graven all round in the ice of the pillar in characters which I could never read; and under the name a long date; and the fluid of the lake seemed to me to be wheeling with a shivering ecstasy, splashing and fluttering, round the pillar, always from west to east, in the direction of the spinning of the earth; and it was borne in upon me – I can't at all say how – that this fluid was the substance of a living creature; and I had the distinct fancy, as my senses failed, that it was a creature with many dull and anguished eyes, and that, as it wheeled for ever round in fluttering lust, it kept its eyes always turned upon the name and the date graven in the pillar. But this must be my madness… (p. 41).

What Jeffson sees is as jarring as his narration is unreliable. Though this is one of the book's most distinctive examples of the supernatural, which could potentially mitigate or ignore MacDuffie's 'basic scientific reality', its only consolations come from a suggestion that some entity capable of written language – whether a divinity or a person from a previous civilization – has left its inscription on the pillar or constructed a lake that is 'clear-cut', details that could allude, according to John Sutherland, to Theosophist Helena Blavatsky's occult imaginings of the Pole (pp. xxiv-xxv, 274). Yet the fluid that surrounds the pillar is the more frightening and disturbing part of the description because it is the first in a series of episodes in *The Purple Cloud* in which the protagonist and the planet appear caught in a mimetic relationship.

The fluid, or at the least animate characteristics Jeffson discovers in the fluid – its ecstasy, the sense that it has 'dull and anguished eyes', and the notion that it 'wheel[s] in 'fluttering lust' –

suggest a surge of pained and sexualized energies almost akin to the Freudian libido and its reliance on dynamic drives and vectors of desire. The fluid seems to have fallen prey to overwhelming emotion, and the narrative record's signals of its own potential unreliability compound the cathectic instability of the fluid. Narrative turmoil accompanies the fluid, which is not explicitly described as water. Monique Morgan has, in her discussion of the genre of *The Purple Cloud*, determined that Jeffson exhibits traits of an unreliable narrator; she highlights how he suffers from delusions and she observes that his narrative includes significant gaps in time between what he experiences and the narrative recording and accounting of such experiences.[27] In terms of the unfolding of Jeffson's narrative and the features of his unreliability, his experience at the Pole is a moment of fracture. Before his experience at the Pole, Jeffson is unreliable because, to use the terminology provided by narratologist James Phelan, he 'underregard[s]' his own knowledge and desires related to the murderous actions that he takes or condones as he competes to become the first person to arrive at the North Pole.[28] In his descriptions of phenomena at the Pole, he moves into the realm of what Phelan calls 'misreporting' when readers begin to suspect that polar visions are inaccurate.[29] Such suspicions are not merely driven by the oddity of, for instance, fluid 'wheeling with a shivering ecstasy', but by the fact that the form of the text is marked by frequent qualifying interjections. A perception opens itself to doubt when the person experiencing it describes it as 'a distinct fancy' that occurred 'as my senses failed'. Similarly, Jeffson observes the name or word on the pillar at the centre of the lake as part of what he describes as 'the clear impression, or dream, or notion', phrasing that suggests significant slippage from distinct perception to oneiric fantasy. The paragraph form also breaks with the convention set by Shiel's novel. While *The Purple Cloud* is an amorphous literary work, notable for having no chapter breaks beyond 'Forward' and 'The Purple Cloud', the description of Jeffson's arrival at the Pole is especially fragmentary, as paragraph breaks are joined by more frequent section breaks and specially asterisked section breaks, such as one that comes after Jeffson 'dropped down flat in

swoon' (p. 40). Jeffson's initiation into the occult knowledge of the earth is accompanied by an accelerated collapse of his narrative authority and reliability.

John Sutherland's edition of *The Purple Cloud* connects this moment to the cryptic conclusion of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* in a way that is persuasive (p. 274), but the moment is also entirely unique given that Shiel does not end his narrative here. Instead, Jeffson's mental unrest and unreliability proliferate until he begins his work on his palace many pages later. The image of the fluid in the circular lake persists in the narrator's mind as he begins his journey southward: 'What I had seen, or dreamed, at the Pole followed and followed me' while 'in my spinning dark dreams spun that eternal ecstasy of the lake' (pp. 44, 45). Jeffson later notes, when he comes upon his ship, the *Boreal*, which he believes will allow him first contact with humans since his discovery, '[f]rom the day when I stood at the Pole, and saw there the dizzy thing that made me swoon, there had come into my way not one sign or trace that other beings like myself were alive on the earth with me' (p. 62). Jeffson's speculations about his Polar confusion continue even later into the novel, when he questions the structure of the earth more broadly and wonders, 'that thing that wheeled at the Pole, wheels it still yonder, yonder, in its dark ecstasy?' (p. 156).

The Pole's inland lake and its supernatural features are both drawn from Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888),[30] but Shiel also connects them to debates within physics during the second half of the Victorian period. Most suggestive in Jeffson's description is the word *fluid*, which he employs for the weirdly animate rotating liquid. The references to fluid point to Victorian theories of the structure of the universe premised on ether and atoms, as well as the debt of these theories to hydrodynamics. William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) adapted Hermann von Helmholtz's idea of 'an absolutely unalterable quality in the motion of any portion of a perfect liquid' in his 1867 paper, 'On Vortex Atoms'.[31] Thomson hypothesized that the entire universe was comprised of a mechanical, frictionless ether in which atoms were sites of vortex motion. He opened his paper with the use of the German word, derived from Helmholtz, 'wirbel-bewegung', which can be loosely translated to mean whirl-movement.[32] Thomson's theory of vortex atoms was, for the

initial two decades following the publication of his paper, a Victorian 'theory of everything'.[33] Though Shiel does not directly refer to Thomson in *The Purple Cloud*, the whirling fluid that Jeffson encounters at the Pole suggests at least partial awareness of Thomson's paper and its reference to Helmholtz's 'wirbel-bewegung'. Thomson's vortex atoms had interested intellectuals and imaginative writers who wanted to question increasingly materialist conceptions of the universe. Theories of vortex atoms proved attractive to religious scientists like Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait, whose book *The Unseen Universe* was published in 1875, and to Madame Blavatsky, who quoted *The Unseen Universe* in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and cited Thomson's article in *The Secret Doctrine*.[34] Yet if the permanent fluid motions involved in the vortex theory of atoms allowed one to speculate that some sort of divine cause was once responsible for setting them in motion and prompted *Popular Science Monthly* to assert of the theory, 'when its adaptability to occult as well as to plainer properties of matter are considered, we need not wonder that it has been thought so beautiful that "it deserves to be true"',[35] Shiel's take on vortex motion as the secret of the earth replaces belief with confusion. A sense of beauty falls prey to Jeffson's 'horrid thrill' (p. 41). Jeffson's response to the unsettling site of the vortex at the North Pole is to imitate its motion, motion that he notes corresponds to that of the planet: 'my whole being reeled and toppled drunken, like a spinning-top in desperate death-struggle at the moment when it flags, and wobbles dissolutely to fall' (p. 41).

Shiel's text aligns the movement of the planet, the movement of Jeffson, and, implicitly the vortex motion structuring the universe not with enchantment, but with degeneration. As the team of explorers on the *Boreal* nears the Pole, Jeffson observes that the area above the 89th parallel 'is a cursed region – beyond doubt cursed – not meant to be penetrated by man: and rapid and awful was the degeneration of our souls' (p. 37). He notes the 'selfish brutishness' of himself and the crew (p. 37). The sense of degeneration at the Pole is echoed in Jeffson's subsequent desire to spin as he 'wobbles dissolutely' when he rotates his body before the clear-cut lake. The alignment of Jeffson's revolving condition at the Pole with degeneration and dissolution reproduces a pattern

from his earlier tale, 'Vaila'. There Shiel associates hereditary decline with circular motion. When Harfager, the last of a cursed family line, begins to imitate his own revolving house, the narrator describes Harfager's animality and degeneracy: Harfager

> sprang; stretched horizonal arms; and began to spin – dizzily! – in the same direction as the mansion! – nor less sleep-embathed! – with floating hair, and quivering cheeks, and the starting eye-balls of horror, and tongue that lolled like a panting wolf's from his bawling degenerate mouth.[36]

The narrator's sense of his friend's revolutions leads him to turn away 'with the retching of loathing' and depart the palace.[37]

Both the passage from 'Vaila' and the description of Jeffson's perceptions of the Pole in *The Purple Cloud* relate spinning and the mimicry of the earth's revolutions with conceptions of brutish personal and species decline. Given the reactions of the narrator of 'Vaila' and of Jeffson, the vortical motion of the universe is not only a source of theistic consolation as many contemporary reactions to the theory of vortex atoms would suggest, but also a concept that entailed the reduction of elements of human consciousness to repetition, trance, and unreliability. The revelation that Shiel associates with revolution is not one of transcendence, but one that suggests kinship with animals and inanimate matter. Shiel's rendering of the whirlpool also differs in its aesthetic response to Pater's 'Conclusion'. Unlike Pater, Shiel refuses to highlight the aesthetic opportunities of the vortex, but sees the whirlpool as violating the physical and psychic boundaries of the human.

Visions of Racial Transformation

Shiel's exploration of the decadent whirlpool in both *The Purple Cloud* and 'Vaila' also connects degeneration with race. Since the 1960s, readers of Shiel have acknowledged and debated the rhetoric of white supremacy that informs his texts.[38] The privileging of whiteness in his writing is the most striking in *The Yellow Danger* and less directly in *The Purple Cloud*. In these texts, the combination of disorientation and degeneration that Shiel associates with the whirlpool emerges

when Shiel represents individuals from outside Europe or, more narrowly, Western Europe. While the juxtaposition of a hydrological feature, the whirlpool, and a system of classifying human difference, race, seems on the surface to entail little logical connection, Shiel's background brings them together, as does recent ecocriticism informed by postcolonial and decolonial theory.

Shiel seems to have been aware of the distinctiveness of his own origins as a descendant of formerly enslaved African people and Irish immigrants on the British colony of Montserrat.[39] The ways in which he at times acknowledged and at others suppressed this history merits further investigation, but three significant patterns are worth noting here. First, Shiel justified his writing and his conduct in terms of the cultural and geographic uniqueness of his upbringing. When Shiel 'was convicted in 1914 of indecently assaulting and carnally knowing Dorothy Sircar', the twelve-year-old daughter of his then unmarried partner, Elizabeth Sircar, he tried to justify his innocence to publisher Grant Richards by noting that he was 'wildly non-English' and that he had been sexually active at the age of two or three.[40] In a different register, as I have mentioned above, he also associated the landscape of Montserrat with madness, creating a parallel between geological and mental tumult.

Second, Shiel identified himself with the white landowners of Montserrat from a young age, such that Harold Billings describes how he made 'a sharp distinction between his lighter family and the generally black mass of those in the West Indies removed just a few years from slavery'.[41] This sense of distinctiveness from the less white inhabitants of Montserrat partly informs, for Billings, the 'development, expression, and occasionally attempted suppression of a vast megalomania' on Shiel's part.[42] While I am unable to go so far as to make this diagnosis, Shiel did deny that he had 'Negro' blood and admitted that he was 'mixed' in the 1930s, in a way that may attempt to hide his hereditary connection to his paternal grandmother, who may have been an enslaved person.[43]

Third and finally, Shiel wrote works in the 1890s and early 1900s that engaged with Darwinism, eugenics, and the construction of racial categories, often in relation to decadence.

William Svitavsky notes that Shiel's decadent fiction and his invasion thriller *The Yellow Danger* both engage with narratives of race, but he suggests that the conception of race in *The Yellow Danger* indicates a shift in thinking from his decadent writing: 'Where Shiel previously might have expressed a Decadent resignation at the decline of his race, he now [in *The Yellow Danger*] affirms a conviction of predestined racial greatness that is far more disturbing.'[44] It is not, however, entirely clear that Shiel's views changed with his turn to invasion fiction; it is also possible that he saw racist jingoism as a necessary component for invasion fiction or, alternatively, that the genre required him to represent more cultures outside of Europe; and his views of these cultures became more explicit.[45] Shiel's work displays a penchant for constructing racial allegories that attempt to resolve social and cultural conflicts. Less extreme than *The Yellow Danger*, Shiel's 1899 novel, *Contraband of War: A Tale of the Hispano-American Struggle*, centres on a distinction made by the Spanish sailor, aristocrat, and polymath, Immanuel Appadacca, that the world is 'at present in the hands of two chief races – the Latin and the Teutonic'; the book concludes with a seemingly predetermined 'victory for the Saxon' (here aligned with the Teutonic) and a harmonious coexistence between Appadacca and his counterpart from the United States, Dick P. Hocking.[46] The book refers to this coexistence as a '[m]arriage […] between the Saxon and the Latin'.[47] As a figure whose naval prowess is complemented by his love of art and beauty, Appadacca at one point plays a 'dark-hued violin' and arranges and examines his collection of gemstones during a naval battle.[48] Meanwhile, Hocking is 'working vulgarly', a contrast that the novel resolves by infusing a 'Saxon' work ethic with some of the charms of the weaker decadent artistry of the 'Latin'.[49]

A similar union emerges at the end of *The Purple Cloud*, when Jeffson is married to Leda, the Sultana's daughter he discovers while burning Constantinople in his post-apocalyptic rage. The discovery of Leda prompts Jeffson to shift both his efforts and his narrative from burning cities and constructing a palace towards romance and cultural exchange with Leda. When paired with Leda, Jeffson ceases wearing the Turkish garb he borrowed from the embassy in London, 'for gone now apparently are those turbulent hours when, stalking like a peacock, I flaunted my

monarchy in the face of the Eternal Powers' (p. 211). He also notes 'a certain *Western-ness*' in Leda that he suspects he has brought about (p. 213; italics Shiel's). While Leda is clearly a force that moderates Jeffson's decadent behaviour and provokes him to suspend his parodic Turkish performance, a modified version of Englishness results from their coupling. Some cultural variation is permitted as long as Anglo-Saxon culture is at least the narrow winner in such racial and cultural competition.[50]

Beyond these overtures to so-called 'Latin' and 'Eastern' cultures, greater challenges to whiteness from beyond Europe and the Middle East in *The Purple Cloud* and *The Yellow Danger* are coupled with a sense of cataclysm, and this cataclysm sometimes becomes instrumentalized in Shiel's writing, such that *The Yellow Danger* uses the whirlpool as a weapon to preserve Englishness and whiteness. Here Shiel's debt to Poe is particularly relevant in determining Shiel's attitude towards people from beyond Europe. In her discussion of the 'Africanist presence' as it is registered in Poe's writing, Toni Morrison looks at the conclusion of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* and contends that 'the concept of the American self was […] bound to Africanism, and was […] covert about its dependency'.[51] In her reading of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Morrison connects the 'white curtain' of the cataract that Pym and his companions encounter at the South Pole with the 'shrouded human figure' whose skin 'was of the perfect whiteness of the snow' from the last two sentences of the novel.[52] Poe's work is unique because it partially reveals the otherwise 'covert' 'dependency' of the American self upon black Americans; after the black character Nu-Nu dies, the cataract and the shrouded white figure 'are figurations of impenetrable whiteness that surface in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged.'[53]

Perhaps due to the question of his own whiteness, Shiel registers an awareness of the ways that Poe connects hydrological features at the South Pole with race and what Morrison calls 'impenetrable whiteness'.[54] The main character of *The Yellow Danger*, naval hero John Hardy, weaponizes the whirlpool to execute the Chinese warriors who have attempted to invade Britain, turning the degenerative and disorienting powers of the vortex into a device for preserving British

sovereignty. Here Shiel draws on Poe for inspiration and reimagines the whirlpool as a place of mass extermination. Hardy's fleet tows the barges northward from the North Foreland of England and across the North Sea at the direction of 'a man named Henrick Björnson, a Norwegian sea-captain'.[55] The barges stop off the coast of Norway. Described as a 'grave-side',[56] the whirlpool devours Britain's adversaries:

> And all at once the whole is over: and every wave, and eddy, and barge, and flake of froth slips into the sweep of one mighty, bawling, racing whirlpool.
>
> Within the writhing uppermost ridge of this vast circumference, invisible under a fierce white wrath of shrieking spray, fly with a thousand wings the barges of the yellow men, fly on even keel, fly uplifted, spurned from the polished ebony of the dizzy basin of water. And as they fly, the storm smothers their gasping breaths, and lifts their hair. And as their speed intensifies to the droning sleep of the spinning-top, their queues stiffen and rise horizontal like darting serpents, and twenty million straight and fluttering pigtails, keeping ever their distances, race in narrowing whorls towards a bottomless, staggering well, a steep epileptic abyss, that yawns, six furlongs broad, within the central space.[57]

Shiel's prose here subsumes the Chinese warriors within the category of inanimate objects through metonymy (the barges) and synecdoche (the pigtails) such that the human energy lost by those drowning is rerouted to the whirlpool, which is transfigured by animate rage so that it is 'bawling', 'writhing', and 'epileptic'. Shiel also depicts the whirlpool as enabling a racial transformation. The reference to 'the barges of the yellow men' hearkens back to the novel's title and its racist imagery, but the description also deploys a black and white binary. The upper part of the whirlpool first hides the barges under its 'white wrath', but as the whirlpool's motions continue, the barges are 'spurned from the polished ebony of the dizzy basin of water' before, notably, they race towards its bottom.[58] The hydrological event resonates as a racial one, as white wrath drives the Chinese invaders down the racial hierarchy, such that they move through the ebony basin, after being spurned by it at first, into the abyss. The whirlpool confirms the otherness of the Chinese antagonists; its structure enables their transition to greater racial difference through the machinations of white, English defenders.

Shiel's reference to the bottom of *The Yellow Danger*'s whirlpool as a 'bottomless, staggering well' resonates with Macfarlane's discussion of 'A Descent into the Maelström'. Macfarlane

examines the overlap between recent activism against oil extraction in the Lofoten islands of Norway and Poe's story, which he calls 'a premonitory oil-dream' in which 'the Maelstrom operates both as a kind of boring drill and a means of seeing the seabed where it lies bared at the base of the vortex'.[59] The whirlpool of *The Yellow Danger* is a frightening reversal of what Macfarlane discusses. Hardy and his fleet aren't attempting to obtain or explore resources in their visit to the Norwegian whirlpool, but to dispose of bodies that have become stripped of their personhood. Extraction of resources becomes the disposal of individuals that Hardy considers as waste. The chapter in which the mass death of the Chinese prisoners is discussed opens with Hardy's internal question about the invaders on barges, 'What was he to do with them?'.[60] The occupants of the barges are compared to a 'locust host' and, though Hardy dislikes the cruelty of starving these men, his decisions are equally shaped by questions about time and logistics – it would take too long to shoot them.[61] The racial conversion of the Chinese invaders at the whirlpool is premised on a conversion of human persons to corpses in need of disposal.

This double conversion anticipates recent discussions of the racial politics of the Anthropocene, most notably Kathryn Yusoff's contention that certain narratives of human-based climate change must be discarded in order to account for practices such as chattel slavery, settler colonialism, genocide, fossil fuel extraction, and nuclear testing that have not been adequately examined by the fields of geography and geology. The constitution of geology as a field that, until very recently, ignored human influence on the physical environment has in part facilitated practices such as slavery: 'It is not that geology is productive of race per se but that empirical processes mesh across geological propositions and propositions of racial identity to produce an equation of inhuman property as racially coded'.[62] While Shiel's representation of death via whirlpool can be discussed as racist and jingoist frenzy or as an overblown parody of the already extreme invasion genre, Hardy's sense that he must, on a material level, eliminate Chinese bodies that are in the wrong geographic location, signals Shiel's possible awareness of the conflation of 'inhuman property' and black bodies that Yusoff describes.[63]

This slippage between the human body and inanimate object is again manifest in *The Purple Cloud*, where the invasion of *The Yellow Danger* has transformed into something akin to migration. Benjamin Morgan has argued persuasively that *The Purple Cloud* shows the 'mutually unsettling' relationships between different conceptions of the planet, including 'the planet as an occult being that takes on human-like capacities of meaning-making and intentionality; the planet as a geophysical system where volcanic eruptions and atmospheric climatic events interact in unpredictable ways; and the planet as a geopolitical space of mass migration and expressions of sovereignty'.[64] A global volcanic event, accompanied by a poison gas, eliminates everyone on earth except for Leda and Jeffson. The cloud's arrival is not instantaneous, however: as it moves across the earth from east to west at a speed of 100 to 105 miles per day, it sends crowds fleeing Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe to Scandinavia and England, such that Jeffson is surprised by the great variation of humanity that greets him first in Norway and then in England. *The Purple Cloud*'s representation of this migration is distinctive and intertwined with its decadence.

When Jeffson arrives at a Norwegian town near Aardheim, the first city he visits on his return polar journey, Jeffson notes 'something un-northern, southern, and Oriental' about the dead there (p. 67). He perceives two Norwegian peasants and then 'an old Jew of the Polish Pale, in gaberdine and skull-cap' (p. 67), followed by

> two dark-skinned women in costly dress, either Spanish or Italian, and the yellower mortality of a Mongolian, probably a Magyar, and a big negro in zouave dress, and some twenty-five obvious French, and two Morocco fezes, and the green turban of a shereef, and the white of an Ulema' (p. 67).

The description of the crowd echoes the racial references to the Chinese warriors drowning in the whirlpool, but also includes references to dress as well as nationality, such that Shiel's catalogue suggests diversity amidst a group of what Jeffson calls 'foreign stragglers' (p. 67). The corpses that Jeffson encounters in Norway are the first of a series that he describes repeatedly, mingling references to nationality, costume, and skin colour throughout the middle of *The Purple Cloud*. The descriptions of corpses are part of what John Sutherland calls the text's 'verbal décor'; *The Purple*

Cloud is 'full of ornate catalogues in which terms, unfamiliar to the general reader, tumble over each other in rich profusion' (p. 263). Though *The Purple Cloud* contains many decadent catalogues of items that hearken back to the extravagant and often morbid lists of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884) and the eleventh chapter of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), lists that in some cases do include human remains, Shiel's catalogues of corpses augment the decadence of these previous works as the objects on display are themselves dead bodies. Jeffson invites his reader to take aesthetic pleasure in and consume the victims of a global cataclysm in an aesthetic manoeuvre simultaneously revolting and eerily suggestive of the ways in which people of colour are frequently consumed by what Yusoff calls 'Western geologic modes of extraction and White Imperialism'.[65] This connection between extraction and the decadent catalogue is consolidated when Jeffson later begins looking for living humans who may have sealed themselves in the mines of England for survival. He describes how he found 'everywhere, in English duckies and guggs, Pomeranian women in gaudy stiff cloaks, the Walachian, the Mameluk, the Khirgiz, the Bonze, the Imaum, and almost every type of man', a group of people he encounters when searching for 'the treasure of a life' (p. 107). In the search for the 'treasure' of a living human being, foreign corpses replace the coal that the mines were designed to extract.

While *The Purple Cloud* invites readers to experience a decadent combination of pleasure and horror in its lists – a combination made even more fraught for early twenty-first century readers by the racism of these lists – Jeffson's reaction to the deceased global masses is telling. When he journeys beyond Norway to Dover, Jeffson finds 'a mixture of races, black, brunette, brown, yellow, white, in all the shades […] and, over-looking them all, one English boy with a clean Eton collar sitting on a bicycle', but he notes that death 'had overtaken them all' (p. 75). This experience, which first suggests the boy's superiority, via the boy's 'over-looking', and then his equality, via 'overtaken', results in a significant crisis for the narrator:

> I did not know whither, nor why, I went, nor had I the least idea whether all this was visually seen by me in the world which I had known, or in some other, or was all phantasy of my disembodied spirit – for I had the thought that I, too, might be dead since old ages,

> and my spirit wandering now through the universe of space, in which there is neither north nor south, nor up nor down, nor measure nor relation, nor aught whatever, save an uneasy consciousness of a dream about bottomlessness. (p. 75)

Jeffson's cosmic detachment in this section – the sense that he is a 'disembodied spirit […] wandering now through the universe of space' – suggests an overlap between Jeffson's disorienting experience of the non-white migrants in Europe and the experiences of the maelstrom, vortex, or whirlpool that this article has explored, yet the response to the mixing of bodies explored in this passage emphasizes a disorientation from disembodiment rather than the bestial embodiment experienced at the North Pole. Later, while exploring post-cataclysm England, Jeffson 'commune[s]' with himself during a storm,

> I, poor man, lost in this conflux of infinitudes and vortex of the world, what can become of me, my God? For dark, ah dark, is the waste void into which from solid ground I am now plunged a million fathoms deep (p. 90).

Once again, Shiel deploys an hydrological metaphor to emphasize confusion about race, subjectivity, and geography, such that Shiel's decadent writing destabilizes the very categories of mind, nature, and place upon which decadence relies. Shiel's vortical meditations fascinate due to their unique expression and perplexing convolutions of time and space, yet their imbrication with conceptions of race and decline suggests that the late-Victorian notions of the decadent and the cosmic are bound up with racial narratives requiring our attention.

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[1] I am grateful to the Harry Ransom Center at University of Texas at Austin for a one-month fellowship in the humanities that, supported by the C. P. Snow Memorial Fund, enabled this research. I am also indebted to earlier research on Shiel by Ailise Bulfin, Benjamin Morgan, Ross Forman, and Brian Stableford as well as to audience members who asked questions in response to an earlier version of this essay presented at the 2015 University of London conference, 'Aestheticism and Decadence in the Age of Modernism: 1895-1945'.

[2] See Dennis Denisoff, 'The Dissipating Nature of Decadent Paganism from Pater to Yeats', *Modernism/Modernity*, 15.3 (2008), 431-46, and Benjamin Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*: On Decadent Planets', *Victorian Studies*, 58.4 (2016), 609-35.

[3] Denisoff, 'Decadent Paganism', p. 444; Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*', p. 611.

[4] Ursula K. Heise, 'Science Fiction and the Time Scales of the Anthropocene', *ELH*, 86 (2019), 275-304 (p. 301).

[5] Previous ecocritical readings of *The Purple Cloud* include Morgan's '*Fin du Globe*' and Ailise Bulfin, 'The Natural Catastrophe in Late Victorian Popular Fiction: "How Will the World End?"', *Critical Survey*, 27.2 (2015), 81-101.

[6] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), p. 150.

[7] Ibid., p. 151.

[8] Quoted in Ailise Bulfin, '"The End of Time": M. P. Shiel and the "Apocalyptic Imaginary"', in *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes*, ed. by Trish Ferguson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 153-77 (p. 163).
[9] 'Maelstrom, *n.*', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <www.oed.com/view/Entry/112107> [accessed 10 December 2020].
[10] For connections between Vorticism and conceptions of the vortex, see Miranda B. Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H. D., and Yeats* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), pp. 20-23.
[11] Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), pp. 307, 308.
[12] Ibid., p. 307.
[13] See Bulfin, 'Natural Catastrophe', p. 91; Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*', pp. 612, 623-24; Bulfin, 'End of Time', pp. 159-67; and Monique R. Morgan, 'The Eruption of Krakatoa (also known as Krakatau) in 1883', *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. by Dino Franco Felluga (January 2013), <https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=monique-morgan-the-eruption-of-krakatoa-also-known-as-krakatau-in-1883> [accessed 12 June 2021].
[14] Harold Billings, *M. P. Shiel: A Biography of His Early Years* (Austin: Roger Beacham, 2005), p. 155.
[15] M. P. Shiel, 'Huguenin's Wife', *Pall Mall Magazine* (April 1895), pp. 568-76 (p. 576). This description aligns with the 'chemical theory of volcanoes' that Jeffson discusses in puzzling over the shape of the continents in *The Purple Cloud* (M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud*, ed. by John Sutherland (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), p. 156).
[16] M. P. Shiel, 'The Spectre-Ship', *Cassell's Family Magazine* (September 1896), pp. 755-64 (p. 764).
[17] Ibid., p. 756.
[18] Though previous critics have discussed Hardy's use of biological warfare, they have had less to say about Hardy's bizarre choice for executing the occupants of the barges. For the biological warfare, see William L. Svitavsky, 'From Decadence to Racial Antagonism: M. P. Shiel at the Turn of the Century', *Science Fiction Studies*, 31.1 (2004), 1-24 (p. 13); Ross G. Forman, *China and The Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 149; and Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*', p. 624. Brian Stableford mentions Hardy's use of the maelstrom in his plot summary (Brian Stableford, *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 76).
[19] Shiel, *Purple Cloud*, pp. 40, 41. Further references to the novel are given after quotations in the text.
[20] Billings, *Biography*, p. 77. Shiel's *Prince Zaleski* (1895) is the most explicit example of his debt to Poe, as detective Zaleski is modelled on Poe's Dupin. See, for example, Brian Stableford, 'The Decadent Detective: *Prince Zaleski*', in *Jaunting on the Scoriac Tempests and Other Essays on Fantastic Literature* (Cabin John, MD: Borgo Press, 2009), pp. 22-31 (pp. 23-24). Less discussed has been Shiel's adaptation of Poe's hot air balloon story, 'The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall' (1835), as a tale of an eight-year-old who inadvertently travels from England to Nice, 'The Awful Voyage of Ralphie Hamilton' (1898), in *The Boys' Friend*.
[21] Edgar Allan Poe, 'MS Found in a Bottle', in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Related Tales*, ed. by J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp. 179-89 (p. 189).
[22] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and Related Tales*, ed. by Kennedy, pp. 1-178 (p. 175). John Sutherland mentions how both *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *The Purple Cloud* include references to warm-weather bodies of water at the Poles (Shiel, *Purple Cloud*, p. 274).
[23] Edgar Allan Poe, 'A Descent into the Maelström', in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and Related Tales*, ed. by Kennedy, pp. 223-39 (p. 224); M. P. Shiel, *The Yellow Danger*, 2nd edn (London: Grant Richards, 1898), p. 335.
[24] Poe, 'Descent', pp. 234, 237, emphasis Poe's, and 235.
[25] Matthew A. Taylor, 'The Nature of Fear: Edgar Allan Poe and Posthuman Ecology', *American Literature*, 84.2 (2012), 353-79 (p. 369).
[26] Allen MacDuffie, 'Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial', *Victorian Studies,* 60.4 (2018), 543-64 (p. 558).
[27] Monique R. Morgan, 'Madness, Unreliable Narration, and Genre in *The Purple Cloud*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 36.2 (2009), 266-83 (pp. 271, 276).
[28] James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 52.
[29] Ibid., p. 51.
[30] While outlining Shiel's representations of the Pole in relation to Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, Sutherland also relates how Blavatsky understood the Pole as the sacred origin of humanity's ancestors (p. xxiv). Yet, as Joscelyn Godwin notes in his study of mystical theories of the Pole, humanity's ancestors who resided at the Pole were, by Blavatsky's description, colourless, 'colossal', and 'had ethereal, not physical bodies, and could not be injured or destroyed by death' (Quoted in Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Kempton, Illinois: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1996), p. 19).
[31] William Thomson, 'On Vortex Atoms', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 6.73 (1867), 94-105 (p. 94).
[32] Ibid.
[33] Helge Kragh, *Higher Speculations: Grand Theories and Failed Revolutions in Physics and Cosmology*, illustrated edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 35.
[34] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[35] Kragh, *Higher Speculations*, p. 45; Daniel W. Hering, 'Modern Views and Problems of Physics', *Popular Science Monthly*, 45.33 (August 1894), 511-21 (p. 515). A portion of Hering's article containing the quoted passage appeared in the *Leicester Daily Post* on 22 September 1894.
[36] M. P. Shiel, 'Vaila', in *Shapes in the Fire: Being a Mid-Winter-Night's Entertainment in Two Parts and an Interlude* (London: John Lane, 1896), pp. 67-122 (p. 120).
[37] Ibid.
[38] Sam Moskowitz, in reviewing Shiel's literary output, refers to him as 'an anti-Semite, anti-Christ, anti-Negro, anti-Oriental, an ardent believer in Aryan superiority and a war lover' (Sam Moskowitz, 'Shiel and Heard', *Science Fantasy*, 17.50 (1961), 95-112 (p. 108).
[39] Billings, *Biography*, pp. 12-13, 40-41.
[40] Kirsten MacLeod, 'M. P. Shiel and the Love of Pubescent Girls: The Other "Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 51.4 (2008), 355-80 (p. 355, quoted on p. 358).
[41] Billings, *Biography*, p. 41.
[42] Ibid., p. 43.
[43] Ibid., pp. 41-42.
[44] Svitavsky, 'From Decadence to Racial Antagonism', p. 13.
[45] Given the extremity of many of Shiel's plots and characters, it is often difficult to determine the extent to which his stories are parodic. Stableford warns readers against 'taking the ideas in *The Yellow Danger* too seriously' and acknowledges that Shiel 'loved to strike a pose at once casual and provocative' (Stableford, *Scientific Romance*, p. 76).
[46] M. P. Shiel, *Contraband of War: A Tale of the Hispano-American Struggle* (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1968), pp. 85, 256.
[47] Ibid., p. 256.
[48] Ibid., pp. 240-41.
[49] Ibid., p. 241.
[50] Maria Cristina Fumagalli reads Jeffson's union with Leda in tandem with a critique of 'North Atlantic modernity' and suggests that the novel encourages readers to imagine alternate, less Anglocentric modernities (Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), pp. 48, 52).
[51] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 33, 57-58.
[52] Poe, *Arthur Gordon Pym*, pp. 174, 175
[53] Morrison, *Playing*, pp. 32-33.
[54] Shiel's rendering of the whirlpool as a site of imposed whiteness is based on an interpretation of Poe's work that resonates with Morrison's interpretation of *Arthur Gordon Pym*. This rendering, however, is different to other readings of Poe. Robert S. Levine has argued that *Arthur Gordon Pym* demonstrates that Poe 'engages' the topics of slavery and race 'head on' rather than being, in Morrison's terms, 'haunted' by them (Robert S. Levine, *Race, Transnationalism, and Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 21). Alternatively, Terence Whalen claims that the racist 'haunting portrait of blackness' in *Arthur Gordon Pym* was Poe's 'means of appealing to multiple segments of the white literary audience' (Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 145). Thanks to my colleague Rene Treviño for directing me to these readings of the conclusion of *Arthur Gordon Pym*.
[55] Shiel, *Yellow Danger*, p. 335.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., pp. 337-38.
[58] The word *ebony* may be borrowed from 'A Descent into the Maelström'. The fisherman describes the maelstrom as a 'funnel […] whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony' (Poe, 'Descent', p. 235).
[59] Macfarlane, *Underland*, pp. 309, 309-10.
[60] Shiel, *Yellow Danger*, p. 333.
[61] Ibid. Forman notes the zoomorphism used in Shiel's descriptions of the Chinese warriors: they are depicted as 'animals that move in groups, without individual agency' (Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination*, p. 139).
[62] Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 73.
[63] This interpretation is in line with Forman's comment that invasion novels like *The Yellow Danger* 'emplot unprecedented, rapid population shifts that are distinctly modern' (Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination*, p. 140). Forman also contends that given the plot of the novel, Hardy is punished for the genocide he perpetrates (p. 149).
[64] Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*', p. 627.
[65] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*, p. 58.

Intertextual London
Empire in the Occult Cosmopolis of Arthur Machen's *N*

Suvendu Ghatak

University of Florida

In Arthur Machen's novella *N* (1935), three elderly twentieth-century city-trotters – Perrott, Harliss, and Arnold – reminisce on a wintry night about the London of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their conversation weaves the material remainders of the city's old streets, shops, and gardens together with literary bric-a-brac from the past. They venture into London's past with the help of textual representations by Thomas De Quincey, Charles Dickens, and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. This is a strikingly intertextual, literary London formed from neoclassical, Romantic and Victorian literary snippets. The temporal differences among these texts are overcome in terms of their spatial unity, evoking the *longue durée* of literary London. While London remains the focal point of this intertextual maze, the itinerants blur its spatial outlines in their mind-walks: the streets at the outer edges of London resemble the colonial frontier and a nondescript park at Stoke Newington acquires the contours of an oriental garden. What is revealed in their walks is the symbolic spatial structure of the intertextual city that marks the colonies as the uncanny double of London. In Machen's text, the colonial spaces are not particularized. Rather, the references to Jamaica, China, or India coalesce into a spatial 'Other' of London, a symbolic outside residing within the city. The occult possibilities of London are symbolically tied to London's status as an imperial cosmopolis in many of his late works, especially the aesthetic manual, *Hieroglyphics* (1902); the autobiographical accounts *Far Off Things* (1922), *Things Near and Far* (1923) and *The London Adventure* (1924); the novels *The Secret Glory* (1922) and *The Green Round* (1933); and the articles in the London-based newspaper *The Evening News* in the 1910s. The focus on intertextuality as a constitutive element of Machen's London helps us map the imperial undertext of literary London in the waning era of the British Empire in his later writings. As the colonial space is configured by Machen to be the textual double of metropolitan London with the

hindsight of time, through allusions to past urban texts, *N* shows that the literary codes that historically gave shape to London have also been tangled with the literary codes of depicting the imperial frontier. If he 'emphasizes the *form* of secrecy' in his 'textual mazes', as Sophie Mantrant has persuasively argued, the occult nature of Machen's London does not reside so much in what it reveals, but in how it veils its secrets.[1] In this article, I explore how the spatial architecture of intertextual London veils its secrets in order to trace the ghostly presence of empire within his occult metropolis, a presence that has largely remained outside the purview of criticism on Machen.

Both spatiality and textuality have been explored as key components of decadence in recent scholarship. Alex Murray connects 'Decadent style' and 'Decadent politics' in terms of different ways of inhabiting 'specific places': Naples, London, Wales, New York and so on.[2] He notes the textual nature of Machen's landscape, strewn with allusions and 'textual traces' of the past.[3] Murray's analysis of spatial textuality is focalized on rural Wales, and draws our attention to the enigmatic quality of allusions in his writings, or his 'linguistic mysticism'.[4] My article, by contrast, focuses on London in order to annotate the literary codes embedded in his figuration of the occult, and locate their historical forms. Machen's London has received less attention than his Wales although, as Dennis Denisoff points out, the urban space is as important as the countryside in his writings, as 'a land of esoteric knowledge, dangerous mystery, solitary exploration, and self-discovery'.[5] Aaron Worth makes a crucial distinction between the early Machen of 'haunted Wales […] charged with deep time', and his late oeuvre, consisting 'of labyrinthine urban spaces, of uncanny repetition'.[6] Machen's London texts often uncannily repeat allusions to past writing on the city. And in these intertextual engagements one can decipher both an historical map of his esoteric views and his oblique commentary on literary London.

While Machen has been considered a maverick in the decadent tradition, the transcontinental scope and critical anachronism of his late writings make him vitally important to our understanding of literary decadence. Robert Stilling has noted that 'decadence' becomes an '*ur*-concept of postcolonial thought', an historical conjuncture that 'evokes imperial decline and

the emergence of postimperial plurality', as well as 'transnational poetics' that remain crucial to poets such as Derek Walcott or Agha Shahid Ali from the 'former colonies'.[7] Machen's London-based oeuvre reveals that the textual space of the metropole and its decadent poetics are woven with aesthetic codes drawn from across the continents. His deeply allusive late writings also augment the ambit of what Kristin Mahoney has called the 'post-Victorian' decadent, as he not only invokes and ironizes 'techniques and styles' of the late nineteenth century, but also engages with literary conventions of an even longer duration, moulding the literary codes that made London an imperial cosmopolis and an epicentre of global modernity.[8] Indeed, Machen's decadent textuality extends beyond the parochial geography of Western Europe and the narrow temporal strip between Victorianism and Modernism. Even though he is not directly attendant upon questions of imperial politics, he formally reorients the modernity of London by showing colonialism as its dark double.

In the urban narratives of late Machen, written in the age of high modernism, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wanderers of London acquire uncanny afterlives. Figures such as the flâneur, the man of the town, the journalist, the opium-addict, the occultist, and the detective are invoked by the characters in *N*. Their walks (and mind-walks) across the city become entangled with imperial outposts and commodity networks across the empire, turning London streets into an occult maze. The rumour of a garden of Edenic beauty seems to offer them a respite from the streets – an access to a purely British past untainted by imperial transactions, a vestige of British countryside within the imperial cosmopolis. However, the elusive garden in *N* shows that transplantations from around the world construed British landscaping structures, and that those structures were often built by returnees from the colonies. Connecting British gardening traditions with imperial botany, the novella constructs a horticultural occult space magically cohabited by the native and the exotic flora. The street and the garden in *N* are the focal points for analysing the imbrications of the occult and the intertextual in Machen's oeuvre.

London Streets as the Imperial Labyrinth

A lingering sense of decay sets the narrative of *N* in motion. Three old friends, Perrott, Harliss, and Arnold assemble in Perrott's rooms to memorialize the city in an epoch of change, ruminating on 'old days and old ways and all the changes that have come on London in the last weary years'.[9] The past is summoned by reanimating literary anecdotes and weaving them together with the streets: the 'church, where Christina Rossetti bowed her head' or 'The shop of the Pale Puddings, where little David Copperfield might have bought his dinner' (pp. 302-3). The friends surround themselves with anachronistic décor to literally posit themselves into conversations of the bygone: 'The armchairs on which the three sat were of the sort that Mr. Pickwick sits on for ever in his frontispiece.' (p. 301) This invocation of Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) by the trio in *N* connects their nocturnal adventures in the city with textual sojourns into the past. Their belated incursion into the setting of the past confers upon them the insight of time that the original inhabitants of the past lacked: 'the eighteenth century couldn't draw a Gothic building when its towers and traceries were before its eyes' (p. 301).

Indeed, Machen's perception of the interweaving of the colonial and the modern in *N* is precisely related to the sense of an ending, when two traditional methods of depicting London in the long nineteenth century are brought together: the literary realism that contoured its everyday, as in *The Pickwick Papers*, and the Gothic tradition that undermined its stable outlines, often by melding the metropolis with oriental spaces of illumination and horror, as in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821, revised 1856). Realism and the Gothic are concurrent and contrapuntal narrative threads in literary London. And the belated entrance of the *N* trio in the fictional London of *Pickwick* as well as *Confessions* inflects the properties of both realism and the Gothic in crucial ways.

Tanya Agathocleous argues that urban realism turned literary London into 'a microcosm of the globe' in the nineteenth century.[10] In her theorization of 'cosmopolitan realism', she traces the tension between London as the ground of 'Enlightenment cosmopolitanism', 'a world in

miniature', and 'the material realities of everyday life' in the city, its crowds, slums and filth.[11] In Machen, the tension is not so much between the moral vision of the city as a site of human connectedness and the experiential alienation of daily life. Rather, in his fiction, the elation as well as the threat of colonial dislocation is present within the very architecture of London, entangling it with the tradition of urban Gothic. Unlike the realist mode, the global is not contained within the description of the local in the Gothic. Tabish Khair notes that the narrative mode becomes a conduit of colonial 'Otherness' not only in the imperial outposts, but within the imperial home.[12] Indeed, the Gothic undercuts the cosmopolitan aspirations of the imperial city by revealing unassimilable foreignness within it.

In Dickens, Samuel Pickwick creates an endlessly fascinating fictional world through his privileged access to leisured observation in his street-facing 'apartments in Goswell Street' from which 'he had an equal opportunity of contemplating human nature in all the numerous phases it exhibits'.[13] Pickwick's is a diurnal world, symbolized by his numerous associations with the sun, which underscores his 'childlike imagination' and endless capacity for creating 'a world distinctly his own', Christopher Herbert suggests.[14] James Buzard notes the 'radical restlessness animating *Pickwick*', which not only configures the notion of 'English liberty', but also the very expansiveness of nineteenth-century London.[15] The visibility and elasticity of *Pickwick* as an urban fictional world, with a protagonist at once observing and shaping its contours, stands as a model of realist London against which the fictional world of *N* ought to be mapped.

In contrast to the daytime adventures of Pickwick, the trio in *N* mind-walks London during the night. They drink and drift into conversation in what is an inn by day – housed in an alley that becomes blind in the night – indulging in a form of leisure that reverses the paradigm of *Pickwick*. Their freedom lies in the shared act of remembrance, shutting out the visible rather than embracing it. The contrasting modes of inhabiting the urban world in *Pickwick* and in *N* are best captured in the contrasting figurations of the street in the two texts: as a panorama in the former, and as a labyrinth in the latter.

The endless possibilities of nineteenth-century London are captured in Pickwick's reflection on the interminable reach of Goswell street: 'Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand – *as far as the eye could reach*, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way'.[16] In his adventure the secrets of the world are unfolded in the optic plenitude of an ever-receding horizon. The infinitude of horizon has been a key feature of the panorama that encapsulated cosmopolitan aspirations of London, as Agathocleous notes: 'in their emphasis on the infinite and all-encompassing extension of the horizon, they situated their landscapes within a global whole'.[17] In contrast, the figural shape of the streets in *N* is that of a labyrinth which is oriented towards access to the past rather than unexplored spaces:

> Perrott began it, by tracing a curious passage he had once made northward, dodging by the Globe and Olympic theatres into the dark labyrinth of Clare Market, under arches and by alleys, till he came into Great Queen Street, near the Freemason's Tavern and Inigo Jones's red pilasters. (p. 304)

The labyrinthine streets are conduits of the past, where time becomes porous. This is not the past that one could experience in a museum. Indeed, Perrott indicts the museums for effacing the sense of wonder from London's streets: 'If there is anything curious, anything beautiful in a street, they take it away and stick it in a museum' (p. 303). In Machen, the streets are the loci of the occult because they archive and reanimate the past. In *The Great God Pan*, Villiers, 'a practiced explorer' of 'obscure mazes and byways of London life' utters the secret of the city to the initiate: 'London has been called the city of encounters; it is more than that, it is the city of Resurrections'.[18] The shape of the labyrinthine streets in London is also structurally connected to the occult idea of the maze as 'the symbol of ecstasy' in *The London Adventure*.[19]

The streets are a living repository of London's past, and, therefore, a standing rebuke to the teleology of progress posited through the museum. Tony Bennett notes how during the nineteenth century both the museum of art and the museum of natural history became instruments of narrating modernity as onward progression, 'helping to shape its organization of the relations

between past and present and, moreover, functioning within these to initiate and regulate *a "progressive" movement* between past and present'.[20] The maze of London streets subverts any progressivist temporal order. Indeed, in *The Secret Glory*, the 'grandiose and gloomy' British Museum is to be avoided if one wishes to truly experience the 'immense scale' of London.[21]

While the museum hierarchized races according to an evolutionary scale – with Europeans at the apex of civilization and modernity – the permeable temporality of London streets connects the metropole with the colonies in Machen. Agathocleous recognizes the problem of temporal hierarchization among social groups in nineteenth-century realist writings on London, even as she notes the utopian impulse of universal progress that accompanied it.[22] She marks the fin de siècle as the moment when cosmopolitan utopianism shrinks into a compartmentalized vision of racial essentialism.[23] While there is much truth to her argument, the end of the nineteenth century was also marked by the rise of alternate cosmopolitan impulses through spiritualism, vegetarianism, the animal rights movement, and so on that forged interracial filiations and anti-imperial networks, as Leela Gandhi shows in *Affective Communities* (2006).

In *N*, this impulse is staged through spatial affiliations between the outer edges of London and the imperial frontier. For the trio in *N*, the streets beyond King's Cross Road 'touch on the conjectured' and entice the possibilities of wonder and terror (p. 306). In *The London Adventure* distance becomes the figure of alterity, marking the edge of London with the insignia of colonial outposts:

> And then there are places and regions farther afield, places on the verge of London, as unknown to the vast majority of Londoners as Harrar in Abyssinia. To attain these, the general recipe is to take something that goes out of London by the Seven Sisters Road, something that touches on Finsbury Park, which I take it, is the extremest mark of the *Londinium cognitum Londiniensibus*; the caravansarai from which the caravans set out across the wilderness […].[24]

The desire for the *incognitus* (unknown) in London inevitably takes its itinerants into colonial spaces. The trope of discovering unknown territories within London alludes to the walks of De Quincey's

English opium-eater under the spell of the drug. In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, city walks in spatial extremities mirror imperial nautical adventures:

> And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye in the pole-star […] I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx's riddles of streets […]. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae* […].[25]

While the notion of *terra incognita* (unknown land) has been historically deployed in the purpose of conquest and colonialism, its invocation in Machen's London alters the ways in which the city and the pedestrian-self were co-constituted in De Quincey. Emily B. Stanback reads the birth of *flâneurie* in *Confessions*, which depicts the 'city's enduring, haunting influence on the mind', and she charts its persistent aesthetic afterlife in Baudelaire, Poe, and Benjamin, among others.[26] The motif of opium addiction in De Quincey's rambles is reiterated through a secret drink that facilitates the occult exploration of London in *N*. The ingredients of the drink have imperial provenance: 'rum from the Jamaica Coffee House in the City, spices in blue china boxes, one or two old bottles containing secret essences' (p. 303). However, unlike 'The Pains of Opium' in De Quincey, the ingestion of these putatively foreign substances does not conjure horror in Machen.

Even more importantly, the trio of *N*, unlike the opium-eater, overcomes the fear of the past associated with colonial spaces and populace. Indeed, in *Confessions*, the opium-induced nightmares initially manifest through 'the vast expansion of time', where the narrator 'seemed to have lived for 70 or 100 years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time'.[27] The 'imaginable horror' of his later dreams, strewn with 'oriental imagery, and mythological tortures' projects his fear of the depth of time into spaces such as China, India, and Egypt.[28] The fear of the past and the fear evoked by the Oriental or the African in De Quincey are inter-constitutive of each other because both evoke the Gothic horror of slipping away from the modernity of London and getting stuck 'amongst reeds and Nilotic mud'.[29]

In Machen temporal and spatial interactions between the metropolitan and the colonial do not evoke this fear. Rather, through the rumour of a garden of astounding beauty in Stoke

Newington called Canon's Park, the latter part of the novella charts spatial affiliations between London and the British Empire in the East on multiple grounds.

The London Garden and the Botanic Occult of the Empire

The tale of a suburban park of unusual beauty trickles into the novella when Perrott shares the textual adventure of his acquaintance Hare, an Edgar Allan Poe enthusiast. He went in search of the setting of the Poe short story 'William Wilson', 'the dreamy village' at the outskirts of London in Poe's schooldays, but could not be certain whether such a place existed in the northern suburbs of London or not. The tale momentarily invokes the relationship between a supposedly unchanging 'knowable community' of rural Britons and the 'country house' tradition of British realism that Raymond Williams explores.[30] The range of accounts of the garden from multiple characters, however, puts it beyond the nostalgic bounds of a pristine British past.

Perrot's cousin, an agriculturalist, had chanced upon a beautiful garden called Canon's Park in the same neighbourhood. Harliss, who grew up in the area, refuses to believe in these stories: 'There is a part in Stoke Newington or near it called Canon's Park. But it isn't a park at all; nothing like a park. That's only a builder's name' (p. 306). Whatever be the veracity of the accounts, the spectacle of the garden, posited in an unremarkable suburban quarter, condenses the landscaping codes of imperial cosmopolitanism. It is at once a botanic marvel of transplantation and an idyll untouched by labour:

> Such trees, that must have been brought from the end of the world: there were none like them in England, though one or two reminded him of trees in Kew Gardens; deep hollows with streams running from the rocks; lawns all purple and gold with flowers, and golden lilies too […]. And here and there, there are little summer-houses and temples, shining white in the sun, like a view in China […] (p. 309).

It is at once the very form of a garden of the world and a garden built through imperial networks, with exotic trees brought from different parts of the world. More than a view of a garden in China that has erupted in London, the golden patterns of flowers with the stylized motifs of summer houses and temples remind one of patterns on porcelain earthenware. Elizabeth Chang points out

that the Chinese garden in the accounts of British travellers and architects, such as William Chambers, presented a 'despotic' and immobile landscape, suited to the British views about the stupor of Chinese society.[31] Botanic patterns on china, however, exemplified 'the paradox of the familiar exotic', where imperial consumerism of nineteenth-century Britain aspires to subsume 'visual difference' within the comforts of 'cultural capital'.[32] And yet, the value of china as a token of refinement resides in the lingering exoticism.

The association of Kew Gardens, and its trees brought from foreign soil, lingers with the botanic chinoiserie in this vision of the agriculturist and interlaces cosmopolitan exoticism with the form of plantation economy. Jill H. Casid acknowledges the role of Kew Gardens in creating an imperial network of gardens in the eighteenth century, 'used as nurseries for the cultivation of plants economically useful to the expansion of colonial agriculture'.[33] However, the cosmopolitan aspects of the garden carry within them the threat of the un-British, not merely construed with foreign elements that have been thoroughly domesticated, but completely unfamiliar. Casid's discussion of the landscaping techniques of celebrated gardeners such as Capability Brown in the eighteenth century shows that the project of naturalizing alien botanic species in British soil carried twin impulses: a cosmopolitan desire for 'seamlessly integrating the foreign', and an imperial anxiety that the space of 'colonial plantation would embed itself in the emblematic heart of old England'.[34]

The next iteration of the garden comes from 'the remote north of the story' (p. 308) through another textual cue: Reverend Thomas Hampole's *A London Walk: Meditations in the Streets of the Metropolis* – a fictional text that also appears in Machen's 1929 novel *The Green Round*. Hampole is a worldly-wise priest who 'stalked the London streets with a moral and monitory glance in his eye' (p. 308). He is a textual relic of eighteenth-century city literature: 'the age of Addison and Pope and Johnson', when landscape gardening gains traction as a mode of organizing nature, and London becomes an epicentre of global trade (p. 310). His characterization of the neighbourhood

draws upon the techniques of the panorama, historically tied to the cosmopolitan spatial aspirations of London, as well as the phantasmagoria and its psychic overtones.

Hampole's beatific description of the city creates a visual panorama reminiscent of Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802': 'Has it ever been your fortune […] to rise in the earliest dawning of a summer day, ere yet the radiant beams of the sun have done more than touch with light the domes and spires of the great city?' (p. 308) Denisoff comments upon the influence of Wordsworth 'in the model of imagination' espoused by Machen's hermit in *Hieroglyphics*.[35] Agathocleous notes 'the impression of totality', knotting 'the highly differentiated spectacle of the city' into the form of a panorama, which appeared prominently in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, despite its avowed retreat from the city.[36] A panorama presents the vision of a variegated but interconnected city, under the rational order of the Christian God. However, the neighbourhood becomes reminiscent of Coleridge and the tradition of Romantic orientalism soon enough: 'They have become magical habitations, supernal dwellings, more desirable to the eye than the fabled pleasure dome of the Eastern Potentate, or the bejeweled hall built by the Genie for Aladdin in the Arabian tale.' (p. 310)

Hampole becomes acquainted with Glanville: an Oriental scholar with 'a dark complexion', as well as a person influenced by the German Theosophist 'Behmen' (Jakob Böhme) and his English disciple William Law (p. 310). Aaron Worth notes that the name Glanville is 'a nod to the seventeenth-century English philosopher Joseph Glanvill, who produced a mighty counterblast to unbelief in the supernatural, and witchcraft in particular, in his *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681)'.[37] Hampole, an 'amateur of landscape and the picturesque', enthusiastic about the visual codes of British organic life, experiences the other end of the spectrum – the phantasmagoria, closely allied to the Gothic – psychic, primal, and demonic, when Glanville touches him 'with his finger-tips on the shoulder' (p. 311). Hampole experiences the spatial alchemy of occult where one place moulds into another. For him, the vision of the garden initially unfolds as a visual panorama, only to

uncannily end in 'great perturbation and confusion of mind' (p. 312). Note the merging of psychic and mineral imagery exploding the panoramic orderliness of the landscaped garden:

> Before me, in place of the familiar structures, there was disclosed a panorama of unearthly, of astounding beauty. In deep dells, bowered by overhanging trees, there bloomed flowers such as only dreams can show; such deep purples that yet seemed to glow like precious stones with a hidden but ever-present radiance, roses whose hues outshone any that are to be seen in our gardens, tall lilies alive with light, and blossoms that were beaten gold. (p. 314)

The texture of the flora shifts, from the visual delicacy of patterns on china in the agriculturist's vision, to the tactile fragility of hammered gold in that of the priest. The lilies and roses beam with the radiance of minerals, revealing the deep temporality of the 'primal Paradise' upon the space of the garden (p. 309). Hampole's final description of the garden highlights the floral associations of European folklore:

> I saw well-shaded walks that went down to green hollows bordered with thyme; and here and there the grassy eminence above, and the bubbling well below, were crowned with architecture of fantastic and unaccustomed beauty, which seemed to speak of fairyland itself. (p. 312)

The occult garden in *N* is a hyper-aestheticized place where the distant Orient becomes improbably knitted with the local. There is no singular aesthetic form that crystallizes the occult. Rather the ever-mutating form of the occult in Machen can only be deciphered in terms of the shifts in aesthetic form: from the panoramic to the phantasmagoric, from the visual to the tactile – through an intertextual reading. Indeed, intertextuality is a constitutive element of the occult in his writings, as the next section makes apparent.

Formal Alchemy Across Continents

The occult is constitutively intertextual in Machen because the materiality of the occult must resist direct figuration: 'figurative language' works to contain the materiality of 'Heavenly Chaos', a 'soft and ductile substance', as Glanville describes it (p. 310). Even the 'Holy Writ' could not contain the fluidity of the universe and it became a dead mass of materiality (p. 310). The antidote to the constraining materiality of the world lies in the power of imagination that restlessly roams across

cultures and continents, recuperating the formal fluidity of Paradise. In this movement of the occult, the textuality of the East and the West are entangled.

The example Machen chooses to illustrate the *forming* potency of imagination is an emblematic text from the putatively magical Orient: *One Thousand and One Nights*. Magic as the prowess of imagination is the 'first nature of man', rather than a supernatural phenomenon:

> the wild inventions (as we consider them) of the Arabian Tales give us some notion of the power of *homo protoplastus*. The prosperous city becomes a lake, the carpet transports us in an instant of time, or rather without time, from one end of the earth to another […]. [T]his magic of the East is but a confused and fragmentary recollection of operations which were of the first nature of man […] (p. 310).

The archetypal human imagination has been fragmented for as long as language has tried to grasp the ever-morphing materiality of the world into fixed forms. Therefore, the wonder and terror of the occult world cannot be captured in a single text. It must be intuited in the very flux of its mutating shapes – glimpsed through the cracks of intertexts.

I am not sure Machen's interest in the formal mutations of matter, as well as materiality of form can be readily summed up as a 'Platonic worldview', as Mantrant suggests.[38] Rather, he explores in his writings the constellation of matter and form, registered in the numerous references to Dionysus, notable for his shifting shapes, and succinctly captured in the image of Helen Vaughan's dead body in *The Great God Pan*: 'the hideous form upon the bed, changing and melting before your eyes from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast'.[39] Murray notes that in Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*, the notion of time as well as space is marked by an eternal flux, 'a constant process of decomposition and recomposition'.[40] The mutating shapes of space and time can only be accessed in relation to the textuality of past, and in the formal weave of history.

In Machen's work, London becomes an especially suitable space for exploring the occult not only because one could decipher the imprint of diverse temporal moments in the varied styles of its streets, buildings, or gardens, but also because those pasts are all alive in the city, threatening to trap its explorer in their mutating shapes. Mantrant has identified the 'labyrinth' as an emblem

of the mystery Machen pursues in his texts; she has called it 'a signifier without a signified',[41] and I agree that his mysteries remain ultimately elusive, without a positive determination. However, since Machen often builds his labyrinths with remnants of past texts, his textual assortment and their occult inscription could be more fruitfully understood according to Jacques Derrida's notion of the 'trace'. Derrida defines the trace as the form of 'spacing' that grafts 'the dead time' of previous texts upon 'the living present'.[42] London remains a mutating archive, constantly being written and rewritten through the textual itinerary of its explorers. Coming at the end of a long tradition of texts, *N* (itself a literal sign of infinity) plays with the past textual knots of the street and the garden that co-created the empire and the imperial city. One might seek a direct cipher to the occult symbolism of the title letter N and connect it to the figurations of Horus or the Christian Trinity. However, it is London that textualizes infinity in Machen's novella, by weaving traces of other texts across space and time. Arnold decides to venture into this living archive of London in his next adventure in Stoke Newington. He becomes the preeminent wanderer of the trio precisely because he is at once an idler, a scholar, a journalist, an alchemist, and an occultist – the perfect textual conduit for Machen to graft the evolving intertexts of London into the tale.

Architectural Debris and the Spatial Memory of the Polis

Arnold encounters a marvellous image of architectural debris that captures the history of London in rubble: 'late Georgian or early Victorian design' – 'ambitious pilasters and stucco' work coexisting with the 'assault' of 'modernism' – 'maisonettes' and 'blocks of flats in wicked red brick' (p. 313). Hypnotism, telepathy, and hallucination are all rejected as possible explanations for the elusive vision of the garden, as it is experienced by multiple people in different times as a concrete landscape where Perrott's cousin 'actually walked' (p. 314). Machen is more interested in the 'puzzling signs and ciphers' than in any singular 'supernatural explanation', as Mantrant notes.[43]

Machen is interested in the architecture of the occult cipher, which in the case of his late oeuvre is London. The city is the very embodiment of temporal flux, marked in the constant

process of dislocation, as Arnold realizes: 'London has always been a place of restless, migratory tribes, and shifting populations' (p. 314). And yet, there is 'an old fixed element, which can go back in memory sometimes for a hundred, even a hundred and fifty years' that attributes a concrete sense of the *longue durée* upon the place – a vantage point from which to perceive the insignia of lost times. Arnold hears an historical account of the elusive garden from Mr. Reynolds, the oldest member of a group of local elders, in a 'venerable tavern' on the brink of being transformed into a pub (p. 314). London emerges as 'a concrete image of the eternal things of space and time and thought', as Machen depicts the city in the third installment of his 1914 column in *The Evening News*, 'The Joys of London', through this dialectic of fixity and change.[44] London becomes a space of endless occult discoveries through the symbolic and material incorporation of its colonial frontier, and the spatial architecture of the city remains thoroughly enmeshed in this history, as the last part of *N* demonstrates.

What now appears to a be nondescript, even 'intolerably unpleasant' suburban park, was originally the property of a nabob, 'an old farmhouse by a rich gentleman from India'. The house became decrepit and was sold along with the premises to a doctor, who turned it into a 'madhouse' named 'Himalaya House'. It has since been turned into another building called 'Empress Mansions' (p. 317). Glanville's house, where the priest Hampole had his vision of the garden, became a lodging kept by one Mrs. Wilson, from which Mr. Vallance, an escapee from the mental asylum, had a similar vision of 'golden and silver and purple flowers, and the bubbling well, and the walk that went under the trees right into the wood, and the fairy house on the hill' (p. 318). Mrs. Wilson did not buy into this 'outrageous nonsense' and handed him over to the doctors of Himalaya House (p. 318). However, Arnold 'wonders whether Mrs. Wilson's lodger was a madman at all; any madder than Mr. Hampole, or the farmer from Somerset or Charles Dickens', all of whom glimpsed a mystery in the temporal folds of London (p. 319). The city is a palimpsest of lost times, where its wanderers cross paths across temporal nodes, as Arnold ends up meeting Mr. Vallance in his obsessive second venture into the 'singular Park': 'And then and there I came upon the

young man who had lost his way, and had lost – as he said – the one who lived in the white house on the hill […]. I am sure that the young man was lost also – and for ever.' (p. 320)

The city as a concrete repository of time where one remains lost forever, reminds one of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's characterization of Baudelaire's Paris as duration and memory in the *Arcades Project*, written in the same period: 'This city is a *durée*, an inveterate life-form, a memory'.[45] The term Benjamin uses for memory is *eingedenken*, which, Peter Osborne notes, has a 'substantial, quasi-spatial' quality.[46] In the concrete memory of the city, the vanishing pasts persist as tropes, as tissues of texts, intertwined in alleys or implanted in gardens. It must therefore be distinguished from subjective nostalgia, as both the tropes of the street and the garden are thoroughly intersubjective. These tropes preserve the dead times of the city in textual fragments, which can be assembled by the initiate, as Arnold does in the novella, but which are not confined to the limited memory of any individual initiate. Therefore, the diegetic architecture of Machen's occult London remains bound to the historical architecture of the city, and its role as the imperial cosmopolis.

Gayatri Spivak makes a fruitful distinction between 'pure trace' and 'instituted trace', which helps us understand why the seemingly idiosyncratic textuality of Machen's London remains embedded in a concrete form of history: 'Being human we *think* the pure trace, an impossible history, a "pastness" without reference. But we can *access* the trace only as instituted trace, some mark of the origin of a particular institution'.[47] The pure trace, which can only be conceived, might signify the form-making capacity of imagination Machen conceived in the esoteric theology of Glanville or the mutating body of Helen Vaughan in *The Great God Pan*. However, a glimpse of that imagination can only be structured through a concrete path, through instituted trace, laden with other texts, and in the case of this article, the textuality of London itself. The explanation offered in the text is 'perichoresis', or 'interpenetration', a theological notion where God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are revealed in relation to each other, and not as separate entities (p. 320). Without the textuality of history, the occult would not be captured in narration, as in the highly

suggestive ending of the novella, where the characters find themselves without the spatial architecture of London: 'sitting among desolate rocks, by bitter streams' (p. 320). The story ends by disintegrating the very building block of the story, the companionship of the trio, and perhaps by becoming a moment of pure trace, wonderful and terrible at once: '…And with what companions?' (p. 320).

At the very brink of dissolution, the trio must find themselves in the historical architecture of London and traverse the textual infinitude of *N* again and again. The pure trace neither leaves any token of remembrance for the characters, nor any hermeneutic cipher for the critic. Machen's concept of 'interpenetration', however, offers the possibility of reading the histories of the metropole and the colony as endlessly intersecting forms. It is a hermeneutic gesture towards the relational: a possibility of time being illuminated in space, and history in that of the trope. The interwoven relationality, that constitutes cosmopolitan London and its imperial constituents, urges us to reveal the colony in the metropole in the twilight years of the decadent Empire. Arthur Machen's centrality in decadence lies in manifesting this act of remembrance – in capturing the murmur of history through resurrected tropes of the past.

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[2] Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 6.
[3] Ibid., p. 150.
[4] Ibid., p. 139.
[5] Dennis Denisoff, 'Introduction', *Decadent and Occult Works by Arthur Machen*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Cambridge: MHRA, 2018), p. 20.
[6] Aaron Worth, 'Introduction', *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, ed. by Aaron Worth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. xxiv-xxvii.
[7] Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 288-89.
[8] Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 23.
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[10] Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 11.
[11] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[12] Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 9.
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[18] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, in *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, pp. 9-54 (p. 21).
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[20] Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 187. My emphasis.
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[23] Ibid.
[24] Machen, *The London Adventure*, pp. 134-35.
[25] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Related Writings*, ed. by Joel Faflak (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2009), p. 98. Emphasis in original.
[26] Emily B. Stanback, 'Peripatetic in the City: De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and the Birth of the Flâneur', *Literature Compass*, 10.2 (2013), 146-61 (p. 147).
[27] De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 119.
[28] Ibid., p. 125.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 165-81 (p. 176).
[31] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 26.
[32] Ibid., p. 73.
[33] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 51-52.
[34] Ibid., p. 53.
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[36] Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 96-97.
[37] Aaron Worth, notes to *N*, in *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, p. 384.
[38] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 93.
[39] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, p. 54.
[40] Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence*, p. 146.
[41] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 86.
[42] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 74.
[43] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 84.
[44] Arthur Machen, 'The Joys of London III', *The Evening News* (London), 15 April 1914, p. 8. https://newspaperarchive.com/london-evening-news-apr-15-1914-p-8/ [accessed 15 June 2021].
[45] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 252.
[46] Peter Osborne, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 218.
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'A Medium More Important than Bodily Sense'
Wilde, the Antipodes, and the Techno-Imagination

Thomas Vranken

University of British Columbia

> Here am I, and you at the Antipodes […]. The messages of the gods to each other travel not by pen and ink and indeed your bodily presence here would not make you more real: for I feel your fingers in my hair, and your cheek brushing mine. The air is full of the music of your voice, my soul and body seem no longer mine, but mingled in some exquisite ecstasy with yours.
>
> (Oscar Wilde, letter to Constance Wilde from Edinburgh, 16 December 1884.)

A decade ago, in his chapter for *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Ken Stewart voiced what has long been the conventional understanding of Wilde and his relationship with Britain's Australian colonies. 'The image of aristocratic dandyism [Wilde] affected', Stewart asserted,

> was the reverse of typically Australian. In witty conversation and in his plays and other writings, he employed with pitiless *brio* the convention of Australia as a joke place, a vast and distant outpost overrun by convicts, sheep and wealthy philistines who were to be spurned, unless one was in debt.[1]

Indeed, some thirty years before Stewart, in his now still-standard biography of Wilde, the most significant statement Richard Ellmann makes about Australia is that Wilde turned the country into 'the butt of his regional jokes'.[2] Even twenty years before Ellmann, in 1970, Coral Lansbury declared that Wilde 'could never regard Australia as a subject for anyone's serious attention'.[3] In this article, I seek to go beyond this somewhat unproductive understanding of Wilde's relationship with Australia. Instead, I argue, over the course of the 1880s and '90s, Wilde and Australia came (albeit, at times, begrudgingly) to identify with one another. In making this argument, I work to view the relationship through the prisms of both fin-de-siècle technology and celebrity culture, on the one hand, and 'Antipodean' discourses on the other.

In his study of decadent cartography, Alex Murray reminds us that the late nineteenth century was a period of

> rapid increase in the speed and affordability of long-distance travel. No longer was European touring restricted to the aristocratic and upper-middle class; instead it had

> become democratized, available to an upwardly mobile bourgeoisie who were desperate to accumulate the cultural capital provided by travel.[4]

Little wonder, then, that the decidedly anti-democratic, anti-bourgeois, decadent movement became so famously averse to the exhausting vulgarities of travelling in person. 'If you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio [*sic*]', Vivian tells Cyril in 'The Decay of Lying'.[5] 'What is the use of moving', Des Esseintes asks himself in *À rebours*, 'when one can travel so magnificently on a chair?'[6]

While advances in nineteenth-century transportation technologies such as steamships and the railway may have contributed to the vulgarization of physical tourism, the spread of media and communications technologies at the fin de siècle opened up more arcane modes of relocation that seemed rather better-suited to the decadent mentality. In 1872, the Earl of Kimberley, Gladstone's Secretary of State for the Colonies, chaired a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute to celebrate the linking of Australia to Britain by telegraph. After enumerating 'the horrors of the movements aboard ship', Kimberley triumphantly declared there to now be 'no such difficulties in communicating with the different parts of the Empire by telegraph'.[7] For, while 'they could not be close in an actual bodily sense with their fellow-subjects on the other side of [the world]', Kimberley explained, 'when they could communicate with them in a few minutes by telegraph they could not but feel they were allied to them through a medium more important than that of bodily sense'.[8]

Despite a number of somewhat half-hearted efforts, Wilde never made it to Australia 'in an actual bodily sense' either: 'I am waiting to go', he claimed during an interview in America, eagerly reprinted by a newspaper based in Sydney, '[but] I cannot find any one to go with'.[9] Yet, though Wilde never actually travelled to Australia – that thoroughly virtualized collection of colonies which, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, 'sent more telegraphs per capita than any other nation'[10] – the author and his fictional creations repeatedly pondered 'that absurdly shaped country' as it appeared on the map, as if preparing to do so. 'What a curious shape it is!',

declares the Duchess of Berwick in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 'Just like a large packing case'.[11] For Wilde, then, Australia became an ambivalent symbol of travel itself – ugly but fascinating, invigorating yet exhausting.[12]

In the process of rejecting in-person international appearances, decadent approaches to travel unwittingly dovetailed with the requirements of celebrity culture. The concepts of intimacy, absence, and distance are now understood as fundamental aspects of modern fame. Indeed, in 2007, Joseph Roach deemed physical absence 'a necessary condition of […] celebrity';[13] while, back in the 1950s, Donald Horton and Richard Wohl suggested that we read celebrity as a form of 'intimacy at a distance', in which 'the most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers'.[14] Yet what if one's celebrity icons really were distant, not just socially or symbolically, but geographically as well? How do people maintain the sense of intimacy on which celebrity relies if the parties involved not only never see one another but never even walk the same streets or breathe the same gaslit and fog-prone air? In this article, I will suggest that the kind of purely imaginative exchange that Wilde and Australia engaged in during the final decades of the nineteenth century produced an increasingly heightened form of celebrity, in which the participants brought about an extreme version of what Horton and Wohl called the 'ambiguous meeting ground on which real people play out the role of fictional characters'.[15] For, just as Wilde toyed with certain stereotypical depictions of Australia during this period, so too did Australian print media regularly manipulate and perpetuate stereotypical impressions of Wilde. These interactions, I argue, enabled the creation of a somewhat unlikely sense of intimacy and identification.

The Grotesque, the Weird, the Strange…

Early on in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (a novel Ward, Lock and Co. published simultaneously in London, New York, and, significantly, Melbourne), Dorian's soon-to-be fiancée Sibyl Vane walks down Euston Road with her sullen brother James on his final afternoon in London before sailing

for Australia. In a long passage of indirect speech, Sibyl 'prattle[s] on about the ship in which Jim was going to sail, about the gold he was certain to find, about the wonderful heiress whose life he was to save from the wicked, red-shirted bushrangers'.[16] The sixteen-year-old James is actually due to take up the relatively mundane occupation of apprentice salesman for a merchant fleet; yet, in Sibyl's mind, James 'was not to remain a sailor, or a super-cargo, or whatever he was going to be. Oh, no! A sailor's existence was dreadful'.[17] Instead, Sibyl fancies, James

> was to leave the vessel at Melbourne, bid a polite good-bye to the captain, and go off at once to the gold-fields. Before a week was over he was to come across a large nugget of pure gold, the largest nugget that had ever been discovered, and bring it down to the coast in a wagon guarded by six mounted policemen. The bushrangers were to attack them three times, and be defeated with immense slaughter. Or, no. He was not to go to the gold-fields at all. They were horrid places, where men got intoxicated, and shot each other in bar-rooms, and used bad language. He was to be a nice sheep-farmer, and one evening, as he was riding home, he was to see the beautiful heiress being carried off by a robber on a black horse, and give chase, and rescue her. Of course, she would fall in love with him, and he with her, and they would get married, and come home, and live in an immense house in London. Yes, there were delightful things in store for him. But he must be very good, and not lose his temper, or spend his money foolishly. […] [I]n a few years he would come back quite rich and happy.[18]

The reader never learns what James actually does in Australia, or even if he makes it to Australia at all.[19] Yet, in many respects, it does not matter for Wilde what Australia is really like. For in this (the only) depiction of Britain's former colony found in the novel, Australia operates purely as a self-consciously textual stereotype, becoming not so much an actual place as a romantic figure conjured up by the feminine overconsumption of melodrama and cheap railway fiction. Indeed, the great specificity of this passage ('before a week was over', 'six mounted policemen', 'attack them three times') serves not to enhance any sense of conventional realism, as one might normally expect, but rather to underline the reverie's clichéd absurdity. Through an ambivalent irony, then, Wilde simultaneously ridicules and perpetuates European discourse about Australia.

The passage from *Dorian Gray* reproduced above glosses a number of the key narratives surrounding Australia at the end of the nineteenth century: from goldmines, sheep-farming, and bushrangers, to the oft-employed movement of wayward literary characters to and from the colonies in their acquisition of new-found wealth and respectability.[20] However, in viewing Wilde's

relationship with Australia, perhaps the most interesting lens one can employ is that of 'the Antipodes'. A *longue-durée*, pre-contact, cultural construction, the Antipodean discourse began circulating long before Wilde, and, indeed, long before European settlement itself. Yet, in envisioning a perversely and subversively uncanny great southern land, this cultural narrative seems particularly suited to what would become the decadent imaginary. Simon Ryan suggests that both before and after 1770 Australia was typically cast as a kind of 'repository of perversity', as 'a stage on which European fantasies of difference, aberration and monstrousness […] played out'.[21] This was a surreal land, in which 'the animals [were] bizarre, the trees peculiar […] the vegetation continually green'.[22] More than simply botanical and zoological difference, however, the Antipodes housed human monstrosity as well. In fact, as Ryan points out, along with other forms of biological perversion and inversion (creatures half-human, half-hog; people with feet where their heads should be),[23] the south was apparently plagued with beings whose sexual status was indeterminate. 'The view that Australia was inhabited by hermaphrodites', Ryan notes,

> is expressed in the 1676 French travel fantasy, *La Terre Australe Connue* by Gabriel Foigny. *Another World and Yet the Same* [c. 1605] also imagined Amazonia […] where 'the women wear the breeches and sport long beards, and it is the men who wear petticoats and are beardless'.[24]

In other words, then, as a cultural construct the Antipodes were pre-populated with socially inverted figures such as the New Woman and the dandy long before their appearance in the fin-de-siècle popular press.

Even after acquiring first-hand experience of Australia, notions of Antipodean strangeness (or what Daniel Hempel calls 'the Australian grotesque'[25] continued to shape how Anglo-Australians represented the country in which they lived. One particularly notable example of this – an example to which Wilde directly responded – was produced by Melbourne's own author-poet-playwright, dandy, and *enfant terrible*, Marcus Clarke. In the preface to an 1876 edition of Adam Lindsay Gordon's collected poems (first published in Melbourne), Clarke presents Australia as not only a Darwinian aberration but as a kind of surreal, hyper-artistic locus of creative production:

> the poetry which lives in the trees and flowers of Australia differs from those of other countries. […] In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. […] Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphs of haggard gumtrees, blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds […]. The phantasmagoria of that wild dreamland termed the Bush interprets itself, and the Poet of our desolation begins to comprehend why free Esau loved his heritage of desert sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt.[26]

Earlier in his preface, Clarke declares 'the dominant note of Australian scenery' to be 'the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry – Weird Melancholy';[27] and Clarke's Australia is even more overt in its self-conscious intertextuality than Wilde's Australia in *Dorian Gray*. Indeed, here, the Australian landscape itself becomes a strangely orientalised, even Daliesque, hieroglyphic text that only insiders are able to interpret and decipher.

When, a little over a decade later, this collection of poems was published in England, Wilde wrote an anonymous review of the collection for *The Pall Mall Gazette*. Though largely dismissive of Gordon's artistic accomplishments ('Had he stayed at home he would have done much better work'),[28] Wilde's review becomes increasingly fascinated with Clarke's preliminary preface. After first appropriating from this preface through a great deal of indirect summary and unacknowledged quotation (a number of Clarke's phrases appear in Wilde's review without inverted commas),[29] Wilde does eventually refer to Clarke directly, reproducing at length those lines found above. With an injection of prophetic optimism, Wilde declares

> [t]hat Australia […] will some day […] produc[e] a poet of her own we cannot doubt, and for him there will be new notes to sound and new wonders to tell of. The description, given by Mr. Marcus Clarke in the preface to this volume, of the aspect and spirit of nature in Australia is most curious and suggestive. […] 'In Australia alone', he tells us, 'is to be found the grotesque, the weird, the strange scribblings of nature learning how to write […]'. Here, certainly, is new material for the poet, here is a land that is waiting for its singer.[30]

Fully exploiting *The Pall Mall Gazette*'s commitment to anonymous publication, Wilde begins this review with a moment of concealed self-contradiction, arguing against a claim he had himself made about Gordon – in another anonymous review published in the same journal – only three months

earlier ('A critic recently remarked of Adam Lindsay Gordon that through him Australia found its first fine utterance in song. This, however, is an amiable error. There is very little of Australia in Gordon's poetry').[31] Yet despite the covert playfulness of Wilde's opening, his review as a whole approaches Australia more specifically as anything but a 'joke country'. Instead, Australia here becomes a thoroughly consequential site of and for the Gothic imagination – a tantalising source of future artistic inspiration.

Indeed, a few years after publishing this review, Wilde wrote *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in which Australia becomes artistically consequential not just in theory but in practice. A surreal decadent locale ('that dreadful vulgar place' 'crawling' with kangaroos),[32] Australia is never directly depicted as a setting in Wilde's play. The country does, however, send its emissary in the form of Mr. Hopper – 'that rich young Australian people are taking such notice of just at present'.[33] Hopper's name itself evokes an uncanny and very Antipodean mixing of human being and exotic wildlife. More than this, though, the Australian discourse that Hopper implicitly incorporates into Wilde's play allows Hopper to become both a kind of genderbending pre-emptive doppelgänger for the returning mother Mrs. Erlynne and an authorial tool with which to reinforce the play's broader preoccupation with notions of money, exile, and redemptive homecomings.

The Abode of Lost Souls

The idea of Australia began informing Wilde's literary output several years before he wrote *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In 1889 (the same year that his review of Gordon's poetry appeared in *The Pall Mall Gazette*), Wilde published a poem in Sydney's *Centennial Magazine*. On first reading, 'A Symphony in Yellow' – an impressionistic description of various sites in London – would appear to have very little to do with Britain's Australian colonies:

> An omnibus across the bridge
> Crawls like a yellow butterfly,
> And, here and there, a passer-by
> Shows like a little restless midge.

Big barges full of yellow hay
Are moored against the shadowy wharf,
And, like a yellow silken scarf,
The thick fog hangs along the quay.

The yellow leaves begin to fade
And flutter from the Temple elms,
And at my feet the pale green Thames
Lies like a rod of rippled jade.[34]

Why, one might wonder, would Wilde – a writer with numerous English outlets – choose to print such a poem in an Australian magazine? Several decades after 'A Symphony in Yellow' first appeared, Wilde's publisher Thomas Werner Laurie (writing in another Australian periodical, *The Bookfellow*) recalled talking with Wilde at the time. Wilde, it seems, had just received one of many invitations to travel to Australia:

> 'so they are desirous of my beauty at Botany Bay', said Oscar, inviting my attention to a letter. 'I have inquired concerning this Botany Bay. It is the place of anthropopagi, the abode of lost souls, whither criminals are transported to wear a horrible yellow livery. […] So I have written for them a Symphony in Yellow – they will feel the homely touch. I rhyme "elms" with "Thames". It is a venial offence in comparison with theirs, yet it will show my sympathy. A symphony with sympathy – how sweet! Suppose I were to add a stanza!
>
> And far in the Antipodes
> When sobbing suns have sunk to rest
> A convict to his yellow breast
> Shall hug my yellow melodies.
> "Oscariana".'[35]

In these lines, and the possibly apocryphal backstory that surrounds them, a number of connections have quietly been formed. The poem printed in the *Centennial* is most overtly concerned with revealing what unites the seemingly unconnected phenomena of daily London life: with making visible the underlying symphonic harmony that hums throughout the city, in a typically decadent synaesthetic intermingling of the senses (in this case, sight and sound: this is a 'symphonic' poem focused on colour). What Werner Laurie terms his piece of 'Oscariana' – as Roach notes, celebrities, like the kings and saints who came before them, 'are typically known to the public […] by their first names'[36] – adds another layer of connective complexity to Wilde's poem. Now, decadent yellow becomes globally significant, forming a link between not only the

different manifestations of London's soul but also between Britain and its colonies. Indeed, while the yellow uniforms that they were forced to wear were presumably intended to signify the estrangement of these convicts from their homeland, these uniforms here become precisely what maintains the 'homely' connection between the heart of Britain and White Australia.

Yet Laurie's anecdote adds a final, even more complicated, layer of connectivity to Wilde's poem. Somehow, in making apparent this connection between Britain and Australia, Wilde and his poem forge their own connection to Anglo-Australia as well. In fact, by the end of the extended version, Britain has quietly disappeared, and it is Wilde and his poem that Australia is found embracing. Earlier on in this article, I asked how a celebrity could possibly maintain a sense of intimacy with an international public from which they were even more physically removed than was the norm. How, I asked, might a connection be formed between people who not only never met one another but never even walked the same streets or breathed the same fog-prone air. Here, Wilde seems to position his verse as a sympathetic stand-in for physical connection while also suggesting that literature more generally is able to negate the need for travelling in person.

In All Probability the Disgraced Author Will Come to Australia

Yet a longing for physical connection begrudgingly remained. As discussed above, Wilde's publisher, Laurie, recalled Wilde identifying with the legal subversion that he associated with Australia and its convict past, and – both before and after his incarceration for 'acts of gross indecency' – Australian print media itself seemed to feel their Antipodean country to be Wilde's natural home. In the years before 1895, this feeling simply manifested in an indefatigable expectation that Wilde would make an imminent visit to Australia. Thus, halfway through Wilde's 1882 American tour, the Freemantle *Herald* suggested 'Oscar Wilde […] may possibly visit Australia before his return to Europe';[37] in 1893, *Table Talk* of Melbourne declared 'Mr. Oscar Wilde intends visiting Australia during the present year';[38] while, two years later still, Sydney's *Sunday Times* announced that 'Oscar Wilde contemplates lecturing in Australia shortly'.[39] After the

scandal of Wilde's imprisonment, however, a number of notices appeared in the Australian press that suggested even more strongly that Australia was where Wilde belonged. 'In all probability the disgraced author, playwright, *doyen* of London drawing-rooms, and advocate of Babylonian bestiality, will come to Australia', wrote Sydney's aptly-named *Bird O'Freedom*, towards the end of Wilde's incarceration, 'where we regret to say gentlemen of his over-cultivated tastes are not entirely unknown';[40] 'His wife […] waits his release', reported Queensland's *Warwick Examiner* the following year, 'to seek with him the obscurity of some small continental town, or perhaps Australia will be the chosen haven. In appearance the brain-distorted Wilde was the image of a fellow-disciple in Melbourne, who died 12 or more years ago'.[41] This 'fellow-disciple' was surely Marcus Clarke, who died in Melbourne sixteen years prior to this report; for Tony Moore, Clarke was 'the closest thing to an Oscar Wilde' Australia ever produced.[42] In a way this reference is fitting. For, while these rumours about Wilde moving to Australia were factually unfounded, where better for a figure such as Wilde to spend his final years (even if only in a purely imaginative capacity) than in 'the repository of perversity', the land of 'the Grotesque, the Weird, the Strange'?

I would like to end by suggesting that this sense of absent presence and present absence was partially constructed by the ontology of the telegraph. In this essay's epigraph, the newlywed Wilde expresses a remarkably modern understanding of communications technologies and the intimate, post-Newtonian temporalities and virtual geographies they help to bring about. As the Freemantle *Herald* partially suggested at the time, Wilde had initially planned to supplement his 1882 American tour with a follow-up tour of Australia and Japan.[43] Ultimately, however, after leaving America, he returned home, married Constance, and completed a British lecture tour instead. By the time he wrote what would become the epigraph to this essay, then, Wilde was actually in Edinburgh and Constance in London; yet his language ('here am I, and you at the Antipodes')[44] maintains a curious echo of the half-planned Australian tour that he might otherwise have been on at the time. In this way, Wilde's Antipodean language itself curiously complements the epigraph's broader message of corporeality-defying geographic indeterminacy ('your bodily

presence here', Wilde assures Constance, 'would not make you more real').[45] Richard Menke has written of how the telegraph 'uncouples communication from geography',[46] and Wilde's broader understanding of geographic flexibility is surely indebted to telegraphic reconceptualizations of time and space: 'I have been obliged to be away […] since our engagement', Wilde told an American friend a few months earlier, 'but we telegraph to each other twice a day'.[47]

Ten years later, in the immediate wake of Wilde's trials and imprisonment, the Sydney *Bulletin* (arguably the most influential Australian periodical of the late nineteenth century) returned to ideas around telegraphic communication while lambasting Australian productions of *The Importance of Being Earnest* for not including Wilde's name in their advertisements. Intriguingly, the *Bulletin* went on to compare this partial self-censorship to stories of an 'old South Melbourne woman who, during a Sydney small-pox scare, declined to accept a telegram from the latter city for fear of contagion'.[48] Here, in this curious conceptual slippage linking ideas of contagion, text, and corporeality, the *Bulletin* echoes decadent discourses associating textual production with corruption and disease. At the same time, though, as Richard Fotheringham makes clear, Australian readers in this period would have been all too familiar with the logistics of telegraphic technologies, and 'would have understood this joke precisely: such a telegram would have been written out by a Melbourne Post Office clerk on Melbourne paper from a wired Morse-code message; there was nothing materially Sydney about it, and so nothing contagious'.[49] In 1893, Arthur Symons claimed that decadence meant constantly striving to become 'a disembodied voice'.[50] While a few simple line drawings of Wilde did make it into the Australian press (itself a poignant statement on the telegraphese-like suggestive incompleteness of Australia's impression of Wilde),[51] for most Australians Wilde remained a disembodied textual conglomeration – a product of telegraphic dispatches and intercontinental reporting. Yet, as this article has sought to illustrate, far from being hampered by physical distance, Wilde's relationship with Australia was ultimately facilitated by the imaginative flexibility and hygienic ethereality that long-distance communication enabled. As Wilde himself wrote in an 1889 article on the notorious Anglo-

Australian forger-poisoner Thomas Griffith Wainwright, 'To be suggestive for fiction is to be of more importance than a fact'.[52]

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[1] Ken Stewart, 'Britain's Australia', in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. by Peter Pierce (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 7-33 (p. 31).
[2] Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), p. 207.
[3] Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: The Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-century English Literature* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1970), p. 30.
[4] Alex Murray, 'Forgetting London: Paris, Cultural Cartography, and Late Victorian Decadence', in *The Long Journey: Exploring Travel and Travel Writing*, ed. by Maria Pia Di Bella and Brian Yothers (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), pp. 133-49 (p. 135).
[5] Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (Leipzig: Heinemann and Balester, 1891), p. 47.
[6] 'À quoi bon bouger, quand on peut voyager si magnifiquement sur une chaise?' (J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: G. Charpentier et Cie, 1884), p. 183). Translation mine.
[7] *Account of the Dinner held at the Cannon Street Hotel, on Friday, 15th November, 1872, to Celebrate the Completion of Telegraphic Communication with the Australian Colonies* (London: Royal Colonial Institute, 1872), p. 12.
[8] Ibid. Strictly speaking, Kimberley's claim about the speed with which telegrams could be sent from Britain to Australia in 1872 is an exaggeration. While the series of cables linking Britain to Australia made communication considerably faster than it had been previously (before the connection, Kate Inglis notes, 'the monthly news from England was about twenty days old when it reached eastern Australia'), in the first few months of the intercontinental telegraph's operation an average telegram would still take between fifteen and twenty hours to travel from London to Melbourne. Speeds continued to increase, however, and, by 1890, 'the average time taken for a message between London and Melbourne was […] less than six hours'. K. S. Inglis, 'The Imperial Connection: Telegraphic Communication Between England and Australia, 1872-1902', in *Australia and Britain: Studies in a Changing Relationship*, ed. by A. F. Madden and W. H. Morris-Jones (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1980; Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), pp. 20-36 (pp. 22, 25).
[9] 'Oscar Wilde Coming to Australia (From the New York Tribune)', *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* (27 January 1883), p. 186. Wilde considered travelling to Australia during his 1882 American tour and twelve years later, in 1894, when he told the English actress Mrs Bernard Beere, 'Of course, *we* must fly to Australia: I could not let you go alone. I have written to Cartwright – a bald genius who is dear Dot's agent – to ask him if it can be arranged'. Oscar Wilde, 'To Mrs. Bernard Beere (? April 1894)', in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), pp. 590-91. Dionysius 'Dot' Boucicault was the son of the Irish playwright Dionysius Lardner Boucicault. In 1886, the Boucicault family established a successful theatre company in Australia, where they staged productions of a number of Wilde's plays.
[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Yearbook Australia* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001), p. 830.
[11] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play About a Good Woman, in Four Acts* (New York and London: Samuel French, 1893), p. 17.
[12] Indeed, Wilde particularly emphasized these lines during the play's first season. 'Last night', he castigated his actor and theatre manager George Alexander, 'whether by inadvertence or direction I don't know, the Duchess left out some essential words in her first speech […] to omit them is to leave out the point of the climax'. Oscar Wilde, 'To George Alexander (Mid-February 1892)', in *The Complete Letters*, pp. 514-15 (p. 514).
[13] Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 17.
[14] Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, 'Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance', *Psychiatry*, 19 (1956), 215-29 (p. 215).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London, New York, and Melbourne: Ward, Lock & Co, 1891), p. 96.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., pp. 96-97.
[19] When James finally reappears at the end of *Dorian Gray*, some eighteen years later, all we are told is that he 'looks as if he had been a sort of sailor; tattooed on both arms, and that kind of thing'. Ibid., p. 309.
[20] While Magwitch in *Great Expectations* is perhaps the best-known example of such a character, as Stephen Knight has noted, 'the trip to Australia was a popular theme in mid-nineteenth century fiction. Early stories tell how a young man not doing well at home makes the long journey […] grows rich from cattle, sheep or, from 1851 on, gold, and returns home in charitable glory'. Stephen Knight, 'From Vidoq to the Locked Room: International Connections in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction', in *Criminal Moves: Modes of Mobility in Crime Fiction*, ed. by Jesper Gulddal, Stewart King, and Alistair Rolls (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 163-78 (p. 169). On this

point in relation to this passage from *Dorian Gray* more specifically, see also Neil Hultgren, 'Oscar Wilde's Poetic Injustice in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', in *Wilde Discoveries: Traditions, Histories, Archives*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 212-32 (p. 221).

[21] Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 108, 110.

[22] Ibid., p. 110.

[23] Ryan's discussion of Antipodean hog-men (ibid.) relates both specifically to Joseph Hall's 1605 satire *Another World and Yet the Same* and John Mandeville's fourteenth-century travelogue *The Travels of John Mandeville*. The trope of southerners walking upside down is, of course, central to the 'Antipodes' as both a concept and a word; as such, it dates back to at least the Classical world.

[24] Ibid., p. 109.

[25] Daniel Hempel, '"This Fantastic Land of Monstrosities": The Aesthetic of the Australian Grotesque in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Antipodes*, 30 (2016), 305-16 (p. 305).

[26] Marcus Clarke, 'Preface', in Adam Lindsay Gordon, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (Melbourne: Clarson, Massina & Co., 1876), pp. iii-vi (p. vi).

[27] Ibid., p. v.

[28] [Oscar Wilde], 'Adam Lindsay Gordon', *Pall Mall Gazette* (25 March 1889), p. 3.

[29] Compare, for instance, Wilde's

> The aborigines aver that, when night comes, from the bottomless depth of some lagoon a misshapen monster rises, dragging his loathsome length along the ooze. From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings – Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair' (ibid.)

to Clarke's

> The natives aver that when night comes, from out the bottomless depths of some lagoon the Bunyip rises, and in form like monstrous sea-calf drags his loathsome length from out the ooze. From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire, dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings – Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair. (Clarke, 'Preface', p. v.)

[30] [Wilde], 'Adam Lindsay Gordon', p. 3.

[31] Ibid. The earlier piece, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* three months before Wilde's review of Gordon's collection, is [Oscar Wilde], 'Australian Poets', *Pall Mall Gazette* (14 December 1888), pp. 2-3. For the identification of Wilde as the author of these anonymous reviews, see John Stokes and Mark Turner, *Volume VII: Journalism, Part II*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 130, 187.

[32] Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, p. 25.

[33] Ibid., p. 11.

[34] Oscar Wilde, 'Symphony in Yellow', *The Centennial Magazine: An Australian Monthly*, 1 (February 1889), 437.

[35] Thomas Werner Laurie, 'Bibliography of Oscar Wilde', *The Bookfellow: The Australasian Review and Journal of the Australasian Book Trade*, 3 (February 1914), 245-46 (p. 246).

[36] Roach, *It*, p. 17.

[37] 'Gleanings: English, Foreign, and Intercolonial', *The Herald* (10 June 1882), p. 2.

[38] 'Personal', *Table Talk* (10 June 1893), p. 2.

[39] 'Personal', *Sunday Times* (20 January 1895), p. 4.

[40] 'Oscar Wilde. Litterateurs Petition for his Release. He Will Come to Australia', *The Bird O'Freedom* (29 February 1896), p. 4.

[41] 'Oscar Wilde', *Warwick Examiner and Times* (17 March 1897), p. 3.

[42] Tony Moore, 'Urban Iconoclast', *Meanjin*, 64 (2005), 204-13 (p. 204).

[43] See Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 186.

[44] Oscar Wilde, 'To Constance Wilde (16 December 1884)', in *The Complete Letters*, p. 165.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 73.

[47] Oscar Wilde, 'To Waldo Story (22 January 1884)', in *The Complete Letters,* p. 155.

[48] 'At Poverty Point', *The Bulletin*, 16 (17 August 1895), 17.

[49] Richard Fotheringham, 'Exiled to the Colonies: "Oscar Wilde" in Australia, 1895-1897', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 30 (November 2003), 55-68 (p. 66). As Fotheringham outlines, even after Wilde's plays were withdrawn from the London stage, following the playwright's incarceration for acts of gross indecency, major productions continued in Australia. Indeed, between 1895 and 1897, Wilde's plays were 'enthusiastically received by colonial high society' (ibid., p. 55). Fotheringham views this enthusiasm as part of a broader anti-English Australian nationalism exciting the Australian colonies in the 1890s – a nationalism that led journals such as the *Bulletin*, Fotheringam

suggests, to view Wilde's homosexuality as simply an unfortunate consequence of his 'over-refined English upbringing' (ibid., p. 64).

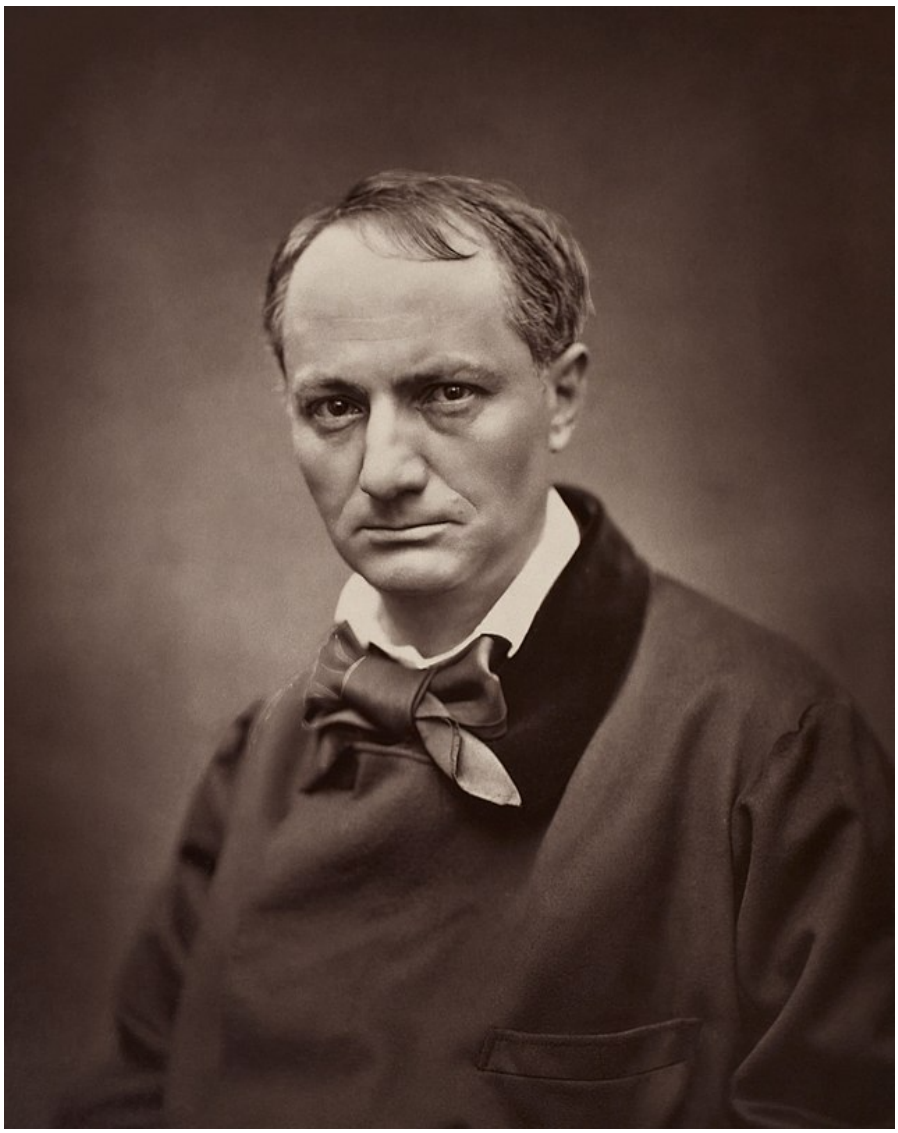
[50] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 87 (November 1893), 858-67 (p. 862).

[51] See, for instance, the simple line drawings of Wilde reproduced in 'Oscar Wilde Makes a Mark', *National Advocate* (4 June 1892), p. 2; 'Oscar Wilde as a Literary Artist', *Weekly Times* (13 April 1895), p. 36; and 'Oscar Wilde. Arrested on Warrant', *The Daily Telegraph* (8 April 1895), p. 5.

[52] Oscar Wilde, 'Pen, Pencil and Poison', *The Fortnightly Review*, 45 (January 1889), 41-54 (p. 54).

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE (1821-1867)

APPRECIATIONS



Étienne Carjat, Portrait of Charles Baudelaire (c. 1862)

FIRST ENCOUNTERS, LINGERING IMPRESSIONS

Jardin du Luxembourg, 1998, © Peter Coles

L'Invitation au voyage

Charles Baudelaire

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

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

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

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

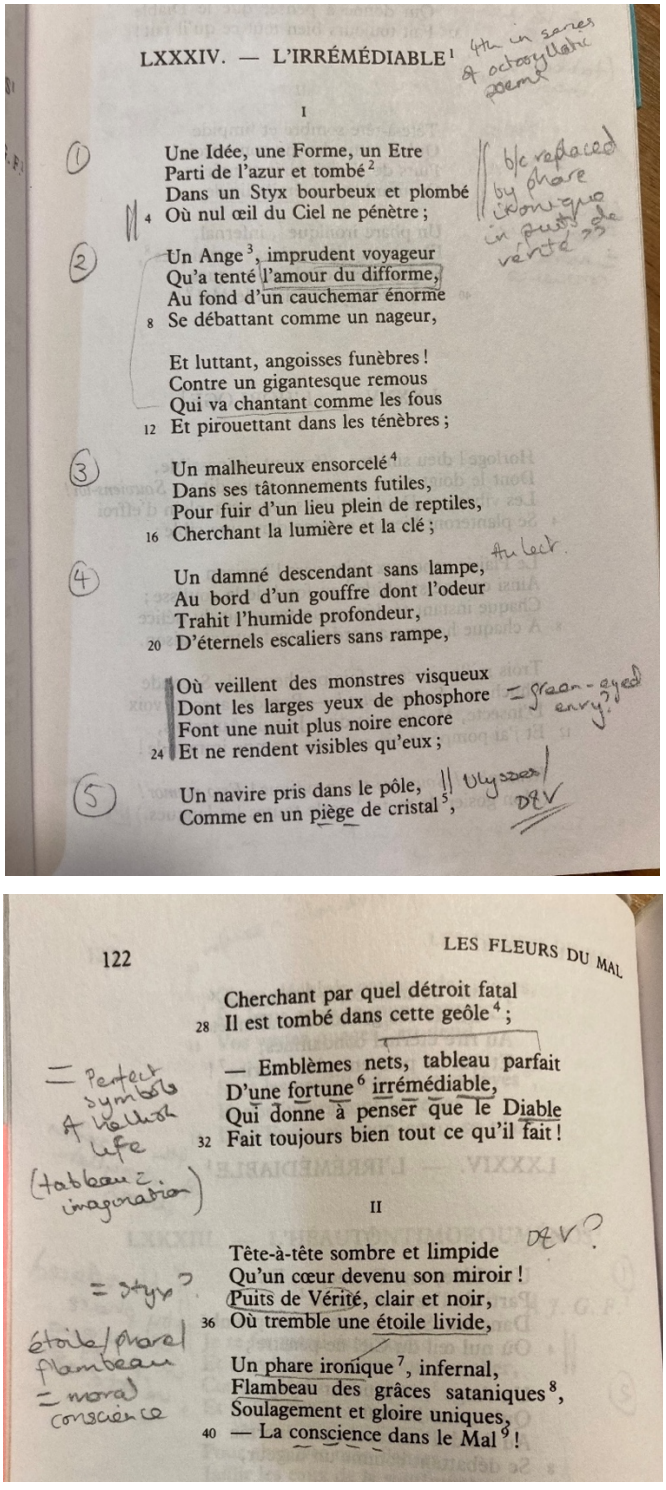
Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Dont l'humeur est vagabonde;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
— Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,
D'hyacinthe et d'or;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière.

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

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

Helen Abbott
University of Birmingham

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



LXXXIV. — L'IRRÉMÉDIABLE[1]

I

Une Idée, une Forme, un Etre
Parti de l'azur et tombé[2]
Dans un Styx bourbeux et plombé
Où nul œil du Ciel ne pénètre ;

Un Ange[3], imprudent voyageur
Qu'a tenté l'amour du difforme,
Au fond d'un cauchemar énorme
Se débattant comme un nageur,

Et luttant, angoisses funèbres !
Contre un gigantesque remous
Qui va chantant comme les fous
Et pirouettant dans les ténèbres ;

Un malheureux ensorcelé[4]
Dans ses tâtonnements futiles,
Pour fuir d'un lieu plein de reptiles,
Cherchant la lumière et la clé ;

Un damné descendant sans lampe,
Au bord d'un gouffre dont l'odeur
Trahit l'humide profondeur,
D'éternels escaliers sans rampe,

Où veillent des monstres visqueux
Dont les larges yeux de phosphore
Font une nuit plus noire encore
Et ne rendent visibles qu'eux ;

Un navire pris dans le pôle,
Comme en un piège de cristal[5],

Cherchant par quel détroit fatal
Il est tombé dans cette geôle[4] ;

— Emblèmes nets, tableau parfait
D'une fortune[6] irrémédiable,
Qui donne à penser que le Diable
Fait toujours bien tout ce qu'il fait !

II

Tête-à-tête sombre et limpide
Qu'un cœur devenu son miroir !
Puits de Vérité, clair et noir,
Où tremble une étoile livide,

Un phare ironique[7], infernal,
Flambeau des grâces sataniques[8],
Soulagement et gloire uniques,
— La conscience dans le Mal[9] !

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

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

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

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

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[1] Henri Duparc, 'L'Invitation au voyage' (1870): https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W6515_GBAJY0652324.
[2] Jules Cressonnois, L'Invitation au voyage' (1873): https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W6918_GBAJY0652301.
[3] Mary Bevan and Joseph Middleton, *Voyages* (Signum Classics, 2017). https://open.spotify.com/album/2URCWCwWlYDI6vRLOAUad2?si=3_WPj8GSQuGZ6Qo6U_4w4Q&nd=1.
[4] *The Baudelaire Song Project*: https://www.baudelairesong.org/search/.
[5] Diamanda Galás, 'Litanies of Satan': https://open.spotify.com/track/3Wij3Osx39agAHlNQYYVBk?si=TxrI0f_oQauGbfhR3YftAQ&nd=1.
[6] Susanna, 'The Vampire': https://open.spotify.com/album/6UMfvIFmpCpEJOD7RCYMZe?highlight=spotify:track:26xVKmTIBtCnDsknWp9nUd.
[7] On the concept of 'Baudelaire fétiche', see Mathilde Labbé, 'Baudelaire au centenaire des *Fleurs du mal*: Commémoration et lectures de circonstance', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 58:1 (2018), 74-86.
[8] Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. by Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1966-1973), II, p. 1452. Baudelaire's recognition of himself in Wagner's music is also described as a process of anamnesis, as per Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica ficta (Figures de Wagner)* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991), pp. 61-62.

What Baudelaire Means to Me

Matthew Creasy

University of Glasgow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot – Volume 1: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber, 2015), p. 57. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.
[2] T. S. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot – Volume 7: A European Society, 1947-1953*, ed. by Iman Javadi and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), p. 483.
[3] T. S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot – Volume 4: English Lion, 1930-1933.* ed. by Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 157.
[4] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 6.
[5] See Clive Scott, *The Riches of French Rhyme* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 312-13.
[6] Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 5.

Baudelairite et réversibilités

Marie Kawthar Daouda

Oriel College, University of Oxford

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Baudelaire now: the sounds of childhood

Michel-Guy Gouverneur

Université de Picardie Jules Verne

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Ces malédictions, ces blasphèmes, ces plaintes,
> […] sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes
> ('Les Phares')

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

A Prose Reverie for Charles Baudelaire

Ian Murphy

Manchester Metropolitan University

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), pp. 390-436 (p. 426).
[2] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', pp. 420-21.

Terra Incognita: On First Reading 'L'Invitation au Voyage'

Chris Waters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEACHING BAUDELAIRE

Jardin des Plantes, 2003, © Peter Coles

À une passante

Charles Baudelaire

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 aimée, ô toi qui le savais!

Baudelaire: The Iceberg

Joseph Acquisto

University of Vermont

I had heard that *Les Fleurs du mal* was one of the most important and influential works of poetry in the last two hundred years, that it was a foundational text of modernity, that it was scandalous, that it was powerful. And so as a sophomore French major in college I eagerly checked it out of the university library, having read only a small handful of poems from it before, the usual ones that often serve as someone's first inroad to his poetry: 'Correspondances' with its vertical and horizontal worlds that seem profound when you're sixteen, 'L'Albatross' and its seemingly transparent lesson about how the world mistreats its poets, also a lesson that teenagers are likely to find appealing. And so, once I had read through all the poems of the collection, my first thought was 'Really? This?' Never would I have guessed, if I hadn't read and been told, that *this* was the foundational text of modernity. It was not that I just wanted to move on from it, though. While I can't quite recall exactly how it happened, I was led to find out more, pursued an independent study that my professor wanted to make about the entire history of French poetry but which I convinced him to divide in three equal parts: pre-Baudelaire, Baudelaire, post-Baudelaire. ('An interesting way of dividing up literary history', said another professor.) And then, when it came time to choose an undergraduate honours thesis topic, I was a full-on Baudelairean.

I enjoy asking students to guess where the only Baudelaire Studies Center in the world is and seeing their surprise when they learn it is in Nashville, Tennessee, not far from Music Row. I was lucky to be able to travel there to do thesis research and to sense a human connection to him as I leafed carefully through one of the original editions of *Les Fleurs du mal*, with the condemned poems ripped right out of the book (along with the first part of whatever poem happened to be printed on the same leaf) and a postcard where he asks advice on a translation from English that he was working on. Soon I came to know him better than I know any living human being, having

read every word he ever published and all his letters with their sad story of constant financial trouble and inability to work as he wanted to. I found Jean-Paul Sartre cruel for enumerating all the misery that Baudelaire didn't deserve and then asking: 'Et s'il l'avait mérité?' I was well on my way toward discovering what one critic called *cet iceberg*.[1]

Now that I've written a book on him as well as many book chapters and articles, and as I'm setting to work on a second book, I find myself more apprehensive, not less, when I first try to introduce him to an undergraduate class. I feel like every entry point I could choose would inevitably give the wrong impression, even though I'm not sure what the 'right' impression would be. Should I tell the anecdote of the poet who tried to shock his friends by implying that he eats children's brains? Should I present him as the *poète maudit* who wrote about horse carcasses and was put on trial for obscenity and then officially pardoned by the French government in 1949? As the first major poet of the modern city? As the last poet of Romanticism? The experimenter with alcohol and other drugs? I usually put these lines from 'L'Héautontimorouménos' on the board:

> Ne suis-je pas un faux accord
> Dans la divine symphonie
> Grâce à la vorace Ironie
> Qui me secoue et qui me mord?

And then I'm honest about not really knowing how best to introduce someone I've known so intimately for so long by now and who I hope my students will come to know and like too. I usually fall back on the idea of the *homo duplex* and I try to give the students an idea of the way it can be said that everyone has his or her own Baudelaire: the Catholic, the Satanist, the modernist, the antimodernist, the Romantic, the decadent, the revolutionary, the reactionary. He is interesting precisely because all of those labels both do and do not apply. And that is part of what has kept me coming back, time and again, to Baudelaire: the interest of his writings is magnified tenfold by the broad span of his reception history, which I find so stimulating to engage with and, in some small way, participate in via my own writing. If the full impact of his poetry was not immediately obvious to me when first I read it, that's part of the point: Baudelaire's world is one that unfolds

slowly, that repays constant return and infinite questioning in the textual company of others who have engaged with his work over the years.

It is Baudelaire's ability always to elude our grasp somehow that makes him so compelling to me; it gives me a sense of undertaking each new reading of *Les Fleurs du mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris* and all his critical writings with a new sense of discovery and also a feeling that whatever I end up saying about him this time will never be definitive for me, nor would I want it to be. It is an ever-renewed *invitation au voyage* of reading, a search for the new *au fond de l'Inconnu*, and at the same time a return, a collapse of the 150 years that separate us as well as an occasional reminder of that vast temporal distance, a putting into question linear time that Baudelaire would no doubt endorse. Baudelaire, *cet iceberg*, an inexhaustible literary stimulation and my own door to the world of modern French literature that has come to mean so much to me. I still need him, in ways that Serge Reggiani sang about back in the year I first discovered *Les Fleurs du mal* in a song I discovered on a cassette tape in the language lab:

> S'il vous plaît, Monsieur Baudelaire
> Un peu de fantaisie
> Entre nous, pour la rime…

[1] Claude Pichois, 'Baudelaire, cet iceberg…', in *Scritti in onore di G. Macchia*, ed. by Arnoldo Mondadori, I (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1983), pp. 497-504.

Aimer *naïvement* Baudelaire

Silvia Giudice

Université Paris-Nanterre

J'ai rencontré Baudelaire en quatrième année de lycée, en Italie : ces « Correspondances » déjà merveilleuses, et l'analyse de mon enseignante d'italien. Peu de temps après, est venu tout le reste : les poèmes moins connus, les poèmes bien trop connus et infiniment interprétés, les vers et la prose, les projets de préface, les journaux intimes, les critiques, les lettres à sa mère et à ses éditeurs, les élans de brutale misogynie et xénophobie et les prières à Dieu pour apprendre à s'aimer soi-même. C'est à travers ce prisme vertigineux de facettes superposées que Baudelaire est avec moi depuis ma première année de master.

Je l'ai lu en étant étudiante, aux prises avec mes premières recherches en littérature comparée. Je l'ai lu en tant qu'enseignante du secondaire, réfléchissant à des stratégies pédagogiques pour faire *sentir* à mes élèves de seconde en quoi ce qu'on leur avait présenté comme un chef-d'œuvre pouvait vraiment l'être, et comment génie et scandale pouvaient parfois aller de pair (et du coup, il a fallu que je justifie ma conviction que l'on avait bien le droit de lire « Les Bijoux » et les « Litanies de Satan » pendant le ramadan). Je l'ai lu en tant qu'enseignante dans le supérieur, cherchant à mobiliser les connaissances des étudiants de licence pour étudier ensemble en quoi « Au lecteur » pouvait tout de même être porteur d'une certaine pensée philosophique. Et je le lis en tant que doctorante, pour étudier sa posture poético-philosophique à l'égard de la nature humaine à la lumière de son rapprochement comparatif avec d'autres poètes.

Je ne me demande pas, ni ici ni ailleurs, de combien de façons l'on peut lire Baudelaire, de combien d'enjeux il peut être porteur, évocateur ou prétexte, dans combien de contextes il peut être enseigné. Ce serait un questionnement immense, et sans doute, par là, d'utilité douteuse.

J'aimerais me demander, en revanche, comment et pourquoi je continue à l'aimer. Évidemment, l'on ne termine jamais d'approfondir sa connaissance d'un auteur, d'une œuvre,

d'une pensée ; bien entendu, l'on peut toujours aimer un auteur canonique, dont tout le monde parle depuis des siècles ; et, absolument, l'on peut continuer à l'aimer tout en l'exploitant et en le décortiquant. Mais est-ce possible de l'aimer encore *naïvement* ? Quelles manières, quelles formes peut assumer un rapport toujours *naïf* avec Baudelaire ?

Pour Baudelaire poète et critique d'art, la naïveté était la niaiserie du public moderne face à la photographie,[1] mais également l'aspiration vers le brillant et vers le style joujou propre à l'enfance,[2] la passion que l'artiste de génie unit au romantisme,[3] l'abri impeccable du poète-philosophe et la bizarrerie inconsciente du Beau qui fait l'assaisonnement de l'art.[4] C'est de cette manière – ou mieux : c'est de toutes ces formes et manières – de la naïveté qu'est nourri mon rapport avec Baudelaire. Ces sens – contemporains et baudelairiens – de *naïf* me semblent avoir quelque chose en commun : l'évocation d'un élan spontané, réel puisque individuel, d'un charme profond et enthousiaste, qui n'oublie jamais, ensuite, de revenir sur soi dans une perspective réflexive et autocritique. Je crois que c'est ainsi que je continue d'aimer Baudelaire, aujourd'hui : *naïvement*.

Juste à côté du Baudelaire étudié – et en même temps que celui-ci –, se situe le Baudelaire aimé naïvement et intériorisé. C'est ainsi que je caractériserais mon rapport avec l'œuvre baudelairienne : une proximité quotidienne constituée d'un dialogue perpétuellement tissé entre ma vie et son œuvre. Cette définition paraîtrait peut-être moins ambitieuse, si j'empruntais à Sergio Solmi les mots avec lesquels il témoignait à Paul Valéry de son estime : en rappelant au poète une de ses réflexions sur la figure de l'auteur, l'intellectuel italien évoquait l'« enviable gloire silencieuse de certains écrivains, sans cesse appelés à témoin », « pérennes interlocuteurs dans le dialogue intérieur muet d'un lecteur ». Baudelaire est alors un de mes « génies familiers », ces écrivains qui sont « plus à nous que nous-mêmes » : [5] il a su chanter ma condition d'être humain, mes limites cognitives, linguistiques et sensibles, et ma lâcheté devant ces facettes si horribles à concevoir.

Valéry l'explique bien mieux que moi : « Pas d'autorité de l'auteur. Quoi qu'il ait *voulu dire*, il a écrit ce qu'il a écrit. Une fois publié, un texte est comme un appareil dont chacun peut se servir

à sa guise et selon ses moyens ».[6] Je sais bien, par contre, que mes moyens ne sont ni les seuls, ni les plus pertinents : la naïveté se doit d'être constamment accompagnée d'une certaine conscience de soi. Et c'est exactement ici que se situe la leçon que Baudelaire m'apprend : à aimer son œuvre comme à aimer l'être humain, avec la profonde conscience de leurs limites et des miennes.

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[1] « Lettre à M. le Directeur de la *Revue française* sur le Salon de 1859 », *Revue française*, 10 juin 1859.
[2] « Le Peintre de la vie moderne », *Le Figaro*, 26 novembre, 29 novembre, 3 décembre 1863. « La Morale du joujou », *Le Monde littéraire*, 17 avril 1853.
[3] *Baudelaire Dufaÿs. Salon de 1846* (Paris, Michel Lévy frères, 1846).
[4] « Exposition universelle – 1855 – Beaux-arts », *Le Pays*, 26 mai 1855 et *Le Portefeuille*, 12 août 1855.
[5] [« Invidiabile silenziosa gloria di certi scrittori, chiamati continuamente a testimoni » ; « interlocutori perenni nel muto dialogo interno di un lettore » ; « geni familiari, più nostri di noi stessi »]. Lettre datée 19 février 1931 : fonds Valéry, BNF Mf 2804. C'est moi qui traduis.
[6] Paul Valéry, « Au sujet du Cimetière marin », *Variété III* (Paris, Gallimard, 1936).

Enseigner *L'Etranger* de Baudelaire ou initier l'étudiant à la quête de l'identité

Salsabil Gouider

Université de Sfax, Tunisie

Si nous souhaitons lire une poésie distinguée par une langue à la fois incomparable et rigoureuse, nous ne retrouvons pas mieux que celle de Charles Baudelaire. Ce poète célèbre du XIX[e] siècle nous a tant inspiré. En effet, la lecture de son recueil *Les Fleurs du mal* qui favorise le contact de l'âme et l'esprit à travers l'expression d'un monde spirituel original crée par un homme tiraillé entre une écriture idéale mais mystique, valorise notre appréciation de ce poète. Cette lecture nous a permis d'étudier, avec un certain enthousiasme, différents poèmes tels que « L'albatros » et « Correspondances », en tant qu'étudiante de langue et de littérature françaises. Par la suite, la richesse du langage baudelairien nous a incitée, en tant qu'enseignante, à choisir son texte comme un support d'un cours d'histoire littéraire adressé aux étudiants de deuxième année Licence d'Education et d'Enseignement. Dans l'intention de définir le XIX[e] siècle ainsi que ses différents mouvements littéraires, nous avons opté pour l'étude du poème « L'étranger »[1] de Baudelaire afin de traiter la question du vers libre qui annonce en même temps l'étude de la poésie moderne du XX[e] siècle. Alors, par quoi se distingue l'enseignement de la poésie de Baudelaire ?

Le choix de « L'étranger » et les premières impressions

Le choix de l'étude de « L'étranger », extrait du recueil *Le Spleen de Paris* de Baudelaire spécialement, émane d'un désir personnel de partage. En effet, ce poème permet à l'étudiant de lire un texte qui semble facile à comprendre avec son vocabulaire simple. Cependant, nous nous sommes heurtés aux problèmes du déchiffrement du sens du poème. Nous avons commencé par une lecture linéaire qui a abouti à une impression collective se résumant dans l'appréciation. Les étudiants ont apprécié d'abord, la forme du poème en prose qui ne demande pas un travail difficile sur la versification comme est le cas pour un poème de forme fixe. Ensuite, la particularité de la

typographie du poème a interpellé les étudiants qui ont remarqué la récurrence des phrases interrogatives et la présence des tirets. Nous avons traité donc, l'aspect du discours qui caractérise ce poème et qui semble mystérieux puisqu'il parle d' « un homme énigmatique ». C'est ce qui a attiré le plus les étudiants, qui sont jeunes et ambitieux mais qui manquent encore d'expérience et qui n'aiment pas l'autorité. Ils ont aimé plutôt les réponses plus que les questions de l'interrogatoire existant dans le poème. En effet, nos jeunes sont en quête d'une identité, ils sont encore hésitants. Ils ont eu l'impression que les vers de Baudelaire parlaient de leurs réalités puisqu'ils signent le dévoilement de l'autre. D'ailleurs, nous avons même parlé d'un poème « écho » de la voix des étudiants. De surcroît, les vers « - Tes amis ? - Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu. » ont sollicité les étudiants qui s'amusent à discuter à propos de l'amitié en général et qui nous permettent d'identifier en particulier, la signification de ces deux vers qui renforcent l'idée de la solitude, dégagée d'ailleurs dans le deuxième vers caractérisé par la négation « - Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni sœur, ni frère. » qui rend compte du refus du poète de la notion de la famille et l'impossibilité d'une intégration sociale.

Nous avons constaté ensemble également, l'intérêt du verbe « j'ignore » qui traduit la révolte d'un poète maudit contre toute forme de patriotisme. Ainsi, l'expression « sous quelle attitude » a été interprétée comme une phrase ironique justifiant la remise en question d'un monde gouverné par la norme. C'est ce qui renvoie au désir du poète qui souhaite quitter son univers réel. Cet appel à la solitude et à l'oubli des autres a provoqué chez les étudiants un certain sens de ressemblance avec « l'homme énigmatique ». Alors, les vers qui traitent le problème d'une vie solitaire ont touché les étudiants qui n'ont pas hésité à exprimer la même attitude que le poète dans une époque où tous les principes et la morale sont remis en cause.

« L'étranger » et l'énigme de l'identité

Bien que le poème soit court, nous avons pu parler de la complexité de l'état de « l'homme énigmatique » qui refuse toute intégration sociale. Face à cette déduction, les étudiants réagissent

avec aisance et ils ont continué à déchiffrer le projet du poète qui met en opposition « la beauté » et « l'or ». En effet, les étudiants se trouvent un peu étonnés face à ces deux termes et ils se demandent quel lien existe-t-il entre ces mots. Nous avons essayé d'expliquer leur connotation qui reflète les principes de l'écriture baudelairienne dans la mesure où il est difficile d'accéder à un univers idéal bien que le poète affirme : « Je l'aimerais volontiers ».

La question du refus hante encore le poète et elle incite les étudiants à poser des questions de type : « quel est le sens de la comparaison évoquée au vers 'Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu' ? » Afin de simplifier la compréhension du poème, nous avons relié ce vers à la perte et au déchirement d'ordre psychologique du poète, entre la possession et la dépossession. Cette hésitation du poète débouche finalement sur le thème du rêve et de l'imagination qui sont présents au dernier vers « J'aime les nuages... les nuages qui passent... là-bas... là-bas... les merveilleux nuages ! » En effet, la fin du poème a marqué la satisfaction des étudiants puisque la quête de « l'homme énigmatique » a commencé par un certain pessimisme mais elle s'est bien terminée, car ils ont besoin d'un certain espoir dans leurs vies. Nous avons de même relevé l'effet des points de suspension qui appellent au rêve et à l'affection en remarquant une allégorie qui souligne un goût esthétique et langagier chez Baudelaire. Les étudiants ont apprécié l'adjectif antéposé « extraordinaire étranger » qui marque le succès de cette quête identitaire dans la mesure où la solitude baudelairienne devient une source d'inspiration qui s'ouvre sur l'imagination et l'onirisme qui sont nécessaires pour avoir des étudiants créatifs.

Conclusion

L'expérience de l'enseignement de « L'étranger » de Baudelaire montre que l'étudiant de nos jours apprécie encore ce poète. Cette expérience nous a été d'un grand intérêt puisqu'elle nous a aidé à traiter les caractéristiques de la littérature du XIX^{e} siècle à travers un exemple « type » qui peut résumer différents mouvements littéraires comme ce poème ne manque pas de traces de romantisme, de Parnasse et de symbolisme. Il s'agit d'un poème prometteur qui a sollicité

l'imagination des étudiants, les a provoqués, mais les a surtout touchés de plus près car il porte la voix intérieure d'un déchirement social permanent. Les étudiants ont eu du plaisir à lire et à interpréter « L'étranger » et nous avons partagé avec eux toutes les sensations hétérogènes de Baudelaire qui a réussi à nous enseigner et expliquer ses propres réflexions si modernes à propos de l'homme et son désir grâce à un souci didactique indéniable de sa part.

[1] Tous les vers cités sont extraits du recueil *Le Spleen de Paris*. Charles Baudelaire, L'étranger, *Le Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Classiques français, 1997), p. 11.

Parapluies and Petticoat tails: Baudelaire's 'À une passante', a *Couturière's* Delight

Anne Rainey

Ulster University

She passed me by

Mid deafening clamour of traffic and street sound,
A woman passed by, tall, slender, majestic,
A vision in mourning, jewelled hand mesmeric,
Swinging scalloped petticoat trim up from the ground.

A queenly silhouette, graceful too, limbs shapely,
Her dark eyes held wild promise of hurricane skies,
That sweetness, those pleasures, for which one would gladly die,
Like an addict, I imbibed her, nerves edgy.

A bolt from the blue! Then… nothing – Elusive
Beauty, one glance from nowhere has turned me around,
Will we chance to meet before the next life?

Or in some distant land? *Belle Dame*, you'll never be found!
Since I know not where you went, nor you where I go,
You might have been the one, and this, I think you know.

My translation of Charles Baudelaire's 'À une passante'

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The early 1990s were a time of heightened unrest in Belfast. The *hurlements* and city sounds in that place were of a different kind to those described in Baudelaire's Parisian street scenes. At that time, I was a Modern Languages undergraduate at Queen's University Belfast studying, among other great works, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. The title intrigued me because finding illumination was something we had to do for ourselves during *les temps sombres*.

'À une passante', one of eighteen poems which make up the 'Tableaux parisiens', was read aloud in our French lecture hall by Professor Peter Broome. Listening to his animated voice, as he defined vocabulary and provided instruction for annotation, we followed the decadent nineteenth-century lexicon, beguiled by the dazzle of a jewelled hand, the rustle of a dress. The poetry worked its effect on each of us.

In what seemed like a Proustian experience, I felt myself transported to Anderson and McAuley's, a department store dating from the late nineteenth century, situated in the often-bombed city centre. My epiphany was not, however, engendered by a shell-shaped *Petite Madeleine* softened by 'une cuillerée du thé' [a spoonful of tea].[1] It was, rather, a *coup de force* inspired by Baudelaire's evocation of the cut of a black gown and the scallop-edged elegance of a petticoat.

It was my practical mother who introduced her three daughters to the art of dressmaking. She was born at the start of WW2, in frugal Make Do and Mend times, where dressmaking was an indispensable skill. We would regularly make our way to Anderson and McAuley's with plans to create different kinds of dresses from the luxurious rolls of velvets, damasks, voiles, lawns, and lace, all in an exotic array of colours. Entering the hush of the grand shop and walking up the carpeted steps, with what Irish poet Ciaran Carson calls 'a squint of the imagination', one could summon up an earlier era, where the *fin de siècle* ladies of the city visited the haberdashery department to be kitted out in finest attire.[2]

My mother reminded us that before any consideration of 'notions', the accurate *structuring* of a garment, in terms of judicious cuts, tucks and seams, determines its flow.[3] Baudelaire also knew this to be the case in his writing. He constructed his poem as a traditional French sonnet, before edging his first two quatrains with *rimes embrassées* (abba) followed by *rimes croisées* (abab). Adding an impassioned air of drama, he emphasized 'the stigmata which life in a metropolis inflicts upon love', by finishing the last two lines of the final tercet with *rimes plates* (a rhyming couplet).[4] Imposing the Alexandrine verse form maintained a degree of order, while allowing luxury and decadence to permeate via exotic vocabulary and imagery.

A dressmaker knows that how the garment drapes and how the figure is accentuated are important considerations, so the movement of the poem also captured the attention of my *couturière* heart. Baudelaire's liberal use of sibilants ('a*ss*ourdi*ss*ante', 'maje*s*tueuse', 'pa*ss*a', 'fa*s*tueu*s*e', '*s*oulevant', 'balan*ç*ant', fe*s*ton') firstly suggests the hissing street sounds, then the exquisite swish of the woman's movements along the Parisian thoroughfare. Baudelaire's illustration of the

preoccupied, confident yet elusive *femme fatale* as she swings her petticoats in a demolishing gesture, is further reflected in her enigmatic eyes.

A few years later, in the National Gallery in London, standing opposite Renoir's famous painting *Les Parapluies*, I felt that I had encountered Baudelaire's 'fugitive beauté'. The scene from this painting, developed in two stages in the 1880s, is reminiscent of Baudelaire's poetic vignette. It is documented that Renoir had originally dressed *his* passer-by with lace collar, cuffs, and hem.[5] However, a few years later, applying his own tailoring skills, and perhaps observing English nineteenth-century poet Robert Browning's advice in 'Andrea del Sarto', 'less is more, Lucrezia', he painted over the frilled 'notions' to create a simpler silhouette.

I stepped out of the crowds of Belfast city and into Professor Broome's office, this time for a seminar group and deeper discussions on Baudelaire. I wore an ankle-length dress of Liberty lawn fabric, cinched at the waist, carefully tucked and darted at the bodice, and neatly hemmed. The grim and the brutal were a stone's throw away, but I wanted to gather some flowers, to learn of a decadent affair of the heart gone wrong, in what Walter Benjamin called love 'at last sight'.[6]

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[1] Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1988), p. 44. All translations are my own.
[2] Ciaran Carson, 'Introduction', in *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Granta Books, 2004), pp. xi–xxi (p. xi). Carson has translated several of Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* in his book-length work of French translations. See Carson, *The Alexandrine Plan* (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 1998).
[3] 'Accessories such as trims, tapes, and fasteners that are attached to the sewing project for function or decoration are categorized as sewing notions'. See <https://sewingmachinelife.com/beginner-info/what-are-sewing-notions/> [accessed 11 March 2021].
[4] Walter Benjamin, 'On some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Mariner Books, 2019), p. 120.
[5] A. Roy, R. Billinge and C. Riopelle, 'Renoir's "Umbrellas" Unfurled Again', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 33 (2012), 73-81 (p. 75) <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/technical-bulletin/roy_billinge_riopelle2012> [accessed 8 March 2021].
[6] Benjamin, p. 119.

'À une passante': A Passing Appreciation

Hugh Roberts

University of Exeter

This appreciation of Baudelaire is shamefully non-decadent. During French language classes, students sometimes encounter the pluperfect subjunctive as an instance of the *conditionnel passé deuxième forme*, which may give rise to understandable consternation on everyone's part. In full awareness that the poet's primary intention was doubtless to exemplify this feature of French modality, as a language tutor this is my cue to share a personal favourite example of this verb form, namely the conclusion of Baudelaire's celebrated sonnet, 'À une passante', 'Ô toi que *j'eusse aimée*'. Even a fleeting encounter with the poem would suggest that its meaning is past conditional as a kind of imagined memory of the future: 'Oh you who *I would have loved*'. With that point duly resolved to everyone's satisfaction, we can return to the excitement of the translation passage we were supposed to be working on.

Turning to Baudelaire to illustrate a grammar point is perhaps no less absurd than a good many educational encounters with him. As an undergraduate, I did not so much appreciate the poet as turn to him to learn how to count syllables, in other words a prosodic accountancy course of which even Baudelaire's mother, who regretted her son never got a proper job, might have seen some employability potential. Very late in the day, I now live in hope that students may be more appreciative than their tutor and realize that there is more to poetry than arithmetic and more to the French language than is dreamed of in Glanville Price's *A Comprehensive French Grammar*. Hence their fleeting encounter with 'À une passante', which I think of as a bird flying into, or perhaps Zoom-bombing, their language class.

Before reciting the poem to the captive student audience, I suggest they should listen to and ideally engage with it instinctively as if to a piece of music, without fretting about the meaning of unfamiliar words or getting that sinking feeling when faced with poetry to analyse in front of

the class. Following my own advice, and taking advantage of being neither a *dix-neuviémiste* nor a modernist, let alone a Baudelaire specialist, I note the opening line cries out to be read out loud, to get the full force of how this particular 'tableau parisien' is also, first of all, a soundscape. Coincidentally, and by way of comparison, I recently encountered something similar in the futurist Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. He discusses how his poem 'To Sergey Esenin' (1926) came to him only after his return to Moscow following a long period trying, without success, to work on it away from the city:

> Myasnitsky was packed with people; after the silence of the provinces, there was the cheerful hubbub of buses, cars and trams […] I walk along, waving my arms and mumbling almost wordlessly […]. So the rhythm is established and takes shape […]. Gradually you ease individual words free of this dull roar.[1]

Urban poets like Baudelaire and Mayakovsky obviously take not only their subject matter and imagery, but also their sounds and rhythms, from the streets. Both give renewed meaning to the clichés of poetry in motion – the rhythm of the widow's gait for the former, of course – and of the poet as an inspired or deranged 'extravagant'.

For a sonnet that seems so obviously concerned with sight, I am struck by how Baudelaire invokes hearing in 'À une passante', followed by touch (the widow's 'main fastueuse') and taste ('Moi, je buvais'), with the visual sense only made explicit in the 'œil' of line seven. The sheer sensuality makes this a sonnet to live and recreate, whether in memory, imagination, or even reality. In other words, Baudelaire has condensed the raw material of endless poems, songs, and novels into fourteen lines. By virtue of invoking a moment of desire and stirring the imagination, the sonnet's encounter suggests eternity precisely because it is of the moment and therefore potentially available at any moment. Hence its appeal as a deviation from standard procedure in a language class and much else besides.

Perhaps the most obvious, if extreme, example of taking up Baudelaire's invitation to turn a desirable passer-by into the stuff of novels, and indeed the mind's *romanesque* or even decadent tendencies, is in another work currently on my bedside table, namely Marcel Proust's *La Prisonnière*

(1923). The novel in some ways tells of what would happen if the poet had taken the *passante* home and kept her there. Famously, the narrator's first encounter with Albertine happens when she passes him at the Balbec seafront as one of a group of girls in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1919). In *La Prisonnière*, however, the narrator observes that 'c'était une chose curieuse comme, à travers les murs de sa prison, le destin, qui transforme les êtres, avait pu passer, la changer dans son essence même, et de la jeune fille de Balbec faire une ennuyeuse et docile captive'. Moreover, looking back at that earlier incarnation, Albertine was a Baudelairean 'Fugitive beauté', an 'être fuyant' who was constantly 'en fuite sur sa bicyclette'.[2] In an earlier passage concerning women he sees passing by, the narrator notes that 'Nous sommes des sculpteurs. Nous voulons obtenir d'une femme une statue entièrement différente de celle qu'elle nous a présentée'.[3] This excerpt neatly performs the reworking it discusses, and that the novel contains, since it turns the 'jambe de statue' of Baudelaire's widow into something to be possessed, controlled, and reshaped. While such sadistic sculpting is implicit in the sonnet, the poet also suggests the opposite, as the *passante*'s look has recreated him. They are as complicit in creativity as they are in desire.

In contrast, for Proust's narrator desire is a trap. Returning home at night and seeing the lit window he realizes its bars are of his own prison; moreover, if Albertine were not there he would have sought pleasure from 'des femmes inconnues, dont j'eusse essayé de pénétrer la vie'.[4] This desire brings us back to the beginning, namely the ending of Baudelaire's sonnet, including the pluperfect subjunctive and its conditional meaning. Desire for a passer-by is inescapably conditional and the wish intimately to know such *inconnues* is self-defeating. Yet as the passer-by inevitably passes on we can still see that although desire may be in the conditional, the creativity it induces is emphatically indicative. As the man himself puts it in answer to the imagined reader's question about the truth of the stories he imagines of those he sees through windows: 'Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?'.[5]

[1] 'How Are Verses Made?' (1926), trans. by George Hyde, in Vladimir Maykovsky, *Volodya: Selected Works*, ed. by Rosy Carrick (London: Enitharmon Press, 2015), pp. 245-46.
[2] Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, III (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 873. With thanks to Adam Watt for these Proustian intertexts.
[3] Proust, p. 648; for another likely intertextual allusion to Baudelaire, at least to this non-expert reader's eye, see the earlier image of the passer-by as 'comme une déesse dans la nue que fait trembler la foudre' (p. 646), which recalls line nine of 'À une passante'.
[4] Proust, p. 834.
[5] Charles Baudelaire, 'Les fenêtres', *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), XXXV.

Baudelaire: Le Cygne

Martin Sorrell

University of Exeter

By ten, it was too hot to go on with our walk. We were out on the scree of Tilos, at that stage of the 1970s still one of the least visited of the Dodecanese. It isn't that far from the Turkish mainland, but the only means of getting there had been in a small fishing-boat, two hours of rocking and rolling from Symi, the nearest island.

The three of us had breakfasted on yoghurt and honey and set off before eight. We intended to keep going until midday, then find a cove and spend the afternoon swimming. A dangerous misjudgement, what with the sun already on fire directly above us.

We found a stone barn and sat down in such shade as it offered. There was the sound of bells approaching, hollow and light, then the goats appeared, then a man with a face like used wrapping-paper. He and S, who has ancient as well as modern Greek, exchanged greetings and fervent wishes for each other's health and prosperity, and the bells moved on.

'That old boy,' S told us, 'has just used a phrase I thought had disappeared with Homer. I've only come across it in *The Iliad*.'

'Well,' said A, 'Troy isn't a million miles up the coast. Or was.'

'Andromaque,' I chipped in, remembering Baudelaire remembering, 'je pense à vous!'

I was quoting, of course, the start of 'Le Cygne'. That same sun above us had blazed down on poor Andromache's husband Hector as he lay dying, slain by Achilles, just as later in the poem it's failing to comfort the tubercular black woman yearning for the coconut-palms of her native Africa as she negotiates the muck of a building-site in Paris.

*

I first read 'Le Cygne' as an undergraduate when my tutor gave me a tricky essay title and no guidance except to suggest I avail myself of the Baudelaire lectures Enid Starkie was giving in this,

more or less, the final year of her career. I went. Of those occasions, I recall nothing except Dr Enid's notorious dress-sense. She put me in mind of a Morris dancer; I half-expected bells to jingle on her toes when she quit the podium. Anyway, I knuckled down and read in sequence every one of *Les Fleurs du mal* in the plain-covered Blackwell edition, concentrating line by line on what the words meant, literally, not how the poetry spoke. No one poem struck me more than another, except perhaps 'Une Charogne', for its sensationalism, and 'À une passante', for the erotic encounter missed. I knew that 'Correspondances' really mattered, but I couldn't get that enthused. I understood that 'Le Voyage' was important, but it was too occupied with death to hit home. (At nineteen, I was still at the immortal stage.) As for 'Le Cygne', I'm not sure it registered.

A decade or so later, I was giving lectures and tutorials of my own. I'd recently embarked on a university career and an early requirement was that I give a course on the nineteenth-century poets to first-year undergraduates. I decided that the best way in would not be via the Romantics. Our French master at school had tried them out on us; we'd wandered along Lamartine's lakeshore, knelt at the graveside of Hugo's drowned daughter. We affected indifference; as the sixth-formers we'd now become, we had to act cool. So I didn't fancy Lamartine's or Hugo's chances with 'freshers' hiding behind *their* show of worldliness.

Instead, I started with dark, tormented Baudelaire. Guided by Marcel Raymond's and especially D. J. Mossop's studies, I charted the *journey* (the descriptive term we now use to elevate any muddling through life) which the 'poet-hero' of *Les Fleurs du mal* undertakes. We soared with him towards *l'Idéal*, we plunged with him into the abyss. I laced my lectures with quotations from the most helpful poems. I ended with the near-despair of 'Le Voyage' – and its unextinguished hope.

'Le Cygne', however, I reserved for close attention in my tutorial hours. I wondered if in the more relaxed atmosphere of my room – which, with its good chairs, the rug on the floor, the desk lamp, was more a study than an office – my students might begin to yield to poetry. My memory is that by and large they did. I think it was theme of exile in 'Le Cygne' that particularly

got to them: widowed Andromache forced to re-marry and live far from Troy; Ovid banished to a miserable hole on the Black Sea; the African woman grown thin and ill in Paris; the swan of the poem's title, parched with thirst, padding open-beaked by a dried-up ditch; shipwrecked sailors forgotten on some island; prisoners languishing in cells; those on the losing side in war; and *bien d'autres encore*. The list could have included, I thought, my students sitting there, suddenly homesick and aching to return to the families they'd left for the first time in their lives. I too, in my first undergraduate year, had had a case of 'fourth-week blues'.

*

Back on Tilos that broiling morning, my mention of Baudelaire's Andromaque started a game of allusions. S conjured up Missolonghi, over there on the far side of the Aegean, where Byron lay dying. A, who later that day would be shivering with sunstroke, invoked Valéry's date-palm in the stillness of the Mediterranean heat, using every atom of silence to ripen its fruit. That palm-tree took me further into 'Le Cygne', to the stranded swan and the exiled African woman down where the Carrousel had been before Haussmann rebuilt Paris, and I declaimed what I recalled of the quatrain which contains that sublime third line for which I've yet to find a right translation, because I don't think there is one:

> Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phthisique,
> Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l'oeil hagard,
> Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique
> Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard.

So you want to write on *Les Fleurs du mal*…
Some notes on (~~teaching~~ reading) Baudelaire in the era of Covid

Robert St. Clair

Dartmouth College

I.

It never fails, making each time we arrive at that point in a term where Baudelaire appears on the syllabus a slightly uncanny pedagogical experience, one not entirely unlike that of reading the poems themselves anew. Each time one notices the same, different thing, or the same thing, differently: if there is a poet that the average undergraduate student in a French literature course *appreciates*, even if for reasons for which they, too, like me, often fumble to find the right frame or articulation or understanding, it is Baudelaire. Whatever the explanation may be, next to *Les Fleurs du mal*, *Les Contemplations* generally doesn't run much chance of ending up among the stack of end-of-term papers (perhaps thereby proving one of Benjamin's opening points from the *Motifs* essay: whatever 'the lyric' was – its epideictic function or role, perhaps – has undergone an irrevocable cultural change). 'Why do you want to work on Baudelaire?', I find myself asking, perhaps somewhat convinced that the earnestness of the question is at least partly due to the fact that, each time, I both am and am not really asking it of them but of myself.

II.

Perhaps it was some Art History course two terms or two years ago in which that name appeared in the course of a unit on Haussmannization and the painting of the city. The heroism of modern life is all around us, if only we had eyes to see and grasp it, having the aphoristic feel of truth to it which makes confronting the problem of modernity in Baudelaire both easier ('see, there it is, it's always *life now* that Baudelaire is on about') and more elusive. (How, though, is one to make sense of the echoes linking that closing section of the *Salon de 1846* to both the radical, well-nigh

provocative espousal of revolutionary history and politics in the *Salon*'s companion piece of the same year, *Le Musée Classique*, as well as to the much later *Peintre de la vie moderne*, which often finds itself reduced to a few apothegmatic fragments about the eternal and the ephemeral from chapter four, thereby entirely bypassing the problem of violence which is at the geographical heart of that essay?) Perhaps what they're trying to say, then, is that that name is the site of a kind of metonymic drift, one giving name to a desire that both does and doesn't have much to do with poetry, modern or otherwise: Baudelaire's irreducible, quasi-paronymic association with the glitzy, sexy, strange, sad, dangerous, haunting capital of modernity as a way of giving a form or figure to their own desire to escape wherever they find themselves in the Spring of 2021, a name allowing them to appreciate, in the sense of appraise or take stock of (*appretiare*), the scope of a problem. (And from this virtual side of the pedagogical limbo that has been the past year of *enseignement en distanciel*, can one truly tut-tut them for being more hasty than normal heuristic caution typically allows in identifying with – or reading as univocal – the lyric subject of at least certain poems from *Les Fleurs du mal*? The ones in which, especially, the tone comes close to desperation: what wouldn't one do to escape the grinding melancholic void of a present with, as the punks used to say, *no future*; sheer deadlock governed by monstrous despots and world-pulverizing cruelty? Who wouldn't want to get 'anywhere' else? Some place where things are *otherwise*, where dreams might still be 'akin' to action.)

III.

Baudelaire's name, then, at least for some, works as another name. A name for the way in which we recognize that this story – the one about 'modernity' and, as Fredric Jameson might put it, 'what hurts', *ce qui fait mal* – is an ongoing one. One that concerns us still. A name, too, for desire: simultaneously acknowledging and, more fundamentally, seeking to annul the catastrophes of (at least) the past year as well as those which are surely yet to come. A name for a sorrow, perhaps, that it is harder to give name to because its experience is undialectic. Lost experiences, in the rather

more *Erfahrung* acceptation of the term (say, travelling to Paris in your third year at the University); lost desires, communities, relationships and futurities; lost time; lost lives. In the past term, for the first time in my years teaching the poem, students needed no prompting at all when it came to discerning the detail – a *punctum* in the Barthesian sense – that sets off that great, first love poem, that odd *innamoramento* of modernity, 'À une passante'. What catches the poet's eye is death (*en grand deuil*), as unknowable as it is certain, as undecidable as it is meaningful. Elissa Marder's reading of this poem from *Flat Death* is a (characteristically) masterful, brilliant one, echoing and engaging with Ross Chambers' similarly *incontournable*, 'The Storm in the Eye of the Poem': the problem we encounter in this sonnet saturated with nearly every verbal signature available to the French language is one having to do with the temporality of human finitude in an era of the 'platitude of death' (Barthes).[1] What do we do with death when, to gloss Marder, we are living through/in the era of the death of God, in 'modernity'? What do we do with death when to the question, *where do we go when we disappear?*, there is at once the sense of a potential answer lurking at the level of the sonnet's intricate semiotic structure (if you have a free moment, try to identify the sheer number of chiasma you encounter in this sonnet: they are there at the level of prosody, rhythm, grammar, rhymes, and the phonemic) and, at the level of language *qua* syntagmatic structure, nothing but the flat affirmation of absences and questions about the great beyond that do not read as rhetorical ones (*Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?*). In the era of *Covid*, it is tempting – whatever the risk of exposing oneself to *post hoc* fallacies – to say that such students are unusually attentive to the problem swirling just under the surface of what the critic Jean Starobinski once mapped out as Baudelaire's *rimes en* -**vide**.[2]

IV.

Perhaps that title – as the poet himself acknowledged, it was designed less to catch the eye than to blow up in your face (*J'aime les titres* […] *pétards*) – is simply doing what it was meant to do from the moment in 1855 when, having published nearly a fifth of the volume in the *Revue des deux*

mondes, Baudelaire finally settled on *Les Fleurs du mal* and abandoned the others he had been toying with for nearly a decade (*Les Lesbiennes* and, after 1848, *Les Limbes*, a title which rightly struck some readers as smacking more of dangerous utopianism than of Catholic dogma). As the saying goes, the Devil has the best tunes. But perhaps, in the same way they can grasp that whatever modernity names involves us, they (we) are all slightly anxious that the 'evil' announced by the title is less metaphysical than it sounds, which is to say more difficult to simply put out of mind once one puts the volume down. *Le Mal* in question may, as indeed the volume's opening poison-pill of a poem, addressed *au[x] lecteur[s]*, pointedly suggests, very much involve *us* and *our* world, neither of which really stand prior to or outside 'Au Lecteur' as a kind of alterity with respect to the world of the poems contained within *Les Fleurs du mal*, but which constitute their inner structure and disavowed problematic. Under the metaphysical mask of 'Evil' one is always encountering things much more *mundane* in the strictest sense of the term (whence the importance of the rhyme linking the world to awfulness and abjection in 'Au Lecteur', 'monde/immonde'): history as a catalogue of hateful acts of violence; in the menagerie of vice at the outset of the poem we find a group portrait staring back out at us. The best bards are indeed in Hell, which is not, as Benjamin (again!) reminds us, something that awaits us in the afterlife but rather the ongoing state of emergency within everyday life right now, down here. And if the past year has taught us much of anything, it is that that place has no bottom to it.

V.

Of course, there is no singular account for what Baudelaire is allowing us to put a name or figure on. Some small part of the enigma doubtless has to do with the weirdly improbable, almost hyperbolic literary posterity when compared to the life and comparatively meagre output of a poet who, measured by the standards of nineteenth-century bourgeois propriety and seriousness (cf., *Monsieur Prudhomme*), looks like a bit of a 'loser'.[3] Which is to say, something that that world, the world of endlessly linear, triumphant progress and prosperity in the course of human history,

brought about by that handmaid of civilization, order and the stock-market, *la bourgeoisie* – found deeply suspicious, if not intolerable. And for more than a few, the ones who, in my experience, not only read but *lisent bien* Baudelaire, often but not exclusively humanities majors, at least some part of the inexplicable appreciation for Baudelaire resides therein: his work and his life stand out as a kind of example of the incalculable contingencies of history, of the invaluable, incalculable merit of that which looks broken, or like it serves no useful, instrumental point or function such as leading to an internship with a bank in New York or something during the summer holidays. We want to read Baudelaire's poems because the world we live in is still one in which we are told this is the only one possible, that it is absolute and that to imagine or desire it otherwise is to court catastrophe. But Baudelaire's poems, down to their last syllable, are a species of odes to remaining unreconciled to that world no matter how many failures or setbacks one encounters in it; odes to what the poet once called, in an aching line from the *Salon de 1846*, our collective *pauvre ligne brisée*.

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[1] Elissa Marder, *Flat Death: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert*) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 68-88; Ross Chambers, 'The Storm in the Eye of the Poem: Baudelaire's "À une passante"', in *Textual Analysis: Some Readers Reading*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1986), pp. 156-66.

[2] Starobinksi's landmark reading (of the sonnet 'Horreur sympathique') first appeared in 1975, but was included in the late critic's collected writings on melancholia, *L'Encre de la mélancolie* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), pp. 465-71.

[3] In this respect, our students are not so far from at least part of Valéry's 1924 appreciation of Baudelaire as *the only* canonical figure of a lyric *Weltliteratur*. Paul Valéry, *Situation de Baudelaire* (Paris: Marcelle Lesage).

REVISITING BAUDELAIRE

La Tour Montparnasse, 2002, © Peter Coles

Le cygne

Charles Baudelaire

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 Simoïs 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 coeur 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

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,
Et disait, le coeur 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 tombée,
Vil bétail, sous la main du superbe Pyrrhus,
Auprès 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'oeil 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 tètent 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 une île,
Aux captifs, aux vaincus! … à bien d'autres encor!

Baudelaire and Transparency

Erik Anspach

L'École nationale supérieure de création industrielle

In an unpublished text on *La Fanfarlo* in 2011, I analysed the decadence of the paratheatrical spaces central to the novel, namely the boudoirs. Published in 1847, the novel followed others of the July Monarchy which broke with traditional representations of the backstage, thereafter centralizing society's opaque mechanics – including class mobility – within hidden and 'overexploited', theatrical environments.[1] In *La Fanfarlo*, a writer operates a calculated press campaign which eventually permits him access to the title character. The reversal of both protagonists' opinions occurs in paratheatrical spaces: while La Fanfarlo breaks into tears immediately upon sight of her worst critic in a dressing room, an enthralled Cramer spends several evenings watching her performance 'like a Turk on opium'[2] in his theatre box.

Albeit offstage, the spectacle of their mutual attraction requires both a *mise en scène* and an audience – La Fanfarlo's bedroom is littered with theatre props. Illuminated by contrived, theatrical lighting, the boudoir is described as a narrow, 'soft', and 'perfumed' aperture. It is a humid 'greenhouse' that 'invites one to waste and perish' (pp. 65-66) – a faintly guarded allusion to the physiognomy of the actress – whose decor features portraits with dark backgrounds, as if the faces of former lovers were spectators emerging from the walls.

The boudoir represents a liminal space where two real people intermingle with the contrived constructions of the stage. Baudelaire's characters present correlated ambiguities – Cramer's family history is complex and his banter indecipherable. The difficulty in understanding him is grasping 'where the acting begins' (p. 61).[3] The protagonists' gender differences also escape binary comprehension. While Cramer uses a female pen name and is described as 'hermaphroditic' (p. 39), La Fanfarlo's body, notably her legs and neck, are firmer than a woman's, large and strong, 'like a gorilla' (p. 61).

Certain analyses have asserted that Baudelaire employed androgyny to enhance the 'gender-fluid' characters; their indiscernibility opened the door to 'vast new possibilities for poetic sensation [and] increased affective and cognitive experience.'[4] Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Baudelaire's characters likens them to the author's own construction of a persona, ultimately aiming to obstruct, 'hide', and thereby 'preserve' his internal ego.[5] Jean-Paul Sartre adds that Baudelaire 'disguised' everything – 'performing rather than experiencing', he manifested a distaste for anything 'natural'.[6] All three observations depict an accentuated artistic agency through designed yet quotidian performance similar to Cramer's intertwining of theatre and intimacy, calling for make-up – a facial disguise – at the height of the couple's physical experience.

The fusion between veracity and fantasy in the boudoir concludes with another marriage, that of the two artists. The 'horror' of the union unravels rapidly as perhaps a revenge for Baudelaire's own experience with actresses, whose marriages he deemed offensive.[7] The relationship was 'terrible, pitiful, shameful […] unhealthy' (p. 69). The denouement epitomizes nineteenth-century artistic denunciations of the bourgeois model: they have twins, La Fanfarlo parades as a respectable, reformed thespian, as Cramer turns to journalism and politics. Similarly, Sartre posits that Baudelaire's career crests with the novella's publication, specifically the cry for *rouge*, before slumping into a mediocre and 'canonized' role as a reticent representative of *L'art pour l'art* movement.[8]

In 2011, my conclusion focused on how the performance moves from stage to the dressing-room and then to the boudoir, burrowing deeper into backstage space as a symbolic and literal climax only achieved through privileged access to paratheatrical secrets, a specific voyeurism especially enticing to contemporary readers. Ten years later, in 2021, when looking back at the original text, an additional reading surfaces which enhances scholarship on the 'textual staging of society'.[9] The investigation into that which lies behind the curtains presents but another example of publications claiming an accurate or scientific observation of society's veiled transactions, and such texts incorporated multiple disciplines during the July Monarchy, including literature.[10]

Baudelaire's novella shares a trait with many of these exposés, namely the impact on the popular imaginary. In illuminating the underbelly of the theatre, *La Fanfarlo* joins a host of other fictions of 'the wings' depicting and decrypting paratheatrical spaces. The novella therefore not only uncovers the *coulisses* of La Fanfarlo, it also reinforces a conception of the backstage as holding dissimulated operations, invisible power, and concealed societal truths: *paratheatrum mundi*.[11]

Although establishing a household, Cramer's fate is nonetheless depicted as catastrophic. The theme reappears in a plethora of backstage novels: *Nana*, *Marthe, La Faustin, La Fauve,* or *Sarrasine*, for example, not to mention *La Duchesse bleue*, or France's *Histoire comique*. The shared storyline accentuates the horrific nature of what actually occurs behind the curtains. Beyond elucidating the mysteries of society then, the novels seek to warn against the dangers and monsters of a new era lurking in the wings.

Baudelaire's monster is of course a social climber who has ascended from the theatre to the bourgeoisie. However, the elite artist Baudelaire champions actually relied upon such demonization of the bourgeoisie so as to render their superiority comprehensible.[12] Primarily criticized was the bourgeois' implication in commercial or financial matters; as contemporary artist Couture bemoaned, 'the bourgeois attributes a mercantile value to everything'.[13] The bourgeoisie subsequently purchases all of the qualities they do not truly possess, living in 'disguises' and 'lies', or in other terms, as actors.[14] Furthermore, a crafted artistic persona requires labour. Sartre underlines Baudelaire's attempts to disguise this 'menial' aspect of his art.[15] Another critic speculates that if Baudelaire wrote so few novellas like *La Fanfarlo*, it was because prose came to be associated too closely with market concerns such as journalism or the *feuilleton*, and because more pragmatic and descriptive language risked stumbling into banality.[16]

Yet looking more closely at the opposition to the bourgeoisie germane to *La Fanfarlo*, ideological questions come to the fore, namely a divergence in political opinions, and issues of class more broadly. In the case of the bourgeoisie, they may be criticized for having sprung from the people, whom they then fail to recognize and even come to fear. Couture's text concludes, 'if

I compare the bourgeoisie to the people from a moral perspective, I attest to the true inferiority of the former'.[17] The analysis of Couture's text cites Jules Michelet as having been a profound inspiration to the artist, notably *Le Peuple*.[18] Michelet asserts the true roots of French civilization as the Barbarians in his study.[19] Other authors of the July Monarchy utilized the concept, notably Eugène Sue, who depicted the enslaved Gauls as the true heirs to a pure French bloodline.[20] While Couture's text on the bourgeoisie attacks their lack of recognition and admiration for the people from which they sprouted, he anchored those opinions in the work of a historian asserting legitimacy in regard to national heritage, both hallmarks of a populist culture that we mistakenly take for granted as a tactical, twentieth-century political mainstay.[21]

If Baudelaire's novella on the perils of bourgeoisification provides a glimpse of such populist arguments, it is through the presence of amnesia. The one character truly of the people, La Fanfarlo, does not acknowledge, nor reminisce about, her former kin. Rather, she awaits her husband's death to further her social climbing. Contrastingly, Cramer represents the artistic elite but fails to distinctly recall the previous events culminating in his demise. Both characters firmly stabilize their condition as bourgeois, omitting previous class affiliations, and stumbling into monetary and political concerns. Even the narrator forgets the titles of Cramer's noteworthy books despite their possessing 'verve, energy, and curiosities' (p. 70), further divorcing the protagonist from any claim to artistry. As in Couture's populist critique then, the protagonists are refused access to both the morally superior popular classes and an artistic elite, thereby offending the former and justifying the supremacy of the latter, inviting new, political readings of Baudelaire's prose.

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[1] Jean-Claude Yon, 'La critique au crayon: L'exemple de *La Vie Parisienne*,' in *Le miel et le fiel,* ed. by Mariane Bury and Hélène Laplace-Claverie (Paris: PUPS, 2008), pp. 73-74. All translations are my own.
[2] Charles Baudelaire, *La Fanfarlo* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), pp. 59-63. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.
[3] Commentary on the hermaphroditic nature of the female dancer or circus-artist in the nineteenth century was apparently commonplace. See Jennifer Forrest, 'Aerial Mistresses and Spectating Messieurs: The Paradox of the

Lady Acrobat in the French Fin de Siècle', in *Peripheries of Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, ed. by Timothy Raser (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2002), pp. 143-44.
[4] Nathaniel Wing, 'Androgyny, Hysteria, and the Poet in Baudelaire's Novella *La Fanfarlo*', *Romance Quarterly*, 45.3 (1998), 143-53 (p. 150).
[5] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Payot, 2002), pp. 142, 250.
[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 24, 103.
[7] See, for example, Charles Baudelaire, *Mystères galans des théâtres de Paris* (Paris: Cazel, 1844), p. 8; and Jean-Baptiste Baronien, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 77.
[8] Debarati Sanyal, *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 3; Sartre, pp. 152, 155-57.
[9] Judith Lyon-Caen, 'Le romancier, lecteur du social dans la France de la Monarchie de Juillet', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 24 (2005), 15-32 (pp. 18, 20-21).
[10] Judith Lyon-Caen, 'Saisir, décrire, déchiffrer: les mises en texte du social sous la Monarchie de Juillet', *Revue historique*, 2.630 (2004) 303-31 (pp. 328, 330).
[11] For more information on this concept, see Erik Anspach, 'Scarron et les coulisses du château en scène', in *Châteaux et spectacles*, ed. by Anne-Marie Cocula and Michel Combet (Pessac: Ausonius, 2018), pp. 47-48.
[12] Pierre Vaisse, 'Thomas Couture, ou le bourgeois malgré lui', *Romantisme*, 17-18 (1997), 103-21 (p. 105).
[13] Vaisse, p. 107.
[14] Vaisse, p. 115.
[15] Sartre, pp. 134-35.
[16] Nathalie Buchet Rogers, 'La Fanfarlo: La prostituée rend au poète la monnaie de sa pièce', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 32.3-4 (2004), 244-48.
[17] Vaisse, pp. 107-08.
[18] Vaisse, p. 111.
[19] Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), pp. 8-11.
[20] Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères du peuple* (Paris: Laffont, 2003), pp. xxiv-xxvi.
[21] Pierre Birnbaum, *Genèse du populisme: le peuple et les gros* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010), pp. 50-51.

A Baudelairean Girl

Anne Jamison

University of Utah

It started with a song about Wilhelm Reich and UFOs, Patti Smith on the tape deck of my dad's beat-up Pontiac.

I have an assignment for you, Dad said. I need you to help me understand this really weird song. Is she singing about being taken up into a big black ship? Yes, I said. Can you get the rest of the lyrics? I could, almost. I listened obsessively. I read what I could find. I looked up every poet Patti Smith had ever referenced and read until my brain was exploding from it. I was eleven.

In middle school French, we learned only that the young girls wearing hats were going to the swimming pool or perhaps, at the very most, to the beach. At no time did it occur to me to connect these girls and the language that failed them with the poems I read late at night. I read the poems in English, it never occurred to me to do otherwise.

In high school French, some poems about owls and cats showed up in our textbook but seemed unrelated to the Baudelaire in my head. My French teacher married the football coach and taught us to match verbs to their appropriate auxiliaries by means of the name Vandertramp. I wrote poems in composition books and stayed up all night reading. I made friends with the night watchman and bummed cigarettes from him and snuck into the school chapel to blow smoke on the crucifix. This felt much closer.

I found a little Laurel library paperback of *French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present* tucked away on one of my parents' bookshelves. The poems were in French with prose translations running along the bottom of the pages. The pages were already yellowing when I found it, the cover half torn off. It's still here on the shelves by my bed, encased in pink plastic to keep the crumbling pages in one place, well-travelled, unreadable, talismanic.

I moved to New York City with the express purpose of becoming Patti Smith. This didn't happen. I did work in a bookstore. I went to college. I studied poetry and languages and philosophy. I read Benjamin on Baudelaire. Walking city streets alone became my favourite pastime. I moved to Prague, then London. I read a generation of Czech poets who turned against nationalism and German by turning to Baudelaire. It worked for them. I moved back to Prague. I no longer needed translation but carried my battered Laurel book with me everywhere.

At no point did I ever identify with any of the women in Baudelaire's poems.

I moved to New Jersey, which has a different ring to it. In seminars we read Paul de Man on Baudelaire and on weekends my father-in-law ranted about Paul de Man and politics and talked about Baudelaire and classics and gave me books. I had now read every word Baudelaire had ever written.

Sometimes I summarize my graduate school career as the process of failing to understand Spleen II in increasingly complex ways. This is the most accurate summary.

I spent a summer in Paris looking at all the paintings Baudelaire had ever mentioned and researching his journalism in the National Library. I spent days arguing that I needed to look at journalism and fashion magazines and poetry at the same time. I would need to bring materials together in rooms and on seats that had been marked for different and mutually exclusive purposes. I would need to make reservations precluded by the operating system. In the end, I would require a manual override and an escort to bring journalism to the poetry. It was a violation that made the workers there uncomfortable. It also performed the main argument of my thesis, which I explained to my escort in a way that amused him.

I talked my way into every art museum by explaining that since Comparative Literature included art history, I was essentially an art history student and should be admitted for free. French was not a very living language to me, and so I sounded like a cross between the nineteenth century and Belgium, a perplexing and unappealing mixture. And yet, I paid very little for my museum visits.

I went to Baudelaire's grave and imagined how he would have despised the poems and watercolour paintings piled over his long-decayed corpse and been deeply gratified by them at the same time. A drunk woman urinated on the sidewalk as I passed and I thought Baudelaire might have despised and been gratified by that, too. And me, of course. This seemed clear.

At some point, I had noticed that the women in the poems were not as I would imagine myself, and that even if I tried, I could not see myself in them. I had noticed that Baudelaire loved and hated them in interesting, compelling ways that I felt more connected to, which distressed me. I found that how Baudelaire loved and hated women was equally repellent and fascinating to me and responsible for many excellent poems as well as some real duds. I found I did not wish to explain it away. I found I had developed a terrible personal fondness for him over the course of twenty years that I knew would not have survived five minutes in his actual company.

Not for the first or last time, I was grateful to work only on the dead.

Once, I was in labour for over twenty-four hours, unmedicated and hallucinating. When my daughter finally made her way to join us, she picked up her head and looked around, which is impossible. She looked old, which is common. I thought, *j'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.* This remains my favourite failure to understand 'Spleen II'. And if I imagine Baudelaire would feel vaguely ill at the prospect, I only like it better.

I recently learned that Patti Smith meant to dress like Baudelaire on the cover of *Horses*, the album that had been my adolescent obsession and set much of my trajectory for the next quarter century. I like to think she would be pleased with this legacy, and that Baudelaire would despise and be gratified by us both.

Baudelaire's Celestial Vision of Jeanne Duval

Eleanor Keane

Goldsmiths, University of London

My first experience of Charles Baudelaire's work resulted from reading Angela Carter's short story, 'Black Venus' (1985), which is interspersed with allusions to his poetry, including an excerpt from '*Sed non satiata*'.[1] The title refers to the so-called 'Black Venus' cycle of poems inspired by Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's Haitian partner. In 'Black Venus', Carter reconfigures Duval and Baudelaire's relationship from Duval's perspective, and presents us with a woman who is in turn vivacious, jaded, provocative, shrewd, and who lights cigarettes with Baudelaire's discarded sonnets. Carter's daring depiction inspired me to seek out the source-material – Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), translated by James McGowan for Oxford University Press (1998). On reading 'Exotic Perfume', 'A Phantom', and 'The Cat', I became fascinated by Baudelaire's extraordinary linguistic dexterity, and how tantalizing glimpses of Duval were scattered like jewels throughout each poem. Even two hundred years after Baudelaire's birth, his desire for Duval lingers on to trouble and entice the reader. As the title '*Sed non satiata*' suggests, satisfaction remains ever-thwarted, engulfing the subject of the poet's desire and the poetic self: 'Like a cook with ghoulish appetite |I boil and devour my own heart', the speaker mourns in 'A Phantom', while his incorporeal lover glows with incandescence, a 'splendid ghost'.[2]

Baudelaire's 'Black Venus' cycle of poems set out to both negotiate and perpetuate Duval's ghostly presence. For Baudelaire, language becomes as supple as the sinuous, undulating movements of the woman described in poems such as 'The Dancing Serpent'. Language continually turns back in on itself to refigure and reassess an elusive, shimmering, and phantasmic woman who dances just out of the poet's reach. Within the 'Black Venus' cycle, the subject's body is repeatedly compared to the awe- and fear-inducing sublimity of natural wonders. In 'The way her silky garments…' the speaker's body equals 'desert sands and skies' and 'the ocean's swells |

Unfolding with insensibility.'[3] This imagery abstracts the beloved's body which becomes a primordial force. In '*Sed non satiata*', the poem fractures into a *cri de coeur* which enunciates an impossible tension between defiance and control, domination and freedom:

> […] I can not
> To break your nerve and bring you to your knees,
> In your bed's hell become Persephone!'[4]

In suggesting that the muse herself has become gender-neutral – both a 'wizard of the dusk' and an 'ebony sorceress' capable of moulding him into an impotent Persephone – Baudelaire presents a striking and unforgettable evolution of the poet/muse dynamic.[5] By straddling both these identities, the speaker's idol becomes a version of Pygmalion, capable of sculpting an identity that extends beyond the poet's imagination to live on in the imagination of later writers such as Carter.

Poetic fragmentation becomes a means of escape. We see this in the final stanza of 'The Dancing Serpent'. After several attempts to catalogue and compare the addressee's dancing movements to an increasingly surreal series of creatures and objects – the titular snake, an elephant, a ship, a glacier – the speaker self-consciously surrenders to the indecipherability that the addressee brings him:

> I know I drink a gypsy wine
> Bitter, subduing, tart
> A liquid sky that strews and spangles
> Stars across my heart![6]

The speaker allows the addressee to elevate him – and the reader – into the 'liquid sky', a celestial space of euphoric desire, freedom, and transcendence which renders all previous attempts at definition redundant. In a pseudo-divine transmutation, the addressee escapes all bodily confines and is transformed into innumerable glorious constellations that embed themselves in the poet's exposed, and therefore vulnerable, heart. In lifting the reader into the space of the imagination, he enables us to witness his 'singular goddess' shine beyond words.

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[1] Angela Carter, 'Black Venus', in *Burning your Boats: Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 231-44.

[2] Charles Baudelaire, 'A Phantom', in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 76-81 (p. 77).
[3] Baudelaire, 'The way her silky garments…', in *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 54-57 (p. 57).
[4] Baudelaire, '*Sed non satiata*', in *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 54-55 (p. 55).
[5] Baudelaire, '*Sed non satiata*', p. 55.
[6] Baudelaire, 'The Dancing Serpent', in *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 56-59 (p. 59).

'Les Plaintes d'un Icare': An Appreciation

Niall McDevitt

Of the many indisputably great poems Charles Baudelaire gifted to French and world poetry, there is one I carry in my memory at all times, learnt in the original language. It belongs to the small group of additional poems that were published in the first posthumous edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* of 1868. This group includes such wonderful mature lyrics as 'L'Examen de minuit', 'Recueillement', and 'Le Gouffre'. But the one I love is distinguished by its literary – if not literal – wings: 'Les Plaintes d'un Icare'.

There are two reasons why I admire this poem so much. Firstly, I see it as a key to Baudelaire's tragedy, arguably the closest there is to a true epitaph. Secondly, I find the rhythm and music spellbinding, even electrifying. Baudelaire rebukes his admirer T. S. Eliot in advance. He is not hollow; he is not stuffed. He demonstrates that a poem of suffering is one that correctly predicts the poet's downfall, not one that fails to predict the poet's salvation.

'Les Plaintes d'un Icare' is supposed to have been written in 1862. Interestingly, one of his French biographers, Claude Pichois, claims 'by 1863, Baudelaire was no longer at his peak'.[1] If this is correct, then 'Icare' is peak Baudelaire. Then again, Pichois also claims that Baudelaire in 1861 'had reached the limits of verse poetry'.[2] Whether or not 'Icare' makes the Pichois cut, it's what's happening to Baudelaire the man, and what he says about himself, that's most important here. In a famous passage from *Mon coeur mis à nu* he reflects:

> Mentally as well as physically, I have always been conscious of the abyss… Now I have vertigo all the time and today, January 23, 1862, I suffered a strange warning. I felt pass over me the wind of imbecility's wing.[3]

While we in today's world are discussing a 'third wave' of Covid-19, Baudelaire was at this time beginning to experience a third wave of syphilis, or thought he was:

> when I was very young I contracted a venereal disease, which I thought later was completely cured. It broke out again in Dijon after 1848, and it was once more checked!

> Now it has returned in a new form – discolouration of the skin and weariness in all the joints. You can believe me for I know what I'm talking about![4]

Baudelaire may have had syphilis, or gonorrhoea, or both, or neither. He may have been suffering from the same hereditary symptoms that killed his father, half-brother, and mother in various ways. However, as the above passage from an 1861 letter to his mother shows, he is certain that his condition is venereal. At this moment of crisis, where physical disease is intensifying and there is a preliminary onset of mental illness ('imbecility's wing'), a poem is born.

The tone of the opening stanza is vintage Baudelaire. He shocks the reader to attention. Some of those readers may have been, like him, 'amants' of sex-workers, but what self-respecting 'hypocrite lecteur' would say so? It is one of the strangest metaphysical conceits to compare brothel-goers in general to Icarus in particular. While the former enjoy professional embraces, the latter suffers RSI from caressing cloud formations. The poetic logic that links the eerie juxtaposition conceals a scientific logic of cause and effect. Baudelaire is rehashing the vignette from the letter to his mother, contrasting himself as a young man-about-town to the ailing middle-aged man he is now.

The fleeting vista of Paris bordellos fades. Realism departs. We join the narrator in a cosmic realm of clouds, stars, sky, space. He is not even Icarus, but is merely – as the title admits – 'an Icarus'. The rest of the poem brilliantly co-opts the original Greek mythology for the decadent era. As the ambition to fly is thwarted, suffering ensues. His eyes are burnt-out, consumed, seeing only solar memories. The broken arms of the first stanza become the breaking wings of the third stanza, reminding us of the aforementioned 'weariness in all the joints'. Though he bemoans his fate, he accepts it with defiant irony. He is still capable of praising what is noble, the 'nonpareil', the 'sublime', and this capability is one of Baudelaire's essential personality traits. The poem ends with the poet crashing into the abyss he has written about in so many other poems.

The form of the poem embodies what Blake calls 'the Spiritual Fourfold';[5] (one thing Blake and Baudelaire have in common is Swedenborg). The poem is in four quatrains. Its mostly tetrameter lines have four beats (a few lines can be recited as trimeters, but the syllable count would still measure tetrameter). The title has four words. It is masterfully excecuted. It is not just that every word counts, but every beat, every sound. When the 'se casse' chimes in at the end of the third quatrain, you hear the cracking of the pinions. Baudelaire self-mythologizes in a cabaret chanson.

One wonders if a certain Dublin self-mythologizer, James Joyce – aka Stephen Dedalus – liked this poem. Another Irishman, W. B. Yeats, might well have liked it. (Yeats said: 'Sex and death are the only things that can interest a serious mind.') I regard this poem as so well-wrought as to be impossible to translate into English well. Roy Campbell, Lewis Piaget Shanks, and Jacques LeClercq offer valiant but 'vain' attempts. A poem is translated not only into a different sound, but into a different combination of sounds. 'Icare' pales *en anglais*. There is, however, a poem by Yeats that does the job. His magnificent 'An Irish Airman Forsees His Death' amazingly combines a very similar theme and form. The narrator is a WW1 pilot who, realizing his plane is about to go down, meditates upon his fate in noble cadences. Its four quatrains and thumping tetrameters rhyme ABAB rather than ABBA – but the pathos is comparable. I'd have suspected a connection between the poems if it wasn't for the fact that Yeats's French was non-existent. Yeats was a friend to the decadents, but not a decadent per se. 'Airman' is an Irish Icarus, but it lacks the malaise of 'Icare'.

The sonnet 'Le Gouffre' must be seen as a companion piece to 'Les Plaintes d'un Icare'. Its phrase 'je sens passer le vent' seems to be versifying the self-diagnosis from *Mon coeur mis à nu*. The 'wing' is saved for Icarus in the following poem in the sequence. Baudelaire uses it to tell us the truth about himself.

[1] Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire*, trans. by Graham Robb (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), p. 285.
[2] Ibid., p. 287.
[3] Ibid., p. 289.
[4] Enid Starkie, *Baudelaire* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 482.
[5] William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, ed. by Morton Paley (London: Tate, 1991), pl. 53, l. 18.

Baudelaire's Swan

Jamie McKendrick

To read T. S. Eliot's 1930 essay 'Baudelaire', that introduces a translation of *Intimate Journals*, is to be thrown back into a very different literary era, especially now when the whole idea of introductions seems to have fallen out of favour with major publishers. (Some notion perhaps that they interfere with the pure and unmediated response of readers?) Beyond that, what's striking is the assured, authoritative tone and the poet's depth of knowledge of a foreign language and culture. It was written the year Eliot published 'Ash Wednesday', and is the work of a poet in full and confident maturity, after a long and searching familiarity with an œuvre that had signally influenced his own development.

Eliot's conversion to an Anglicanism with a distinctly Catholic tinge occurred three years earlier, and much of the essay is concerned to establish the great French forebear as a kind of Christian poet whose wilful deviations from orthodoxy and doctrine – 'he has the excesses of a Tertullian' – only serve to express his centrality to that tradition; his *ennui* shades into '*acedia*, arising from an unsuccessful struggle towards the spiritual life'. In brief, he has a Christian soul in a thwarted earlier stage of development, but his rebellion against God reveals his adherence to the faith – and, put crudely, you can't sincerely blaspheme against something you don't believe in. It's a line of argument, already nascent in Baudelaire's trial for obscenity and well-developed in France by 1917 when Alfred Poizat wrote in *Le Correspondant*: 'There was not a poet of the C19th who had a mind as deeply Catholic as that of Baudelaire, nor one who was more of a believer than him' (my translation). Eliot's criticisms of Baudelaire are largely respectful: 'His apparatus, by which I do not mean his command of words and rhythms, but his stock of imagery (and every poet's stock of imagery is circumscribed somewhere), is not wholly perdurable or adequate.' This striking thought – that every poet has a finite range of imagery – is slipped in deftly to suggest, by way of a courteous negative, that this is a predicament even Baudelaire shares with other lesser poets. (It's reminiscent

of Baudelaire's own remark that every poet must carry around in his head a dictionary of rhymes.) The casual, jarring word 'stock' with all of its commercial and utilitarian connotations serves to demystify the poet's craft.

Eliot goes on to sharpen the criticism in the next sentence by instancing those elements in Baudelaire's work that the passage of time has not been kind to: 'His prostitutes, mulattoes, Jewesses, serpents, cats, corpses form a machinery that has not worn well'. By demoting, at least in the first three examples, the human to the level of imagistic machinery, I believe Eliot is seriously undervaluing the importance to the poet of all three, though the reader might concede that not all the *poète maudit* paraphernalia has weathered well. Baudelaire may be vulnerable to a critique that would see these images as mere projections of aspects of his own soul, and yet they figure prominently and purposefully in his work. Eliot's urbane view that this imagery has become a kind of 'outmoded detritus' reveals its own limitations. The centrality of the 'négresse' in 'Le Cygne' would be a good place to start in examining Eliot's claim and approaching the French poet's actual use of such images. It might also show something evidently 'perdurable' about his imagery as well as the persisting relevance of his poems.

'Le Cygne' is a vast panorama, geographic and historic, as well as an interior landscape of memory. In the course of its thirteen quatrains, it moves from ancient Troy to modern Paris and back again, from Andromaque, Hector's widow who became a slave and concubine of Achilles' son Pyrrhus, to an unnamed 'négresse' seeking a lost Africa, and to other images of orphans, stranded sailors as well as the swan itself. It proceeds like a roll call of loss, and yet is rich in minutely observed details such as the convulsive movement of the swan's neck or the contours of the Louvre environs in reconstruction.

The poem has its source in Virgil, rather than Homer, Euripides, or indeed Racine. When it was first published in a journal (*La Causerie*), the dedication to the exiled Victor Hugo was followed by the epigraph 'Falsi Simoentis ad undam' – beside the false Simois – from *Aenead* III. 302, with reference to Andromaque's exile and servitude in Phthia, where to console herself, she

imagines the river of Troy. So much for the epigraph, but I'd like to dwell further on the dedication. It's not the only poem by Baudelaire to be dedicated to Hugo – 'Les Sept vieillards', the one that follows in most editions of *Les Fleurs du mal* (though it was published in *Le Nouveau revue* four months earlier in September 1859), shares the same dedication. Neither are random, or mere tributes to a senior, admired poet. It signifies, and has an important bearing on the poem, as well as shedding some light on Eliot's more general comment.

The opening of Baudelaire's essay 'Victor Hugo: *Les Misérables'* is an illuminating argument as to why Hugo as a poet 'est moralisé sans le vouloir, *par abondance et plénitude de nature*' (Baudelaire's italics). The argument is crucial also for our understanding of the poem. He presents Hugo, in a dialectic, as being drawn, because of his vigorous temperament, by an equal love 'pour ce qui est très-fort comme pour ce qui est très-faible'. He shows himself as the friend – '*l'ami attendri de tout ce qui est faible, solitaire, contristé; de tout ce qui est orphelin*' (Baudelaire's italics). Note also that last word which recurs in the poem. If this is true of Hugo, it is at least equally so of Baudelaire whose poems are populated by the downtrodden and outcast, *les marginaux*, including 'the prostitutes, the mulattoes and Jewesses' to quote Eliot once more. It is ironic that Eliot in weighing up Baudelaire's credentials as a Christian poet, his doctrinal non-conformism and so on, should see as time-worn and trite these very elements that could arguably most qualify him as a Christian poet, at least in his sympathies. He praises Hugo, in a subtle argument, for his 'charité' (the paramount Christian or Pauline virtue) which has nothing programmatic or didactic about it, and so distinguishes the poet from any kind of 'pédanterie', or what we might now call virtue-signalling. It's an intriguing essay that touches on the point that Hazlitt makes about poetry being drawn to power, but offers a deeper, more dialectical relation, that it is, or should be, equally attracted to the disempowered. Eliot seems to me oblivious to this crucial element in Baudelaire's work.

'Le Cygne' embodies those temperamental traits which he praises in Hugo – chez Baudelaire, likewise, manifest in a way that may be 'moralizing' without aiming to be so. In the poem, the titular swan has escaped its 'cage' – an odd detail but it's odder still that the bird speaks.

The weather too is peculiar; there's a storm but the air is silent, the stream is dry. It is psychic weather, psychic geography and history. And yet the detail of the

> […] négresse, amaigrie et phtisique
> Piétant dans la boue, et cherchant, l'oeil hagard,
> Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique
> Derrière la muraille immense du brouillard;

is arguably the central image of the poem, the counter-image to the swan's white feathers. Swan and woman share the same fate of displacement and exile, the same state of Andromaque at the poem's opening. While the image of the African coconut trees may sound merely exotic, they evoke a luxuriance in contrast to the arid urban landscape as the wall of fog that obscures them evokes a whole other weather system, and the effect is far from suggestive of a tired prop, especially with the detail of the black woman's haggard, consumptive state. In a time such as ours of thousands of refugees arriving in Europe from Africa and the Middle East, forced to survive in makeshift tents, this picture hasn't shed any of its force or relevance.

The reader has to decide whether the poet's identification with another person's suffering is appropriative or empathetic. Perhaps both at once. Here, again, the issue of what Eliot calls the 'perdurable' obtrudes. What lasts and what fades. My own sense of the dated attaches rather more to a phrase such as 'toute pour moi devient allégorie', the constant transformation of the world into symbol, and yet without it Baudelaire would lose his framework. While 'Le Cygne' abounds in symbols for Baudelaire's inner state, I suspect that a modern sensibility is more drawn to the moments in the poem where actuality *transcends* the symbolic, 'le bric-à-brac confus' of the construction work, for example, and most tellingly the figure of the black woman who appears towards the end.

The exclamatory address of the poem from its opening 'Andromaque, je pense à vous!' to its 'Je pense à mon grand cygne', to its final lines: 'Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île, |Aux captifs, aux vaincus!… à bien d'autres encor!' is the sustained monologue of the poet wandering over a changeable but familiar terrain, *piétant lui-même*, arrested by images, and memories of the

streets he is passing through – 'la forme d'une ville | Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel' […] 'Paris change!'. Thirteen exclamation marks (unevenly distributed through the thirteen stanzas) indicate the jagged progress of this inner promenade, the jolts of consciousness, of an exasperated awareness. The vertical punctuation clatters down like hailstones on the stately though fractured alexandrines. Even the poem's first line is interrupted by two cesurae ('Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve'), an effect mirrored by the final line's gaping caesura and aposiopesis 'Aux captifs, aux vaincus!… à bien d'autres encor!'.

This organizing axis of the poem – 'Je pense à…' – isn't a Cartesian assertion but rather a thinking about something or someone who in turn is thinking about something that has been taken away, that no longer is. The word 'absent' hovers over this poem that is haunted by what has disappeared or been replaced – architecture, nature, weather. Given the repetition of the phrase the poem is also about a repeated, ever more ingrained state. The prominent 'I' of the poem includes and overarches widows, orphans, the black woman, sailors, and 'bien d'autres choses'.

Eliot's demurral with regard to the 'prostitutes, mulattoes, and Jewesses' seems less than ever accurate about 'Le Cygne'. On the contrary, it seems as if the French poet had a more prescient notion of the future than Eliot did. Baudelaire's prolonged, often agonized relationship with Jeanne Duval in itself might encourage a more serious engagement with the imagery of 'Le Cygne', though that biographical prompt alone neither implicates nor exculpates the poet. It is worth noting, however, that as Enid Starkie tells, in his very last days of illness, Baudelaire's principal anxiety and concern was that Duval be given what money he had, and that she be provided against the poverty and ill-health from which she was suffering. This would suggest, as does the whole orchestral movement of 'Le Cygne', one of his longest and most intricate poems, that Baudelaire was not merely employing 'stock' imagery but touching a crucial and emotionally charged part of his vision which reveals much about his own era and connects intimately with ours.

It's hard to like Baudelaire

Stephen Minta

University of York

'It's hard to like Baudelaire.' We were looking at an exhibition. In glass cases, there were copies of *Les Fleurs du mal* in all the languages the curator – no doubt pressed for time – had been able to track down. The books were pinned at an angle, like butterflies, but in no obvious order, slumbering in the heat of an Athens afternoon… the titles: some you could easily recognize, others you might guess at, others, dustier than all the rest, were lost in the outer regions of unknown languages, unknown scripts that could have disguised anything. *Las flores del mal*, *I fiori del male*, *As Flores do Mal*, *Ta Anthi tou Kakou*…

The covers suggested that a vague unpleasantness might lie beneath it all – apart from a few pretty covers with pastel flowers, which looked irrelevant in their innocence. There were corpses, women in poses that might once have been erotic, now displaced by the earnest pornography of the early twenty-first century; sinister-looking trees and plants, all entangled; lots of generalized nakedness; abstract line-drawings, suggesting fates you could never escape; then the inevitable lover covers, with people doing the limited things lovers do, sometimes man and woman in profile, darkling kissing, sometimes woman and woman openly, with an eye on posterity; occasional pictures of Charles Baudelaire, mostly the photograph by Carjat that is always called 'brooding', with the tight lips and those less than poetical eyes that threaten to ruin your day. Baudelaire said that photography was 'the refuge of every would-be painter, every painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies'. One of the things that's hard to like is that he seems to have an answer for everything, an opinion on everything, those eyes that keep boring into you, eternally threatening you with your only conceivable role in his life, *hypocrite lecteur*.

There were few people about in the afternoon. Outside, on Panepistimiou Street, the traffic roared a little less as siesta set in. In the shade were lines of Albanian women, refugees, each with

a child, worn hands, children's hands, each extended in the generic pose. They were there this morning. After a few days they become familiar.

'There's no compassion in Baudelaire', my friend said. I think of the *négresse,* emaciated and phthisical, stranded in mid-century Parisian mud. The very word *phthisique* suggests our distance from her, a world we can never know, nor she ours. Graham Greene said there is always a 'splinter of ice in the heart of a writer'. How could it be otherwise? How else to extract the quintessence? And then compassion is a limited virtue, if indeed it is virtue at all. Of all the positive-sounding qualities to which we may lay claim, it is perhaps the one that is easiest to put on and to shake off. Tears come to the eye, then evaporate over lamb *kleftiko*.

It's interesting that Baudelaire teaches such an obvious lesson; but one of his strengths is his relentlessness. That is why we find him so hard to like. It's easier to hear a truth once. The more it may *be* a truth, the less easy it is to hear it repeated. Baudelaire knows this intuitively and takes a grotesque pleasure in knowing it. It's strange that he who, in his correspondence, is so ready to whinge and whine, to creep and crawl, seems not to care that his readers won't like him. But his truths have, for him, a religious potency that thrives on resistance and requires our distaste, for otherwise the verse has nothing to overcome, no measure of its enduring power.

Back inside the overheated hall, I wondered why curators put books in cases and who, in Athens, would come to visit. 'Because the books are valuable and people always love to look at what is valuable.' Late in 2019, a copy of *Les Fleurs,* containing a previously unknown extra verse for *Les Bijoux,* went on sale in Paris, a moment that prompted an article in the London *Guardian*. The asking price was up to 80,000 euros. The extra verse wasn't exactly unknown, and it said nothing new, anyway, just the usual language of *Vérité*, *Génie*, *Beauté*, and *Dieu* – but it came from a poem that had once been banned. So *Les Fleurs* remains an unhealthy, sickly commodity. But also refreshingly uncontaminated. Because it's hard to see how anything might contaminate it. What depths, what monstrosities does it not already touch? Under its covers, or under ours.

'So liking him is neither here nor there.' Though it's good to like a writer you admire, isn't it? The fall of Neruda still hurts. Baudelaire could never fall in that way, because he never promised. If our image is, in the marvellous words of 'Le Voyage', 'Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui!', it pays a tribute we never asked for to the endlessness of which we are capable. Perhaps Baudelaire got some of it from Byron. The Giaour's girlfriend is loaded into a sack by a jealous master and drowned at sea; the Giaour kills him and retires from the world. But there's no moral:

> I'd rather be the thing that crawls
> Most noxious o'er a dungeon's walls,
> Than pass my dull, unvarying days,
> Condemn'd to meditate and gaze…

The necessary horror, the threat of what will become of us without it, both still confuse. Byron escaped into the comedy of *Don Juan*. But there is no escape in Baudelaire. There is, it seems, no built-in obsolescence to *Les Fleurs*, because we have not yet found a way of going beyond it, and perhaps there is no way. 'Can one be a saint without God?' is outvoiced by 'Can one be damned without Him?' 'Everything's terrible, *cara* – in the heart of man', as the Prince says in the most urbane of James' novels.

'And then, the sense of an ending: for that, surely?' Yes, for that you could almost forgive anyone anything. The last four lines of 'Le Voyage' still take us by the throat, with the intellectual and emotional challenge: how to retain the initiative, up to and beyond the final moment. As the gulf closes over and the imagination is faced with its own erasure, Baudelaire plays with an extraordinary invitation.

We walked down into Syntagma Square, in the heat that rose as evening fell. It's hard to like Baudelaire. Time for a break.

Abdellatif Laâbi's *Casablanca Spleen*

André Naffis-Sahely

In January 1972, the thirty-year old Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi was arrested by his country's security services and brutally tortured. Student demonstrations in his support ensued, which eventually forced the authorities to release him, only to re-arrest him a month later, when he was sent to Casablanca's Moulay Cherif Detention Centre. Originally detained without being charged, Laâbi took part in a series of hunger strikes alongside other prisoners before finally being granted a trial in August 1973, at which point he was condemned to an eight and half year sentence at the infamous Kénitra penitentiary. His crime? Distributing political pamphlets. During his stay in Kénitra as prisoner number 18611, Laâbi would produce a body of work that would later be recognized as some of the twentieth century's finest political poetry, alongside that of Pablo Neruda and Nâzım Hikmet.

Le Spleen de Casablanca / Casablanca Spleen (1996), a long poem composed in 1995 during one of Laâbi's trips back to Morocco following his self-imposed exile in France, is a riposte of sorts to Charles Baudelaire's 'Le Spleen de Paris' (1869). In Laâbi's poem, the author uneasily walks the streets of Casablanca, the city in which he had once been imprisoned for so long, and examines a country he no longer recognizes, prophetically singling out the issues that would later lead to the demonstrations of the Arab Spring almost twenty years before they occurred. Here are two selections from my translation of *Casablanca Spleen*, featuring the original text below.

Abdellatif Laâbi
Casablanca Spleen

Option 1:

Amid the noise of a soulless city
I learn the hard work of returning
Inside my torn pocket
in a summer as cold as the winter
only your hand
keeps mine warm
Tell me, where has the country
of our younger years gone?

*

O how all countries look alike
how exiles resemble one another
Your footprints aren't the sort of footprints
that leave any trace on the sand
you pass by without really passing by

*

Face after face
the years die

I search for a glimmer in everyone's eyes
for a flower to bloom from their words
And I'm scared, truly scared
of losing another old friend

*

This grey morning is honest
I'm grateful for the spleen it unleashes
how it's such a fine connoisseur
of the pain it collects
and the bouquet of doubts it has offered me

*

If I went out
where would I go?
The pavements are raw and rutted
The trees look pitiful
Skyscrapers obstruct the sky
Cars rule as absolutely
as any old tyrant
Cafés are open only to men
Women, quite rightly
are scared of being stared at
And besides
there is nobody
to visit

*

I will always feel lost
no matter how old

*

I'm not the kind of nomad
who goes looking for wells
dug by static dwellers
I drink very little
and steer clear
of the caravan

*

Soon this century will end
or so they say
And this leaves me cold
Although the next one
doesn't fill me with confidence

*

In the city of salt and cement
my cave's made of paper
I have a good stockpile of pens
and the means to brew coffee
My ideas cast no shadows
nor emanate any odours
My body has disappeared
and inside that paper cave
there is only my head

Option 2:

Nations
are finally equal
now
in their ferocity

*

God
how I feel like a stranger
However much I wanted to throw
myself into the world's fray
I'm sidelined in my own corner of it
Am I punishing myself
or is it the world?

*

After vain actions
vain words
make one nostalgic for actions

*

The books that bear my name
and which I dare not open
out of fear
that they'll crumble into dust
between my fingers

*

Rub shoulders with monsters
and your skin
will smell like monsters

*

Wake up
rebel
The world is collapsing
beneath the weight of appearances
It will die
out of resignation

*

When I was cold
and hungry
(believe it or not
I have experienced both)
life was almost sweet to me
and my bouts of insomnia fruitful
Every night I thought about other people
(meaning the marginalized
believe it or not)
and each morning
a fraternal sun
came to visit me
and left two
or three sugar cubes
by my bedside

*

I need a break
the time you might give me
to open a window
on a time I haven't yet visited
an island of princely flesh
that will offer itself up to me in earnest
I'll push that blue window open
and hurry before it shuts again
I won't tell you what I'll see
Whatever I will have proven or experienced
will go rejoin the great mystery
If only you'd give me a little respite
I'm certain I'd make you
fond of conundrums

*

The poet invents a rose
but doesn't know which colour it should be
What is the colour of secrets?
A familiar warmth in one's ear
A father's beaming face

carried off by sweet death
A burgeoning wrinkle in your beloved's visage?
None of this may be defined by colours
Our poet's invention will therefore
remain incomplete

(Translated by André Naffis-Sahely)

Abdellatif Laâbi
Le Spleen de Casablanca

Option 1:

Dans le bruit d'une ville sans âme
j'apprends le dur métier du retour
Dans ma poche crevée
je n'ai que ta main
pour réchauffer la mienne
tant l'été se confond avec l'hiver
Où s'en est allé, dis-moi
le pays de notre jeunesse?

*

Ô comme les pays se ressemblent
et se ressemblent les exils
Tes pas ne sont pas de ces pas
qui laissent des traces sur le sable
Tu passes sans passer

*

Visage après visage
meurent les ans
Je cherche dans les yeux une lueur
un bourgeon dans les paroles
Et j'ai peur, très peur
de perdre encore un vieil ami

*

Ce gris matin est loyal
Je lui ais gré du spleen qu'il répand
de la douleur qu'il recueille
de la gerbe des doutes qu'il m'offre
en bon connaisseur

*

Si je sors
où irai-je?
Les trottoirs sont défoncés
Les arbres font pitié
Les immeubles cachent le ciel
Les voitures règnent
comme n'importe quel tyran
Les cafés sont réservés aux hommes
Les femmes, à raison
ont peur qu'on les regarde
Et puis
je n'ai de rendez-vous
avec personne

*

Je me sentirai perdu
à tout âge

*

Je ne suis pas ce nomade
qui cherche le puits
que le sédentaire a creusé
Je bois peu d'eau
et marche
à l'écart de la caravane

*

Le siècle prend fin
dit-on
Et cela me laisse indifférent
Quoique le suivant
ne me dise rien qui vaille

*

Dans la cité de ciment et de sel
ma grotte est en papier
J'ai une bonne provision de plumes
et de quoi faire du café
Mes idées n'ont pas d'ombre
pas plus d'odeur
Mon corps a disparu
Il n'y a plus que ma tête
dans cette grotte en papier

Option 2:

Les pays
maintenant
se valent
en férocité

*

Mon dieu
comme je me sens étranger
J'ai beau vouloir me mêler
à l'agitation du monde
je me retrouve à l'écart dans mon coin
Est-ce moi qui me punis
ou est-ce le monde?

*

Après les actes vains
les paroles vaines
donnant la nostalgie des actes

*

Les livres qui portent mon nom
et que je n'ose ouvrir
de peur
qu'ils ne tombent en poussière
entre mes doigts

*

À force de côtoyer le monstre
l'odeur du monstre
te colle à la peau

*

Réveille-toi
rebelle
Le monde croule
sous les apparences
Il va crever
de résignation

*

Quand j'avais froid
et faim
(j'ai connu cela

ne vous en déplaise)
la vie m'était presque douce
et fécondes mes insomnies
Je pensais chaque nuit aux autres
(aux laissés-pour-compte
ne vous en déplaise)
et chaque matin
un soleil fraternel
venait me rendre visite
et déposait à mon chevet
deux ou trois
morceaux de sucre

*

J'ai besoin d'un répit
le temps que vous voudrez bien m'accorder
pour ouvrir une fenêtre
sur un temps que je n'ai pas encore visité
une île de chair princière
qui s'offrira à moi pour de bon
Je pousserai cette fenêtre bleue
et je ferai vite avant qu'elle ne se referme
Je ne dirai pas ce que j'aurai vu
Ce que j'aurai éprouvé
ira rejoindre le mystère
Si seulement vous m'accordiez ce répit
M'est avis que je vous rendrais
friands d'énigmes

*

Le poète invente une rose
mais ne sait quelle couleur lui donner
Comment est-ce la couleur du secret?
Tiédeur reconnaissable au creux de l'oreille
Visage rayonnant du père
emporté par la mort douce
Ride naissante au flanc de l'aimée?
Rien de cela ne définit une couleur
L'invention de notre poète
restera donc incomplète

Baudelaire ou le secret de l'art

Lamia Oucherif

Laboratoire LISODIP, ENS-Bouzaréah – Alger - Algérie

> « Malheureux peut-être l'homme, mais heureux l'artiste que le désir déchire ! »
> (« Le désir de peindre », en *Petits poèmes en prose*)

« L'invitation au voyage », c'est ainsi que Baudelaire intitule l'un de ses petits poèmes en prose, une sorte de *clin d'œil* qu'il fait à l'un des musiciens allemands connus du XIX[e] siècle, Carl Maria Friedrich Ernest Von Weber, qui a composé *L'invitation à la valse*. Il répond à l'un de ses désirs qu'il exprime ouvertement dans son poème :

> Un musicien a écrit l'invitation à la valse; quel est celui qui composera l'invitation au voyage, qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d'élection?

A-t-il voulu faire une sorte de « compte rendu » pour montrer tout l'intérêt qu'il a porté à cette musique ? Rappelons que pour Baudelaire « la meilleure critique » que l'on puisse faire d'une œuvre d'art est celle qui est, comme il le dit lui-même, « poétique et amusante ». Nous nous référons ici à l'un de ses célèbres essais : « A quoi bon la critique ? » dans lequel il explique ce que doit être le vrai travail du critique et dans lequel il défend l'une de ses idées phares : défendre l'art pour l'art. Ainsi, il ne s'empêche pas de déclarer que « le meilleur compte rendu d'un tableau pourra être un sonnet ou une élégie. »

Ne serait-ce pas poétique que d'écrire un poème pour exprimer son opinion sur une « musique romantique » ? En effet, dans « L'invitation au voyage », c'est un vrai voyage que Baudelaire nous propose de faire dans un pays de Cocagne, un pays où tout est permis, où on peut vivre heureux et faire honneur à un sentiment aussi précieux que celui de l'amour. Nous sommes invités, donc, avec Baudelaire, à découvrir le secret de ce pays qui n'existe pas mais qui est pourtant présent en toute personne qui désire fuir et quitter le monde dans lequel nous vivons ne serait-ce

que pour un moment. Un moment certes de solitude mais une solitude qui nous permet de « peupler » un monde nouveau comme nous le souhaitons et dans lequel nous y mettons tout ce à quoi nous aspirons, il s'agit bien de cette « contrée […] où tout est beau, riche, tranquille et honnête ». C'est un monde imaginaire dont rêve tout un chacun, un monde sans défauts et qui n'a pas de place pour la sottise, pour le mensonge ou pour tout ce qui peut nuire à votre esprit ou à votre humeur.

Pourquoi chercher à séparer ce qui est à la base inséparable, pourquoi séparer la musique de la poésie ? la peinture de la littérature ? ou encore la sculpture du théâtre ? Désormais, tous les arts se confondent du moment où ils puisent tous à la même source : l'imaginaire. L'art est fait pour être vécu par celui qui veut chercher à se ressourcer, il est fait pour être goûté par le passionné, celui qui est à la recherche de la nouveauté, de tout ce qui pourrait le déranger dans sa tranquillité et de tout ce qui viendrait troubler ses sens. Il ne s'agit pas de chercher le beau mais de chercher le vrai ou l'authentique, c'est-à-dire cet *idéal* qui nous échappe sans cesse mais qui est pourtant là dans notre esprit et qui nous ronge de l'intérieur. Mais pourquoi aller à la recherche de ce qui n'existe pas puisque nous savons que la partie est perdue d'avance ? La question peut être posée mais elle ne peut pas empêcher notre cœur de ressentir les choses telles qu'elles sont et de pousser le rêve jusqu'à l'extrême ou, comme l'entend Baudelaire dans son poème, jusqu'à l'impossible : « Des rêves ! Toujours des rêves ! et plus l'âme est ambitieuse et délicate, plus les rêves l'éloignent du possible. »

Baudelaire a peut-être été parmi ces « poètes maudits », connu pour décrire dans ses poèmes le monde dans sa réalité amère, cruelle, décadente, cette réalité que nous ne voulons pas percevoir car elle est révélatrice d'un quelque chose en nous que nous voulons dissimuler. L'homme est connu pour refuser d'admettre ses défauts et surtout ce défaut qui le caractérise essentiellement : l'égoïsme. Mais Baudelaire est aussi parmi ces écrivains qui ont voulu décrire la beauté de l'âme, de cette âme sincère qui veut tout simplement profiter des *petits plaisirs de la vie*, et surtout de cette âme « artiste » qui a un pouvoir que nul ne peut lui ôter : celui de créer. Le pays de

Cocagne est comparé par le poète avec l'art, il est, dit-il, « supérieur aux autres, comme l'Art l'est à la nature, où celle-ci est réformée par le rêve, où elle est corrigée, embellie, refondue. » Telle est la « beauté » de l'art si on doit lui en reconnaître une. En effet, l'art, le vrai, est celui qui permet à son artiste de transformer les choses qui l'entourent comme il le veut, jusqu'à rendre ce qui est laid, beau, de faire en sorte que le lointain devienne proche, d'aller vers l'inconnu jusqu'à s'y perdre pour ensuite s'y retrouver, etc. Et pourquoi pas faire d'un texte, un tableau de peinture, comme nous pouvons le voir dans ce petit poème en prose qu'est « L'invitation au voyage » et dans lequel le poète s'écrie : « Vivrons-nous jamais, passerons-nous jamais dans ce tableau qu'a peint mon esprit […] ? » Tel est le secret de l'art, de cet art qui ne connaît aucune limite et qui *s'enivre* de ce qui lui revient de droit : la liberté.

Les *Fleurs du mal* ou la prosodie du mystère

Jonathan Petitot

CIELAM, Aix-Marseille Université

La plus belle réussite de Baudelaire est assurément d'avoir réussi, dans ses compositions, à illustrer cette « prosodie mystérieuse et méconnue » qu'il trouvait dans la langue française, comme il le rappelait dans son second projet de préface aux *Fleurs du mal*. À cet égard, son recueil constitue encore aujourd'hui la référence *ad libitum* de toute bibliographie poétique, aussi partielle soit-elle, l'idole cultuelle des étudiants en lettres, ou l'immarcescible « rêve de pierre » de tout poète en devenir.

L'unicité d'une telle prépondérance interroge nécessairement : Hugo a la voix naïve et forte des blessures profondes, Lamartine écrit par la délicatesse du lyrisme dompté ; Mallarmé a la virtuosité du terme et une syntaxe pour le moins unique ; Rimbaud a l'adolescente et musicale audace de sa métrique, Verlaine la provocation irrévérencieuse de son impaire. Baudelaire n'a rien de tout cela. C'est sans doute ce profil insaisissable qui esquisse le mieux son génie. Si les premiers peuvent être – fort injustement et fort schématiquement – écrasés par des étiquettes réductrices, Baudelaire, lui, échappe bien plus insolemment à cet inepte processus : son unicité réside-t-elle dans une saillie esthétique ou formelle reconnaissable entre mille ? D'aucuns[1] ont déjà souligné la paradoxale pauvreté lexicale et le fréquent traditionalisme métrique des *Fleurs du mal*. Et pourtant le génie demeure, vif et intemporellement moderne, laissant une trace indélébile à tout lecteur, qui garde en sa mémoire une strophe choisie, un vers chéri, ou peut-être, sans même le vouloir, un simple groupe nominal ; l'alchimiste qu'est Baudelaire a assurément su forger des vers plus durables que l'airain, et si la formule ne saurait s'y réduire, la puissance de la signifiance lexicale et rythmique qu'il déploie y joue un rôle majeur. Cette puissance du signifiant, qui prend corps sous sa plume de latiniste averti, tient autant dans l'exploitation du sens premier ou dans la polysémie que dans l'agencement sonore du vers, l'un servant l'autre. De nombreux articles y ont été consacrés ; de

nombreux ouvrages ont tenté et tentent de percer les mystères de cette « prosodie mystérieuse et méconnue », et avec succès ; les réactions d'élèves, quant à elles, confirment l'attractivité et la modernité de ce mystère.

Nombreux seront sans doute les enseignants à s'accorder avec ce constat fait d'expérience : rares sont les cas où nous jalousons intellectuellement nos élèves. Ouvrir les *Fleurs du Mal* pour la première fois fait indubitablement partie de ces exceptions ; l'impression avoisine, pour l'amateur, l'initiation aux mystères orphiques, tant le toucher initiale mêle l'excitation avide et la curiosité farouche.

Se voir expliquer l'un des poèmes s'en rapproche grandement, tant qu'il ne s'agit pas de commencer par la traditionnelle étude sémantique de l'« Albatros ». Baudelaire semble avoir trouvé, comme le confirmeront sans doute des générations d'élèves ou d'étudiants, le juste équilibre entre prosaïsme rédhibitoire et hermétisme repoussant. La lecture est mystérieuse, attirante, enchanteresse, mais le sens ne se projette pas immédiatement à l'esprit ; quel plaisir y aurait-il ? Le *carmen* des sirènes est plus doux sans la pâle limpidité de la connaissance offerte. Confronter un esprit neuf au principe de synesthésie relève de la même logique : briser la linéarité habituelle du langage pour révéler un sens latent comme nouvelle voie intellectuelle et émotionnelle. L'équivocité, plutôt que d'édifier un obstacle dans la compréhension, devient un pont qu'il est nécessaire d'emprunter ; quand la compréhension devient un risque, elle est d'autant plus attrayante.

Accompagner la lecture de « Sed non satiata », par exemple, sans apparat critique, illustre cette tension du sens en perpétuelle fuite et pourtant prosodiquement palpable : les élèves ou étudiants ne savent ce qu'est un « obi » et n'ont pas les références œnologiques nécessaires – qui les en blâmerait ? - pour comprendre la référence au *Constance* ou au *Nuits-Saint-Georges*. On les voit donc s'interroger sur ces mystères apparents : « au constance » plutôt qu'« à la constance », « au nuits » sans « x » ? Pour certains, la mention du Styx n'évoque rien ; pour d'autres c'est celle de Faust. Ici, dans le sanctuaire des *Fleurs du mal*, la lacune n'est pas crispation ; elle se fait tentation. La musique même du nom signifie autant que la référence, et la grandiloquence solennel du rythme

et de l'articulation prosodique fait pour eux davantage sens que l'éventuelle note en bas de page qui éloigne en tentant d'éclaircir. On les voit insensément saisir, dans ce flot mélodique à la logique parfois nébuleuse, la complexité du sentiment amoureux aliénant à travers la seule suavité sonore, susurrante ou amère, du verbe.

Expliquer Baudelaire, c'est savourer le plaisir du traducteur, celui de la résolution victorieuse et pourtant incertaine ; c'est vivre et permettre l'élucidation jouissive du mystère du verbe ; c'est illustrer le symbole comme essence de l'art.

Se heurter à l'obscurité mystérieuse et séductrice des *Fleurs du mal*, c'est être Dante dans l'Enfer ; tenter de l'éclaircir avec ses élèves, c'est devenir Virgile, auquel il rend honneur : « Ô soleil qui guéris la vue troublée, tu me rends si content quand tu résous mes doutes, que le doute m'est doux autant que le savoir ». [2]

Lire Baudelaire, c'est apprendre à aimer l'inconnu. Lire Baudelaire, c'est accepter l'obscurité comme une touche de poésie.

Cela peut être vrai de tous les textes poétiques ; pour une raison qui m'échappe encore, cela est d'autant plus vrai avec Baudelaire.

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[1] Albert Cassagne (*Versification et métrique de Charles Baudelaire)* peut en être un exemple.
[2] Dante, *L'Enfer*, XI, trad. Jacqueline Risset (Paris : GF, Flammarion), p. 111.

My Baudelaire

Stephen Romer

Brasenose College, Oxford

Recently I was seeking an epigraph for a suite of poems entitled *Âpretés pour après* in preparation for a collection of my work in French; I finally fixed on 'Cependant je laisserai ces pages…', which may appear elliptical, but a devotee of Baudelaire will recognize the phrase that follows, 'parce que je veux dater ma colère.' This is the concluding sentence of that great page of rant printed at the end of *Fusées*, the one beginning 'Le monde va finir. La seule raison pour laquelle il pourrait durer, c'est qu'il existe.' There is a telling variant, some editions have *tristesse* as opposed to *colère*. Both emotions are present in the passage, but it is notably the articulate anger which proves to be so nakedly prophetic:

> La mécanique nous aura tellement américanisés, le progrès aura si bien atrophié en nous la partie spirituelle, que rien parmi les rêveries sanguinaires, sacrilèges ou anti-naturelles des utopistes ne pourra être comparé à ses résultats positifs.

One might well ask, Baudelaire where art thou now? as America continues to foist its toxic, divisive and undeliverable utopianism upon the rest of us; more virulently than ever indeed, from both wings, so that no field of human endeavour is left untouched or unsuspected of the worst of crimes – of 'thought crime', or indeed of 'feeling crime'. But, enough! This is no place for a personal gripe about the culture wars, though there are a few traces of it in the poems I was looking to preface. My point is simply that Baudelaire, as for so much else, would seem to be the go-to poet for searingly clear-sighted spiritual prophecy. At its finest, his *saeva indignatio* reads as though the ink were still wet on the page.

Possibly it is age, and grumpiness – *hélas!* – which these days incites me to seek out the prophetic Baudelaire – or maybe just the grumpy Baudelaire. You find an earlier version in the prose piece included in *Le Spleen de Paris,* 'A une heure du matin', that Confiteor so beloved of Rilke that he quotes it in his Baudelaire-steeped narrative *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*:

'Horrible vie! Horrible ville: Récapitulons la journée: avoir vu plusieurs hommes de lettres, dont l'un m'a demandé si l'on pouvait aller en Russie par voie de terre (il prenait sans doute la Russie pour une île) …' and so on and so forth; it's all terrific fun. The satire is always spot-on; there is a late letter in which he takes time to skewer *le style coulant*, the fluent style of journalists and *petits-littérateurs*, favoured by the Bourgeois. By the same token he lists his 'tastes', and his selection of writers that he would save from oblivion have pretty much without exception all stood the test of time (though George Sand has survived, despite Baudelaire's contempt).

In the Pichois edition of the *Pléiade* (following on from the seventy or so penitential pages of *Carnet* in which the poet lists his debts and debtors and his excruciating attempts to create a kind of financial miracle of the loaves), is an obscure page called 'Lettres d'un atribilaire', letters from a 'bilious person' worth reading as a kind of digest of *scènes de la sottise parisienne*, with as particular bête noir the journal *Le siècle* and its main writer Girardin:

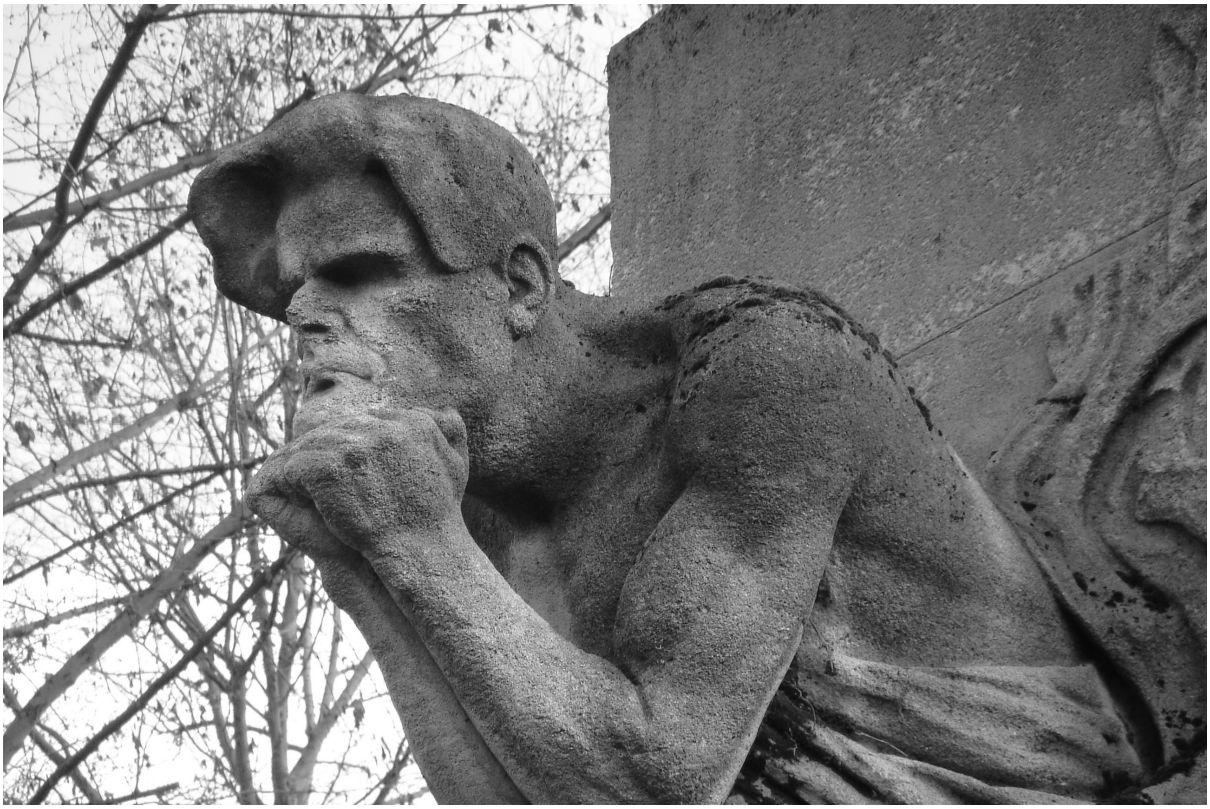
> Girardin. Girardin et la vérité. Les escargots. La lune. Les ballons. Abolition de la guerre. Ptolémée. […] Le latin et le grec de Girardin. Pecudesque locutae (plague locusts). Le style fleuri des marchands d'orviétan (The flowery style of a quack).

Again, in the Pichois edition, after *Fusées*, we find those poignant memos to self under the general titles *Hygiène. Conduite. Morale.* followed by the slightly different – *Hygiène. Conduite. Méthode.* – clearly a Baudelairean version of CBT; an attempt, by writing, to put into practice objurgations like 'Fais tous les jours, ce que veulent le devoir et la prudence'. Ever since I started reading Baudelaire I have been drawn to, and terribly moved, by these notes. *Pace* the name of this journal, this really is Baudelaire the anti-decadent – we are as far as it is possible to be from the hothouse *cabinet de lecture* belonging to Des Esseintes. That particular luxury of feeling or of scorn is no longer available. This is Baudelaire on the edge of breakdown.

I must perforce be brief, and obviously the side of Baudelaire I have foregrounded above is not the heart of the matter, even if it is immensely engaging. Were I required to encapsulate Baudelaire's greatness, and what he means to me, I would use a phrase that Eliot used in a different context: Baudelaire is the 'restorer of the real'. I would not venture to try and define the word 'real'

in this case, because it is useful, precisely, as an umbrella term, one under which a horde of readers and writers shelter. It is perhaps best defined negatively as the place one is glad to return to, after a foray, say, into the ardent visionary work of Rimbaud or the intensely cerebral poetry of Mallarmé; or, equally, after a hair-raising ride into decadence or surrealism. It is not for nothing that Yves Bonnefoy, who started his career as a surrealist, and who has written more extensively about Rimbaud and Mallarmé than any other poets, entitled his last major critical volume, as if returning home, *Sous le signe de Baudelaire*. And by 'real' I don't simply mean the *Tableaux parisiens* or the Painter of Modern Life, I mean the apprehension of profound spiritual realities, including the death wish, in poems like 'L'Ennemi', 'La Vie antérieure', 'Chants d'automne', 'À une passante', 'Brumes et pluies', 'La fin de la journée', 'La rançon', 'Le voyage', 'Le Cygne'… et à bien d'autres encor!

ELEGIES



Le tombeau de Baudelaire, 2006, © Peter Coles

Le Voyage

Charles Baudelaire

À Maxime du Camp

I

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!

Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le coeur gros de rancune et de désirs amers,
Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,
Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers:

Les uns, joyeux de fuir une patrie infâme;
D'autres, l'horreur de leurs berceaux, et quelques-uns,
Astrologues noyés dans les yeux d'une femme,
La Circé tyrannique aux dangereux parfums.

Pour n'être pas changés en bêtes, ils s'enivrent
D'espace et de lumière et de cieux embrasés;
La glace qui les mord, les soleils qui les cuivrent,
Effacent lentement la marque des baisers.

Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent
Pour partir; coeurs légers, semblables aux ballons,
De leur fatalité jamais ils ne s'écartent,
Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours: Allons!

Ceux-là dont les désirs ont la forme des nues,
Et qui rêvent, ainsi qu'un conscrit le canon,
De vastes voluptés, changeantes, inconnues,
Et dont l'esprit humain n'a jamais su le nom!

II

Nous imitons, horreur! la toupie et la boule
Dans leur valse et leurs bonds; même dans nos sommeils
La Curiosité nous tourmente et nous roule
Comme un Ange cruel qui fouette des soleils.

Singulière fortune où le but se déplace,
Et, n'étant nulle part, peut être n'importe où!
Où l'Homme, dont jamais l'espérance n'est lasse,
Pour trouver le repos court toujours comme un fou!

Notre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie;
Une voix retentit sur le pont: 'Ouvre l'oeil!'

Une voix de la hune, ardente et folle, crie:
'Amour … gloire … bonheur!» Enfer! c'est un écueil!

Chaque îlot signalé par l'homme de vigie
Est un Eldorado promis par le Destin;
L'Imagination qui dresse son orgie
Ne trouve qu'un récif aux clartés du matin.

Ô le pauvre amoureux des pays chimériques!
Faut-il le mettre aux fers, le jeter à la mer,
Ce matelot ivrogne, inventeur d'Amériques
Dont le mirage rend le gouffre plus amer?

Tel le vieux vagabond, piétinant dans la boue,
Rêve, le nez en l'air, de brillants paradis;
Son oeil ensorcelé découvre une Capoue
Partout où la chandelle illumine un taudis.

III

Etonnants voyageurs! quelles nobles histoires
Nous lisons dans vos yeux profonds comme les mers!
Montrez-nous les écrins de vos riches mémoires,
Ces bijoux merveilleux, faits d'astres et d'éthers.

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile!
Faites, pour égayer l'ennui de nos prisons,
Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile,
Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d'horizons.

Dites, qu'avez-vous vu?

IV

'Nous avons vu des astres
Et des flots, nous avons vu des sables aussi;
Et, malgré bien des chocs et d'imprévus désastres,
Nous nous sommes souvent ennuyés, comme ici.

La gloire du soleil sur la mer violette,
La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant,
Allumaient dans nos coeurs une ardeur inquiète
De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant.

Les plus riches cités, les plus grands paysages,
Jamais ne contenaient l'attrait mystérieux
De ceux que le hasard fait avec les nuages.
Et toujours le désir nous rendait soucieux!

— La jouissance ajoute au désir de la force.
Désir, vieil arbre à qui le plaisir sert d'engrais,
Cependant que grossit et durcit ton écorce,
Tes branches veulent voir le soleil de plus près!

Grandiras-tu toujours, grand arbre plus vivace
Que le cyprès? — Pourtant nous avons, avec soin,
Cueilli quelques croquis pour votre album vorace
Frères qui trouvez beau tout ce qui vient de loin!

Nous avons salué des idoles à trompe;
Des trônes constellés de joyaux lumineux;
Des palais ouvragés dont la féerique pompe
Serait pour vos banquiers un rêve ruineux;

Des costumes qui sont pour les yeux une ivresse;
Des femmes dont les dents et les ongles sont teints,
Et des jongleurs savants que le serpent caresse.'

V

Et puis, et puis encore?

VI

'Ô cerveaux enfantins!

Pour ne pas oublier la chose capitale,
Nous avons vu partout, et sans l'avoir cherché,
Du haut jusques en bas de l'échelle fatale,
Le spectacle ennuyeux de l'immortel péché:

La femme, esclave vile, orgueilleuse et stupide,
Sans rire s'adorant et s'aimant sans dégoût;
L'homme, tyran goulu, paillard, dur et cupide,
Esclave de l'esclave et ruisseau dans l'égout;

Le bourreau qui jouit, le martyr qui sanglote;
La fête qu'assaisonne et parfume le sang;
Le poison du pouvoir énervant le despote,
Et le peuple amoureux du fouet abrutissant;

Plusieurs religions semblables à la nôtre,
Toutes escaladant le ciel; la Sainteté,
Comme en un lit de plume un délicat se vautre,
Dans les clous et le crin cherchant la volupté;

L'Humanité bavarde, ivre de son génie,
Et, folle maintenant comme elle était jadis,
Criant à Dieu, dans sa furibonde agonie:
"Ô mon semblable, mon maître, je te maudis!"

Et les moins sots, hardis amants de la Démence,
Fuyant le grand troupeau parqué par le Destin,
Et se réfugiant dans l'opium immense!
— Tel est du globe entier l'éternel bulletin.'

VII

Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage!
Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd'hui,
Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image:
Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui!

Faut-il partir? rester? Si tu peux rester, reste;
Pars, s'il le faut. L'un court, et l'autre se tapit
Pour tromper l'ennemi vigilant et funeste,
Le Temps! Il est, hélas! des coureurs sans répit,

Comme le Juif errant et comme les apôtres,
À qui rien ne suffit, ni wagon ni vaisseau,
Pour fuir ce rétiaire infâme; il en est d'autres
Qui savent le tuer sans quitter leur berceau.

Lorsque enfin il mettra le pied sur notre échine,
Nous pourrons espérer et crier: En avant!
De même qu'autrefois nous partions pour la Chine,
Les yeux fixés au large et les cheveux au vent,

Nous nous embarquerons sur la mer des Ténèbres
Avec le coeur joyeux d'un jeune passager.
Entendez-vous ces voix charmantes et funèbres,
Qui chantent: 'Par ici vous qui voulez manger

Le Lotus parfumé! c'est ici qu'on vendange
Les fruits miraculeux dont votre coeur a faim;
Venez vous enivrer de la douceur étrange
De cette après-midi qui n'a jamais de fin!'

À l'accent familier nous devinons le spectre;
Nos Pylades là-bas tendent leurs bras vers nous.
'Pour rafraîchir ton coeur nage vers ton Electre!'
Dit celle dont jadis nous baisions les genoux.

VIII

Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos coeurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!
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*!

Holy Ground

Sam Branton

Sam Branton's paintings are imagined stories that emerge from a decadent mind. His images feature unlikely correspondences between flora, fauna, and decorative objects. The paintings have a sickly and fleshy quality reminiscent of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Creatures frolic in a fantastical world, and, as for Baudelaire, nature serves as an imaginative stage: rarely benevolent, sometimes threatening. Branton's subjects appear to grapple with their place within an unnatural landscape, negotiating the surreal surroundings in which they find themselves.

Alice Condé and Jessica Gossling, June 2021

Still Life with Sea Slugs, oil on canvas, 2021, © Sam Branton

Monkey with Large Vessel, oil on canvas, 2019, © Sam Branton

Monkey, Pufferfish, and Peaches, oil on canvas, 2019, © Sam Branton

Swan, Squid, and Lemons, oil on canvas, 2019, © Sam Branton

Bird with Miniature, oil on canvas, 2020, © Sam Branton

Hound with Tapestry, oil on canvas, 2020, © Sam Branton

Baudelaire, un esprit singulier

Daniele Carluccio

Centre de formation professionnelle Arts, Geneva

Qu'est Baudelaire deux siècles après sa naissance ? Il est trop aisé de resouligner l'importance incontestable et incontestée de ses poèmes, de ses écrits intimes ou de philosophe et critique des arts, trop aisé de dire que la sensibilité nouvelle – dite moderne – qu'il a voulu exprimer dans son lyrisme nous demeure d'une inquiétante familiarité. Il est néanmoins toujours excitant d'observer cette familiarité se manifester dans l'écoute captivée que des générations nouvelles d'étudiantes et d'étudiants offrent à la mélancolie de la « Passante » ou au sadisme de la « Charogne » … Auteur canonique (et scolaire), Baudelaire n'en demeure pas moins vivant, parce que son langage affectif, après lui, a été parlé par beaucoup d'autres, et continue à l'être. Si toutefois je dois retenir ou pointer quelque chose de l'écrivain, en ce bicentenaire, davantage que des poèmes classiques ou culte, ou des alexandrins frappés, imprimés dans la mémoire collective (« – Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère ! », « Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* ! »), c'est le pli singulier de son esprit. « Je puis devenir grand ; mais je puis me perdre, et ne laisser que la réputation d'un homme singulier », écrivait-il dans une lettre à sa mère. Baudelaire a été, c'est certain, un homme spirituel, et cet esprit qui faisait sa singularité s'est exprimé dans sa poésie comme dans sa prose. Dans l'une, il s'est trouvé une figure privilégiée, l'oxymore. Dans l'autre, il a su faire naître l'étincelle des paradoxes (la modernité comme transitoire, la beauté moderne comme éternité dans le transitoire). Il faut relire le bref poème en prose intitulé « Enivrez-vous » : « 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. » L'esprit de Baudelaire en quelques lignes : la provocation de l'injonction, l'affirmation brutale, puis sa neutralisation dans l'entente finalement métaphorique de l'« ivresse ». S'enivrer de « vertu » ? Le poète est un moraliste,

mais sa morale est inséparable de la manière fantasque qu'il a de la poser. La vraie provocation réside finalement dans l'équivalence affirmée entre le « vin », la « vertu » et toute autre source d'ivresse. Il y a un nihilisme baudelairien, qui s'alimente à la violence avec laquelle le poète cherche sa place, dans la foule de la ville moderne, et ne la trouve pas, sinon dans une précarité faite condition. Il y a, au fond, un désespoir baudelairien, mais qui est aussi un élan.

Voilà un aspect essentiel de la modernité de Baudelaire, que je pointe ici car il me semble être celui qui s'offre aujourd'hui le moins à l'appropriation. Sans doute a-t-il toujours été pour beaucoup dans la solitude du poète, mais cette solitude demeure, et ne fait que s'accentuer. Qui aujourd'hui pour partager l'esprit du poète du *Spleen de Paris*, alors que les problèmes du temps appellent un sens de la responsabilité, un engagement, une positivité qui ne laissent aucun champ au dandysme ou au retrait mélancolique ? Qui pour penser et parler comme il le faisait, c'est-à-dire d'une manière toujours faussement évidente, vraiment dissensuelle, à l'heure où s'impose la clarté des discours et des prises de position, et le (bien) commun, plutôt que le singulier ? Il y a, en définitive, une inactualité de Baudelaire, persistante et peut-être aussi insistante. Avec son ironie, son nihilisme, sa rage de poète maudit, il nous rappelle ce que sont la littérature et l'art, leur condition d'émergence autant que leur contexte idéal de réception. Car c'est en écrivain et en poète qu'il écrit toujours, c'est même à cela qu'on le reconnaît. Pas de littérature sans vacance du sens qui est aussi une ouverture aux sens multiples. Et pas de littérature sans marginalité, situation d'où peuvent naître les valeurs neuves. L'écrivain est toujours au fond cet adolescent qui se demande de quoi sera faite sa vie (et celle des autres), mais qui résiste à y répondre avec des formules déjà éprouvées. « Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage, traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils ; […] Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur ? », lit-on dans « L'Ennemi », l'un des grands sonnets des *Fleurs du mal*. Telle est la morale subtile de Baudelaire dont j'aimerais me souvenir, et qui me semble actuelle dans son inactualité même. À toute époque, qui ne manque jamais d'être troublée, il faudrait laisser place à cette vacance – ou ce choc – du sens qu'est la littérature, qui n'est pas une

place de droit, mais une place de nécessité : celle où l'écho des traumas du temps peut avoir la possibilité de se changer en promesse d'avenir. C'est à cette promesse que pensait le jeune André Breton en 1919 en lisant « L'Ennemi » : « Le feu dans la campagne d'hiver attire tout au plus les loups. On est mal fixé sur la valeur des pressentiments si ces coups de bourse au ciel, les orages dont parle Baudelaire, de loin en loin font apparaître un ange au judas ».[1] Un siècle plus tard, je crois que c'est encore à cette promesse qu'il nous faut penser.

[1] André Breton, « Jacques Vaché », *en Les Pas perdus* (Paris : Gallimard, 1969), p. 56.

Appréciation sur Baudelaire
« Relire 'Une charogne' : le corps et l'esprit de la décadence baudelairienne »

Régis-Pierre Fieu

Université du Québec à Montréal

Si *Les Fleurs du Mal* était une cathédrale, « Une charogne » serait sa charpente. « Spleen LXXVIII » ou « Le serpent qui danse » sont certes des rouages majeurs de la mécanique décadente du poète, mais rien n'égale « Une charogne », corps et esprit de la décadence baudelairienne. À travers ce poème, Baudelaire fait la synthèse de son art et se permet de surcroit de rappeler la vocation magique du poète quasi-démiurge. « Une charogne » n'est pas une simple provocation de dandy, d'esthète décadent, c'est également un poème nécromancien et une trace de l'esprit antimoderne de son auteur, ce qui nous semble primordial de rappeler à l'heure où nous nous apprêtons à célébrer le bicentenaire de sa naissance et où le mot « modernité » sera sur toutes les lèvres.

Le cœur du projet baudelairien tient en la description morbide d'un cadavre ravivée par le souvenir d'une promenade en agréable compagnie. « Une charogne » se révèle une provocation double. C'est tout d'abord une parodie de Ronsard sous forme décadente. « Mignonne allons voir si la rose » devient « Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme », et le rappel de la mort imminente des deux dernières strophes renvoie à la classique obsession du poète de la Pléiade pour la séduction sous forme de chantage, la femme aimée étant sommée de répondre aux avances de l'artiste fameux, seul capable d'immortaliser son corps pourrissant. « Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie ! » écrit ce cher Ronsard, tandis que Baudelaire, plus subtil peut-être, enjoint sa compagne à expliquer à « la vermine » qu'il a fait son travail de poète.

La seconde provocation est plus subtile. En disposant sous le regard une charogne qu'il dissèque et poétise, Baudelaire rappelle à son époque la vérité de la mort. Dans son essai *Le XIX^e^ siècle à travers les âges*, Philippe Muray explique que la véritable révolution qui s'opère, avant 1789, est celle de 1786, soit la disparition du Cimetière des Innocents. D'après Muray, le

« dixneuvièmisme » est cette volonté de faire disparaitre le Mal, le péché originel, toutes ces conceptions chrétiennes obsolètes qui peuvent empêcher l'Homme de trouver le bonheur. Ainsi, le Cimetière des Innocents, terrifiant rappel de la Mort au cœur de Paris, se devait de disparaitre du regard dans une société de plus en plus hermétique à l'idée de Mal, de Mort et de souffrance.[1] Baudelaire apparait dès lors comme un antimoderne, lui qui, dans *Les Fleurs du Mal*, joue avec des thèmes certes souvent licencieux, mais aussi foncièrement catholiques et, de fait, pratiquement réactionnaires. « Une charogne » ne doit pas être seulement lu comme un poème décadent à l'esthétique fin-de-siècle, mais également comme le contre-pied d'une époque qui commence à vouloir couvrir cette mort qu'elle ne saurait voir.

Le pouvoir démiurgique du poète est ravivé dans « Une charogne » d'une façon bien plus subtile que les vers somme toute tape-à-l'œil de « L'albatros ». Le poète n'est plus seulement représenté comme un esthète incompris qui souhaite être délivré des pesanteurs du réel, il devient ce magicien rimbaldien, qui bénéficie d'un œil unique et insuffle la vie à sa création. Si « le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague | vivait en se multipliant », c'est bien parce que le poète l'anime par le langage et non seulement parce que Baudelaire décrit le cadavre. Le pouvoir poétique confère à ce corps décomposé un souffle artistique, soit la « musique » ou la peinture (« toile »). La charogne baudelairienne prend vie dans le poème, par un effet nécromantique pervers : le poète renoue avec l'obsession décadente pour l'artifice et la création divine, souvent moquée ou pervertie. Tandis que Raoule de Vénérande créé un automate à partir du cadavre de son amant dans *Monsieur Vénus* de Rachilde, Baudelaire confère la vie à un cadavre le temps d'un poème à la gloire de l'esthétique. Alors Baudelaire, poète vaudou ? Disons plutôt nécromancien, conscient de la toute-puissance du langage et de l'oralité primaire de l'art poétique.

Enfin il est essentiel d'affirmer que Baudelaire, poète de la modernité, était surtout un antimoderne carabiné. C'est là tout son paradoxe, déjà commenté par Antoine Compagnon.[2] « Une charogne » peut dès lors être lu comme une métaphore filée dédiée à une société haïe. Cette « femme lubrique », au « ventre plein d'exhalaisons », ne serait-ce pas la République, détestée par

le poète ?[3] Et ces « noirs bataillons de larves », ne serait-ce pas l'engeance républicaine ? Enfin que dire de ce fameux vers « On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague, | Vivait en se multipliant » si ce n'est qu'il pourrait être la métaphore d'un pays déserté par toute spiritualité, et dont le terme « vivait » ne peut s'appliquer que dans un sens bassement biologique.

Relire « Une charogne » c'est donc se souvenir d'un Baudelaire radical, provocateur, antimoderne à l'origine de la modernité poétique, étrange catholique décadent et esthète fin-de-siècle. Célébrer Baudelaire c'est embrasser tout cela à la fois, c'est méditer sur le corps et l'esprit de sa poésie.

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[1] « Pour que le XIX[e] siècle soit possible, pour qu'il puisse naître avec toute l'originalité que, j'espère, on verra se dessiner au fil des chapitres qui vont suivre, pour qu'il devienne ce qu'il devrait être, mais aussi et d'abord pour qu'il commence, il a donc fallu et peut-être suffi que le voisinage innocents-macchabées, cette mitoyenneté insupportable, apparaisse brusquement comme abominable. Qu'on y introduise une contradiction, une opposition, un ensemble de lois séparantes. » (Philippe Muray, *le XIX[e] siècle à travers les âges* (Paris : Gallimard, 1999), p. 25.)

[2] Dans son ouvrage *Les antimodernes de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris : Gallimard, 2016).

[3]« Nous avons tous l'esprit républicain dans les veines, comme la vérole dans les os, nous sommes démocratisés et sy philisés. » Charles Baudelaire, *Pauvre Belgique !, Œuvres complètes* (Paris : Gallimard, « Bibl. de la Pléiade », II, 1976), p. 961.

Baudelaire's Graves

Melanie Hawthorne

Texas A&M University

Despite my avowed rationalism, nothing could induce me to spend a night in a cemetery, but during the daylight hours, I am the one haunting the dead. I am, I have come to understand, a taphophile. To my mind, graves are a great way to get to know people, and when I teach Baudelaire, I often introduce students to his work through his graves. I say 'graves' in the plural because he has two, though one is strictly speaking only a cenotaph in the sense that it is an empty memorial with no body present.

I start my introduction with poor Charles' actual burial site: the Aupick family plot near the western wall of the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris. Here, he is reunited with his mother, at least, and this is where poetic pilgrims leave their tributes: selected quotations (the recommendation to be drunk seems to be a perennial favorite, and strikes a chord with students, too), personal testimonials, and assorted objects (flowers, candles, metro tickets). This photo from 2011 shows a sample of the appreciations that are left in many languages.

Fig. 1: Tributes to Baudelaire.

But next I talk about how Baudelaire was so unhappy with having to live with his military stepfather, the General Aupick, even posthumously (a burial plot is in perpetuity, after all), that many years after his death in 1867, his friends clubbed together to buy him a second residence as far away as possible, clear on the other side of the cemetery, tucked up against the eastern wall. Here, in 1892, a memorial was dedicated to the legacy of Baudelaire, whose work resonated so loudly at the fin de siècle. It consists of a sculpture by José de Charmoy representing 'l'ennui' in the form of the bust of a floppy-haired man hunched over, his chin resting despondently on his hands, looking down from atop a column, while a prehistoric-looking bat is spread out below him. The bat is dissolving into a skeleton, while a life-size sculpture of the body of Baudelaire in his winding sheet is laid out below. This macabre ensemble serves as an excellent introduction to the work of a poet who thought that ennui was the greatest evil, and who embraced the idea of death as eternal rest, a moment of release rehearsed every evening with the arrival of nightfall, a welcome respite from daily pain.

Fig. 2: Baudelaire and 'l'ennui'.

Incomparable Baudelaire

Joanna Rajkumar

Mon enfant, mon frère,
Mon Papa Baudelaire,
Amant passionné, cruel et taciturne,
Parfait initié renversant Saturne.

Quand je songe à la douceur
D'un si grand voyage, brille la lueur,
Étrange et familière, d'un souvenir
Infini et d'un rêve à venir.

De toi à moi, les siècles peuvent bien passer,
Avivent un cœur profondément prononcé
La trace de l'archet et le poinçon de l'éphémère,

Pendant que le temps améthyste nous change,
Par le chant renouvelé de sa louange,
Laissons couler en nous l'ultime mystère.

La première fois que je rencontre Baudelaire, je dois avoir dix ans.

Dans la bibliothèque familiale que j'écume déjà depuis un moment, je tombe sur une ancienne édition des *Fleurs du Mal* en cuir vert foncé, comme les pins, et lettres dorées. J'ai déjà lu de grands romans de Hugo, mais je n'ai pas encore dévoré de poésie. Je recopie « L'invitation au voyage » dans mon premier carnet de poésies, juste après « Le dormeur du Val » sur lequel s'ouvre le cahier bleu nuit. Je les apprends par cœur, comme tous les textes que je recopie dans ce journal d'incantations intimes.

« L'invitation », l'invitation à la poésie, j'y reviens toujours, comme à d'autres poèmes comme « Correspondances ». Rien de très original, mais comme l'a formulé le poète inventant la modernité, la force du cliché délivre un certain génie. Et puis dans *Le Spleen de Paris*, « Les fenêtres », « Le mauvais vitrier », et tant d'autres… Et aussi la correspondance, les textes de Benjamin sur Baudelaire, le monde proprement infini à l'échelle humaine des textes de Baudelaire et sur Baudelaire. Ah ! « voir la vie en beau », en sachant que le verre se brise, la « Conscience dans

le Mal », et puis, au-delà de la perte de l'idéal pourtant maintenu, faire autrement la synthèse de ce dont Baudelaire fait clivage.

Quand on fait lire Baudelaire aux étudiants et aux lycéens, un certain nombre de remarques reviennent. Tous disent d'abord à quel point c'est beau, comment les appels au rêve sont puissants, comment la douleur est forte, l'effet intense et déroutant de ce double mouvement d'envol et de chute, comme dans « L'albatros » ou « Chambre double ». Les lycéens sont souvent surpris de ce qu'ils sentent de transgression, de révolte et de subversion : « c'est un fou, c'est un provocateur, un nécrophile, il va loin ! ». Souvent « c'est un génie ! », « c'est vrai, qu'avec la boue, il fait de l'or… ». Toujours, des remarques sur la musique et la puissance de suggestion…

Baudelaire ayant diagnostiqué à l'avance de nombreux maux se déployant au XX^{e} et prenant une forme exponentielle au XXI^{e}, travailler sur cette œuvre superlative comme sur ses postérités européennes donne plus que je ne saurais le dire. J'ai trouvé ce que je cherchais et bien au-delà. Écrivant sur une ligne de crête, au point de bascule entre un ancien et un nouveau monde, Baudelaire aiguise la compréhension au bout d'une lame et développe un art proprement poétique de la modulation entre concentration et dilatation, ligne sinueuse et ligne brisée.

The Toy and the Cemetery

Maria Scott

University of Exeter

Baudelaire is not to everybody's taste, but he does touch a lot of people. I remember visiting his grave in Montparnasse, many years ago. I realized at the last minute that I very much wanted to leave a gift but discovered that only the only flowers I could buy nearby were in the form of lavish funeral wreaths. I didn't have a lot of money, and after all Baudelaire had been dead for quite a long time; also, unlike him, I had never been of a naturally extravagant disposition. As a last resort, I went into a shop beside the graveyard and put a coin into a dispensing machine full of cheap toys in plastic capsules. This seemed an appropriate enough gift for a man who, in both his essay 'A Philosophy of Toys' and the prose poem 'The Toy of the Poor', recommends the supposedly innocent and amusing pastime of distributing cheap, mass-produced toys to street children for the sheer pleasure of seeing their eyes widen before they scamper off like cats with their prizes. I felt sure he would not feel slighted by my gift. I felt even more certain of this when, with some relief and not a little dark laughter, I found inside my plastic egg a set of tiny bat wings and fangs. This seemed a fitting gift for a poet who liked to imagine sexual relations with vampires. Over I went to lay my shabby but amusing tribute on his grave.

Baudelaire wrote often about corpses. They are regularly portrayed, in his verse poetry, as food for worms, vermin, birds, maggots. He wrote about the dead bodies of women he loved, of the corpses of men and women he did not know, of animated skeletons, and of his own dead body. Dead bodies, in his poetry, rarely seem entirely dead. In one of his prose poems, 'Laquelle est la vraie?', the narrator stands at the freshly filled grave of an idealized woman, when a very different version of the same woman materializes before him; the narrator stamps his foot so hard in refusal of this hysteric's claim to be his beloved, that his leg becomes buried in 'the grave of the ideal'. In another prose poem, 'Le Tir et le Cimetière', a man visits a graveyard abuzz with the

sounds and sensations of life and hears a voice from below the ground: it tells him that death is the only truth. Baudelaire's grave, as a result, seemed an impossible place: how could someone so conscious, in life, of death, and who so often wrote about the endurance of consciousness after death, now be devoid, in death, of all consciousness?

The first thing that struck me, on seeing Baudelaire's final resting place, was the relatively small space accorded to him on the gravestone: he was described in two lines, merely as the stepson of Jacques Aupick. Below these lines was the name of his mother, given as 'Caroline Archenbaut Defayes'. He loved his mother very much and would no doubt have been glad at the thought that his remains would spend eternity alongside hers. She had seven lines. Above both of their names, however, dominating both, was that of the General Jacques Aupick: ten lines. Aupick was a military man who became a well-known and respected statesman later in life: an ambassador and senator under Napoleon III's Second Empire. He disapproved of his stepson's choices in life, and Baudelaire, in turn, had little love for his stepfather; he is said to have called for his fellow insurgents, in February 1848, to shoot the General Aupick. The injustice of his posthumous tethering to the detested stepfather, and the insult of the gravestone's implied hierarchy, cut me to the quick.

But there is a twist to this story (as so often in Baudelaire's writing, though usually in the other direction), because piled high on this grave were fresh bouquets of flowers, often accompanied by cards. Someone had left a beautiful silver-on-blue handwritten version of 'À une passante', a poem that tells of a fleeting meeting of eyes on a crowded street, and which speculates about a connection that may or may not defy death. During his lifetime, Baudelaire only intermittently found the understanding that he craved, but he has certainly found it since his death, to the extent that such a finding is possible after death.

Baudelaire is not known for his sense of humour, but he was and remains very funny. There is one passage in his literary criticism that never fails to make me laugh. It is in his 1861 essay on Théodore de Banville, the Parnassian poet and generally luckier-in-life friend of

Baudelaire. The relationship between the two men was warm, though no doubt somewhat strained by the fact that one of Baudelaire's mistresses, Marie Daubrun, had recently left him for Banville. In a passage from the essay that discusses Banville's vision of his own afterlife, he notes that any hint of rot or decay would travesty the poet's grand ideas about himself. He goes on to quote Banville's lyrical evocation of his place at an eternal banquet, dressed in purple, drinking nectar, and seated beside the Renaissance poet Pierre Ronsard, being served by feminine forms more beautiful than any physical body could ever be. 'J'aime cela', observes Baudelaire, tongue firmly planted in cheek: 'I consider this love of luxury, reaching beyond the grave, to be a mark and proof of grandeur. I am touched by the marvels and majesties that the poet decrees in favour of whosoever touches the lyre' ('Sur mes contemporains: Théodore de Banville', my translation).

Banville, I suspect, would not have approved of the plastic bat wings. Baudelaire, I hope, might just have been tickled.

Disturbance

Adam Thorpe

'Search for my heart no longer: the wild beasts have eaten it.'
(Charles Baudelaire, 'Causerie')

The Tollygunge Club required a certain courage to enter. Although those of Indian origin were just as welcome as whites (or any other colour combination), an invisible net fell upon everyone present that ensured the divide remained. The one unifying factor was the smell of whisky or gin beneath a pall of sweet tobacco.

The mansion's tall and slender colonnades ensured that everyone felt dwarfed.

After ten years or so of Independence, Calcutta was already crumbling. The fabric of the city was not yet in mortal danger, but cracks and mossy patches were ineluctably growing. Upkeep was neglected, in favour of stark new concrete buildings of a sickly pallor. The old hands, white or native, grumbled, but most skulls remained intact these days, and the chances of being singled out by a loose brick or rock were now minimal. Skyscrapers did not yet march across the horizon. Very few buildings stretched higher than four or five floors. The city was still, in theory, on a human scale.

The teeming crowds below, however, had begun to grow restless and were already flooding from the countryside into the narrow streets of the slums. The poor died in droves and it might take weeks to remove a beggar's corpse, even from the smart suburbs with their broad and leafy avenues. The houses there were huge, especially from the point of view of a child like Timothy, for whom home meant the cool of a living-room and its rattling air-conditioner, or the momentary swelter of the garden as you slipped into the relief of its deep shade, with spacious fields and tall reeds beyond.

The family *ayah* was skinny with narrow cheek-bones, her agelessness something indistinguishable from the rest, like her patchouli-scented skin and its hint of animal sweat. This

smell was resurrected whenever Timothy stroked the tiger pelt draped over the couch, the fur showing bare patches of hide, the muzzle hard and dry. The gloom within was to keep the cool from crumbling into the swelter of outdoors, where it eventually met with the honking cars and taxis you could taste on your tongue. The traffic was still light back then, however, in the 1950s – much of it powered by bony beasts (responsible for the ubiquitous heaps of dung), or the pressure of naked foot on rusty pedal.

Until the burglary, life was uneventful and even pleasant. Timothy's *ayah* accompanied him to his first school (the Elementary), nattering to their driver, her slim hands with their bony fingers weaving an airy dance. Timothy's mother was already poorly with some unidentified disease that kept her mostly in bed for week after week, staining the air.

Meanwhile, Father's laugh boomed with hearty frequency, hiding his distress.

Timothy had a special friendship with their sweeper, who was an Untouchable with an enormous beard, its sinuousness always shiny with oil and beautifully groomed. 'He has impeccable manners,' Mother declared from her creaking basketweave couch, and Father agreed. Timothy felt proud on the sweeper's behalf. His name was Rahul.

Then the burglars came. They were efficient and deadly, cutting the heavy-duty wire and breaking in by the much flimsier side door. Fortunately, given the murderous reputation of these criminals, Father's sleep-filled reaction to the disturbance was merely to fetch a glass of water, settle Timothy and ignore, still half asleep, the curious fact that the door, opening onto the huge central living-room, was ajar.

His father closed it without checking behind, a chance decision that undoubtedly saved the entire family from a gory fate.

Mother's jewellery box of ebony, placed for safety just behind her head, had been emptied as if by a wraith, leaving only a near-worthless coin (an old shilling from the 1840s). The deadly curved *kukri* blade, razor-sharp, had been fetched down from its perch and lay in the corner. Nothing else was missing.

The police were not that interested, given the break-in did not involve a killing. Ever after, of course, Timothy's curiosity grew into a maddening need to clarify what had happened, to shed light on the murk and the secrecy. The slim brown hand of the burglar (while Timothy himself only ever pictured one individual, it was much more likely there were several) loomed with ghastly frequency in his feverish dreams, which prolonged drug use only worsened from his late teens.

A few years later, back home in Chiswick for the Easter holidays (he was reading French at Exeter), his father's long furlough now over without regrets, Timothy jumped ship without warning.

Only a bundle of washing, left on the fifteenth floor of the anonymous tower block dominating the Old Kent Road, provided any sort of clue, as the blustery wind revealed dawn.

Few were surprised, given his long history of depression, anxiety or worse, including two previous suicide attempts. No one but close family recalled the trauma of the burglary long before. It had marked him deeply, we all agreed.

Found quite by chance near the bins, above a line of poetry in French, also in his own hand ('Ne cherchez plus mon cœur; les bêtes l'ont mangé'), the single word *gunge* was written in shaky block capitals on a carefully folded sheet of foolscap.

Whether this had any bearing on the tragedy, with its dim reminder of the famous colonial club, no one knew.

The rest was silence.

Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne'

David Weir

The Cooper Union, New York

In the late 1980s I taught Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' to a class of first-year students using the Richard Howard translation of *Les Fleurs du mal* (1982). Howard was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the institution (one of them, anyway) where I was un-gainfully employed: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, a progressive professional college for would-be artists, architects, and engineers located in the neighbourhood of New York City formerly known as the Lower East Side but now called, for reasons of real estate gentrification, the East Village. The year was likely 1987 or soon thereafter because 1987 was the year the Pet Shop Boys released their synth-pop hit 'I Want a Dog'. The dog the Pet Shop Boys wanted was a Chihuahua and Richard Howard had a little dog that he sometimes carried around with him, perhaps so that when he got back to his small flat, he could hear somebody bark (as the song goes). Naturally, whenever Howard would sit outside my office, I would play 'I Want a Dog' at very high volume on a boom box (it was the '80s, after all).

I mention this anecdote because it perhaps explains why I cannot help but think of the dead animal in Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' as a dog, though probably not a Chihuahua; a mongrel, rather. Only recently has it come to my attention that not everyone understands the animal as a dog; other carrion candidates include the homely cow and the workaday horse, neither of which strikes me as remotely plausible. To those readers who advocate for either the bovine or equine identities, I say, 'What? You can't be serious! Have you never heard of the doctrine of correspondences? What about Richard Howard and his little dog? What about the Pet Shop Boys?'

A dog, then: but when teaching the poem, I always found it best not to suggest the canine identity of the carrion right away, not least because the poem itself defers that literal

possibility until the reference to what Howard calls 'an anxious bitch' (une chienne inquiète), another (?) dog that had been feeding on the dead animal (it's a dog-eat-dog world, after all) just before being interrupted by the lovers out for a romantic stroll 'on that lovely summer day' (Ce beau matin d'été si doux). I say 'lovers' because the diction in the first line of the poem evokes the convention of Romantic recollection: 'Remember, my love, the thing we saw' (Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme). The romantic epithet that Howard renders 'my love' is actually 'my soul', which raises the possibility that the poet is out for a stroll alone, talking to himself, or rather, to his soul. That prospect is heightened in the tenth stanza:

> – Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,
> À cette horrible infection,
> Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,
> Vous, mon ange et ma passion!

The last two lines revert to the romantic 'soul' language of the opening: 'You, the light of my life, the sun | and moon and stars of my love!' as Howard has it. His translation of the first two lines of this quatrain is a bit too abstract: 'Yet you will come to this offence, | this horrible decay'; moreover, 'decay' in place of 'infection' – to my mind, at least – misses the sense of animation earlier in the poem, where death fairly seethes with life (*decay* seems a passive state, *infection* active). But Howard's omission of 'semblable' is really problematic. We know how important that word is because of 'Au Lecteur', where it signals the kinship of poet and reader on the basis of their shared sinfulness. The word here also signals correspondence between 'ordure' and 'âme': both are infected with something deadly, or rather deathly – the carrion suffers from decomposition, the soul from sin. The soul itself, it seems, is *une charogne*.

Like *âme*, the grammatical gender of *charogne* is feminine, but the gender correspondence goes beyond grammar, *charogne* being Parisian street slang for 'slut', as in the Aristide Bruant chanson 'Crâneuse' ['The Braggart'], where *charogne* appears alongside more familiar whorish epithets such as *salope* and *putain* (the song also includes the epithet *vache d'métier*, 'professional cow', which might force me to let go of my canine compulsion). The *charogne* meta-whore

Baudelaire has going is impressive, to say the least: the carrion creature is on a bed (of stones), legs in the air, very like a woman in a state of sexual arousal ('comme une femme lubrique'), or, possibly, like a woman giving birth – to decay. Howard translates 'larves' as maggots, which is fair enough, given that there are flies buzzing about the dead animal. Baudelaire's reference to 'a curious music' (une étrange musique) made by the maggots gnawing away always prompted a moment of Romantic recollection of my own in the classroom, because one of my most cherished childhood memories is hearing the faint whispering sound that maggots make at the bottom of a battered metal garbage bin when they are at their disgusting, unending repast. (The memory antedates the era of today's plastic garbage bags – I refer to a time when offal in a garbage bin was truly awful, so I sorrow for children today who will never know such memories, *hélas*!)

A fair definition of decadent poetry might be corruption recollected in tranquility. That, at least, seems to be the case with 'Une Charogne', which ends by reprising the tired trope of the poet making his belovèd immortal through his art, but with a sick, Baudelairean twist. How sick depends on whether 'mon âme' is 'my love' or 'my soul'. If addressed to a woman whose destiny is the same as any old *charogne*, the poet's assurance that his art will preserve 'the sacred essence' and 'the form' (la forme et l'essence divine) of his 'rotted loves' (mes amours décomposés), that pretty much buries the Romantic tradition once and for all. But if it is the soul itself that is left to rot while the poetry lives on, that undermines much more – the Christian faith, in fact.

Either way, such sicknesses are things that first-year students absolutely need to understand and appreciate. That particular Baudelairean dog, to vary a folksy American adage, will definitely hunt.

Martin Lockerd, *Decadent Catholicism and the Making of Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 231pp.
ISBN 9781350137653

Matthew Bradley

University of Liverpool

The study of decadence and Christianity generates powerful and difficult contradictions. To focus in detail on any part seems always to risk misrepresentation of the whole. It forces the tradition's major intellectual currents into open (and seemingly unresolvable) confrontation. To stress a Baudelairean aesthetic of original sin and evil is to edge out a Paterian aesthetic of relativism, with which it is almost completely irreconcilable. To stress the framework of Christian beliefs, symbols and rituals on which much decadent literature so clearly draws is to risk ignoring the tradition's equally clear debts to a frequently anti-Christian Hellenism (a relationship for which it is very difficult to find a satisfactory conceptualization, save the old get-out 'paradoxical'). To focus on theology dries decadent Christianity out, makes it too scholarly; but to ignore it makes it not scholarly enough, just another brand of subversive whimsy. And, of course, even to ask the question of whether decadent religion is 'sincere' or 'insincere', 'serious' or 'aesthetic' (and these types of question still unquestionably haunt the roots of this field) lumpenly enshrines the very hierarchies that decadence sets out to destabilize.

Ellis Hanson attempted to solve this problem in his ground-breaking *Decadence and Catholicism* (1993) by focusing these contradictions through a single lens of queer performativity, brilliantly drawing on the shared penchant of both decadence *and* Catholicism to provide spaces for this type of experience. Hanson marshalled the relationship between decadence and religion into coherence, but the way he achieved that was to consider Roman Catholicism as thoroughly decadent already, seemingly just waiting for its literary counterpart to catch up and find it. Hanson's range across the canon of decadent engagements with religious discourse is very comprehensive (it remains the pre-eminent work on the subject nearly thirty years on), but its conceptualization

of religion is a much smaller and more partial thing: exclusively Roman Catholic, and near-exclusively defined by the power of that Catholicism's performativity and the queer potential it unlocks.

Whilst Martin Lockerd's *Decadent Catholicism and the Making of Modernism* intermittently uses the lens of queer theory to good effect, it also gives us a more traditional (and arguably more recognizable) account of Catholicism. Indeed, while Lockerd clearly conceives his book as, at some level, the heir to Hanson (he explicitly picks up Hanson's suggestion to give Ronald Firbank and Evelyn Waugh more attention as inheritors of the decadent-Catholic mode), his project mostly eschews the earlier book's methodological radicalism. In fact, for the most part Lockerd's is a relatively traditional study of influence – or, as he puts it, of *anamnesis,* a term originally used by Socrates to denote 'an unforgetting of knowledge lost by the soul in the trauma of rebirth' (p. 2). And while we understand much more of the nature of decadence's 'rebirth' into modernism than we did even ten years ago (via the scholarship of Kate Hext, Kristin Mahoney, Alex Murray, and Vincent Sherry), religion hasn't yet played any significant part in this understanding, as Lockerd correctly contends.

Lockerd's twofold aim is to bolster the status of nineteenth-century decadence as a full-blown Catholic revival in literature – he calls it 'the most substantial Catholic literary movement in Protestant Britain until the Catholic revival of the mid-twentieth century' (p. 23) – and to strengthen the connective tissue around our knowledge of decadence and religion as it manifested *between* those two moments. The focus is thus mainly on high modernism, although Lockerd's sense of both the decadent and the modernist canons is very conservative (Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Lionel Johnson, and Ernest Dowson the main players for decadence, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce for modernism). The absence of figures like Frederick Rolfe and Michael Field (to name only two/three) somewhat impairs Lockerd's ability to fully advocate for decadence's influential impact as Catholic literature (and I would agree with his overall claim). More seriously, however, it means ignoring much of the recent critical work on decadence which is the primary

context for his study ('Michael Field', for example, only appears in the index as a sub-heading to other entries). Despite this – and I fully acknowledge that the nature of the influence being tracked here means a natural skew towards decadent figures who were well known in the early twentieth century – Lockerd's overall narrative, of a high modernism in which 'decadent Catholicism' is a lively key constituent, is nonetheless impressive, and the connections he makes are well-forged.

The first chapter provides a useful overview of the key encounters between literary decadence and religion in the late nineteenth century, and it acts as an excellent primer and introduction to the topic of decadent religion; even (or perhaps especially) read in isolation, it would be very useful for students coming to the subject for the first time. The second chapter charts the various attempts made by certain modernists to firmly relegate decadence to history – and while this is not really news in headline terms, Lockerd provides a useful guide to 'decadent Catholicism' in the early work of Yeats and Pound. For this reader, it was the analysis of the latter that was more striking: while I was well aware of Yeats's various debts to decadence (and his infamous attempts to write himself out of it as sole 'survivor' in 'The Tragic Generation'), I was intrigued to discover the way in which Pound's poetry from the 1900s also draws from this well. Lockerd provides sensitive readings of Pound's poems like 'In Praise of Ysolt' and 'Night Litany', and overall provides a valuable reassessment of Pound's relation to decadence. The big archival claim in this chapter is based on a particular copy of Lionel Johnson's collected poems which Pound apparently gifted to Eliot. Lockerd sees his sending of the collection (to which Pound wrote a preface) as an attempt on Pound's part to recruit Eliot into the cause of rubbishing the poets of the late 'nineties – and Eliot's subsequent re-publication of Pound's preface as an almost subversive refusal to do so. It's a neat materialization of a particular dynamic within the Eliot/Pound relationship, although I was never quite convinced that the fact of the gift carried the importance Lockerd claims.

The third chapter, 'T. S. Eliot's Decadent (Anglo)-Catholicism' argues that Eliot's later religious poetry 'grows into, not out of, his darkly satirical and overtly decadent work' (p. 77).

Again, the overall thesis is convincing, and some original analyses are made of Eliot's debt to Beardsley in particular. Above all, it is the close poetic links which really succeed here – the comparison of Eliot's and Johnson's 'Ash Wednesday' poems, for example, is excellent. However, the brackets in the chapter title are important, because here, as in the rest of the book, distinctions between different types of Christian belief are made to seem relatively unimportant. This has implications both for individuals like Eliot (who, after all, converted to Anglicanism), but also for the wider issue of how decadent writers engaged with religious discourse. Lockerd's book is a study of British decadence, and while at one point Lockerd states that nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholicism helped British decadence to see Catholicism 'as less a latent cultural force in need of revival or rejection than a foreign entity to which one might defect' (p. 8), it's perhaps a little disappointing that there isn't more than this, given the counter-cultural power of Anglo-Catholicism in decadence's formative years and the very different religious contexts of Britain and mainland Europe in both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Lockerd's next chapter is on the writing of George Moore and Joyce, where he ingeniously shows both writers as participating in the decadent-Catholic discourse even as they reject it – 'the relationship between decadence and Catholicism is not exclusively positive or generative' (p. 117). Much of this chapter focuses on 'decadent' poetry written by Moore's and Joyce's fictional characters (Mike Fletcher, Dayne in *Confessions of a Young Man,* and Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist*), a framing which gives a delightfully refreshing take on the fairly well-trodden ground of decadent satire. Sometimes A. C. Swinburne feels a little like the missing link here: Lockerd is right to say that in the *Confessions*, Dayne's poem 'Nostalgia', in which a speaker looks back to an idealized pagan past in favour of the 'grey doubt' of the present-day, recalls Yeats's 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', but surely Swinburne's 'Hymn to Prosperpine' is the common ancestor? Likewise, Stephen Dedalus' poems supplanting the Virgin Mary with a figure of erotic desire may recall Dowson, but seem just as much (if not more) to be reminiscent of 'Laus Veneris' and 'Dolores'.

The final chapter proper, 'Decadent Catholicism Revisited', sees something of a change of tack. Technically on Firbank and Waugh, Firbank is dealt with fairly briskly in order to get to Waugh and in particular to *Brideshead*, where one senses that Lockerd's real enthusiasm lies. Whilst retaining an element of influence-study (there's a convincing argument for the importance of Beardsley's 'Et in Arcadia Ego' on the 'fragile paradise' of Waugh's famous opening (p. 161), and for Wilde as a significant role model for Lord Marchmain's deathbed conversion), it is mostly comprised of an argument that the end of *Brideshead* offers the prospect of celibacy, 'the queerest form of human sexuality', as a viable alternative to the equally undesirable alternatives of fin de siècle decadence and soulless modernity (pp. 173, 175). In Lockerd's reading, the prospect of Charles's lay celibacy, far from being a form of self-denial or a novelistically disappointing refuge in orthodoxy, actually offers a satisfying realization and unification of the aesthetic, erotic, and religious senses. It is perhaps Lockerd's most confident and memorable argument, passionate and convincingly made, although it is quite a different argument in kind to the other chapters (and the one that calls back to Hanson's methodology the most strongly). It is also a reminder that class may play a more important part in the history of decadent religion than we commonly acknowledge: certainly Catholicism in *Brideshead,* which can often seem the figure for a kind of exclusively aristocratic experience which might well be in decay but which is still making a valuable if doomed stand against middle-class materialism, seems to illuminate a class dynamic in decadence not often talked about in relation to religion. This isn't necessarily how Lockerd sees the novel, but his original and thoughtful approach to it is still a reminder of how much analysing decadent religion's impact on twentieth- and twenty-first century writing might encourage us to see it anew. This applies equally well to Lockerd's coda to the book, which brings this approach up to date by examining the strands of decadent Catholicism detectable in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* and D. B. C. Pierre's *Lights Out in Wonderland.*

One final pedantic point, and probably only relevant if recommending the book to students: because of what I presume to be a publisher's error, the reproductions of Beardsley's

'The Climax' and 'The Dancer's Reward' are labelled wrongly (i.e., each is given as being the other). It is minor, it will surely annoy Lockerd more than it annoys anyone else, and it certainly does not detract from what is overall a very lively study, which makes its case convincingly and in a prose style which is highly readable, incisive, and memorable. And if some of the omissions niggle, it's perhaps just a reminder that decadent religion is a field particularly doomed to always be a shadow or two short of the ideal – an irony that certainly would not have been lost on the decadents, or the decadent-Catholic modernists that succeeded them.

Marie Kawthar Daouda, *L'Anti-Salomé: Représentations de la féminité bienveillante au temps de la Décadence (1850-1910)*, Romanticism and after in France, Vol. 29 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020), pp. xiv + 330
ISBN 9781788747080

Alexandre Burin

University of Manchester

Salome is undoubtedly the most prominent femme fatale of the fin de siècle. In his 1967 study of Salome, Michel Décaudin even calls her a 'fin de siècle myth'.[1] From Stéphane Mallarmé's poetic fragment 'Hérodiade' and Gustave Flaubert's tale *Herodias* (1877) to Jules Laforgue's and Oscar Wilde's versions of *Salomé* (1887; 1892), many writers used the young Jewish princess as a literary trope; she became, so to speak, 'inevitable'.[2] Indeed, Salome was the subject of poems, plays, stories, novels, operas, even posters and decorative objects, as well as paintings (J.-K. Huysmans famously dedicated many pages of *À rebours* (1884) to Gustave Moreau's symbolist representations of Salome, which prompted Bram Dijkstra to write that Moreau's *Salomé* (1876) 'inaugurated the late nineteenth century's feverish exploration of every possible visual detail expressive of this young lady's hunger for St. John the Baptist's head').[3] Salome was in fact so omnipresent in the literary field that in 1912 Maurice Krafft claimed to have recorded 2,789 French poets who had written about the dancer, before she slowly faded out of fashion later in the century.[4] Even so the mythification of Salome and her dance engendered a cultural phenomenon – known as the 'Salome epidemic' or 'Salomania' on US opera and theatre stages in 1908-09 – which spread throughout Europe and America in the early twentieth century.[5] With the symbolic beheading of John the Baptist, Salome came to crystallize all the anxieties of the fin-de-siècle hero, most notably the destructive and malevolent forms of femininity. To this day, the figure of Salome still generates many literary, social, and cultural debates about women, sexuality, immigration, race, and morality.

In her stimulating *L'Anti-Salomé* (2020), Marie Kawthar Daouda chooses to concentrate on the reverse image of Salome as a figure of malevolent femininity. With the concept of 'bienveillance' – that is, *benevolentia*, good will, benevolence and kindness (p. 13), or the voluntary

provision of care toward someone in need – Daouda analyses the representation of what she coins 'benevolent femininity' in the fin de siècle through a typology of 'positive' characters found in decadent narratives. In her book, she examines figures of benevolent femininity that fall outside the deadly femme fatale spectrum, whose links with decapitation often give rise to considerations of language and its performative power. On the contrary, the anti-Salome is an alterocentric figure, 'celle qui se sacrifie pour faire advenir une ère nouvelle' [the one who sacrifices herself in order to bring about a new era] (p. 16) – in other words, while Salome cuts off the poet's head, as the author puts it, the anti-Salome crowns it (p. 16). The issue of self-sacrifice as a sign of strength, if not power and domination, is therefore central to this study. According to the author, '[s]e révèle en effet, derrière le mot de bienveillance, une transcendance de l'enjeu eudémonique vers un idéal où la volonté, l'acte et la parole ne feraient qu'un' [the word benevolence also reveals a transcendence of the eudaemonic issue towards an ideal where drive, action, and speech would become one] (p. 13). Analysing an imposing corpus of literary works from a wide range of authors of the long decadent period (1850-1910) – Émile Zola, John Henry Newman, the Goncourt brothers, Renée Vivien, Liane de Pougy, Marcel Schwob, Marie Corelli, Léon Bloy, George Macdonald, Jeanne de Tallenay, Pierre Louÿs, Jean Lorrain, Catulle Mendès, Jean Bertheroy, Félicien Champsaur, amongst others – Daouda recontextualizes the power of sacrificial women in the nineteenth century. In so doing, she reassesses benevolent female figures such as the Virgin Mary, Eve, Joan of Arc, Mary Magdalen, as well as androgynous female Orphic characters (e.g., Sappho, Hypathia), challenging the usual associations between seduction and evil that Salome represents. While the first two chapters are dedicated to the 'obvious' counter-figures to Salome (the Virgin Mary and Eve), sorrowful mothers, and the opposition between virgin figures who give speech and virgin figures who erase it, Chapter 3 addresses the question of androgyny (or rather, the question of 'benevolent androgyny'), not in terms of a representation of the New Woman as a positive threat to social order, but predominantly as the perception of the crisis of the epic model (p. 118) and a vector of sacrificial crisis and benevolence. Chapter 4 focuses on the representation of a more

disruptive form of holiness in figures such as Joan of Arc and Mary Magdalen. Indeed, their sacrifices seem to circumvent moral issues while remaining resolutely canonical (p. 161). Daouda notes for instance that 'la figure de Jeanne d'Arc […] met en évidence l'efficacité de la confrontation entre les codes hagiographiques et les enjeux esthétiques ou politiques de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle jusqu'à la Grande Guerre' [the figure of Joan of Arc […] highlights the efficacy of the confrontation between hagiographical codes and the aesthetic and political concerns of the second half of the nineteenth century until the Great War] (p. 161). In this sense, the dialectics of *devotio/salvatio* triggered by Joan of Arc are well represented in Michelet, Huysmans, and Blois (fairy and virgin, saint and monster, chimera), in turn engendering both history and 'rhetorical *inventio*' (p. 164). Finally, in Chapter 5, Daouda draws a parallel between figures of feminine benevolence towards affliction and Christ/Orpheus – also both representations of the romantic poet. In this concluding chapter, the author examines how such figures become 'l'allégorie d'une altérité salvifique' [the allegory of a saving otherness] (p. 221) in fin-de-siècle literature.

Daouda's book offers insight into the overlooked theme of 'benevolent femininity' in the second half of the nineteenth century. It proposes a brilliant alternative to the perception of women and femininity more generally in fin-de-siècle literature, along with an impressive collection of illustrations. Its original contribution lies in the comparative reading of texts and media from an angle that is both literary and theological. However, Daouda's serious and erudite study would have benefitted from a more thorough, and consistent, engagement with cultural, gender, and feminist theories, current debates about which are often neglected in the study (Julia Kristeva's concept of reliance in maternal eroticism could have been further developed in relation to the function of the *Mater Dolorosa* in decadent literature, while Hélène Cixous is only quoted once in the book). Conversely, Daouda's predominantly textual approach is drawn from a literary and theological reading of fin-de-siècle narratives; yet it misses the opportunity to properly engage theoretically with René Girard, who is referred to only sporadically and peripherally. Indeed, it

would have been interesting to see Daouda drawing further parallels between her textual analysis and Girard's theoretical reflections on sacrificial crisis and mimetic rivalry in literature and religion (he wrote about Salome, and the origin of language in relation to the scapegoat mechanism more generally),[6] along with the use of key theological terms in relation to decadent literature, such as 'benevolence', 'atonement', 'sacrifice', 'redemption', 'devotion', 'martyr', 'victim', etc.

Overall, notwithstanding some reservations about theoretical range, the book is beautifully written and rigorously researched. Daouda's *L'Anti-Salomé* will be significant for scholars in the field of fin-de-siècle literature and culture, particularly those interested in the theology of decadence, and a broader, non-academic audience alike.

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[1] Michel Décaudin, 'Un Mythe "fin de siècle": Salomé', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 4.1/2 (1967), 109-17 (p. 109).
[2] Pierre Jaudon refers to 'l'inévitable Salomé' in *L'Étouffement* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Plume, 1902), p. 86.
[3] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 384.
[4] Quoted in Décaudin, 'Un Mythe "fin de siècle": Salomé', p. 109.
[5] See Marlis Schweitzer, 'The Salome Epidemic: Degeneracy, Disease, and Race Suicide', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theatre,* ed. by Nadine George (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), pp. 890-921.
[6] See René Girard, 'Scandal and the dance: Salome in the Gospel of Mark', *New Literary History*, 15.2 (1984), 311-24. On the concept of the scapegoat, see Girard, *The Violence and the Sacred* [1972], trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), and *The Scapegoat* [1982], trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

Patricia Pulham, *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 245 pp.
ISBN 9780748693429

Eleanor Keane

Goldsmiths, University of London

Patricia Pulham's *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* offers a fresh perspective on the erotic charge attributed to statues and sculptures throughout history. From Ovid's myth of Pygmalion to the *tableaux vivants* of 'living statues' regularly performed on London's music hall stages (p. 14), the study provides convincing evidence that the long-held erotic resonance of statuary is fuelled by a 'tension between animation and stasis' and its unique placement within 'the liminal spaces between movement and stillness, life and death' (p. 13).

Pulham offers new insight into how this liminality adds to the eroticism of the ancient sculptural body by focussing on the use of the sculptural form to articulate, aestheticize, and normalize provocative expressions of desire in the nineteenth century. She notes in the introduction how the sexual nature of artefacts excavated from Pompeii became a source of increased curatorial unease, prompting curators to actively 'seek solutions, to restrict access' (p. 2) by sequestering the objects in secret museums or archives otherwise unavailable to the public. Yet desires that were too shocking to be expressed openly still found public exposure through the (often nude) sculptural forms on display in British and European art galleries and museums, and through the more intimate medium of the novel.

Pulham conducts a thorough and engaging exploration of how such works express a sexually charged sense of the haptic. While sculpture on display in museums and galleries remained physically untouchable, nineteenth-century texts were full of statue-like bodies that, for all their coldness and aloofness, remained responsive to human touch. Pulham terms these works a textual 'Secretum', a 'repository for forbidden love' (p. 2) that pays particular attention to this sense of the 'forbidden' and the taboo, often by portraying the relationship between the sculptor and their

sculpture in erotic terms. Throughout her study Pulham cites a range of examples spanning art, fiction, and poetry that illustrate the cross-gendered pervasiveness of this phenomenon. These include significant works such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) as well as lesser-known examples, such as Thomas Woolner's poem *Pygmalion* (1881), George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1895) and Olive Custance's 'Antinous' (1902).

In the first chapter, Pulham discusses the Victorian fascination with the Pygmalion myth that inspired such works, including an investigation of the myth's origins and legacy that is impressive in its scope and depth. As well as considering Ovid's version, Pulham highlights little-known earlier interpretations of the Pygmalion narrative. The discerning analysis of the variations between these texts demonstrates this study's relevance to classical scholars and enables further discussion of the enduring influence, malleability, and subversive erotic capability of the Pygmalion narrative. Pulham notes that within Ovid's version of the myth, Pygmalion's relationship to his statue is infused with an overt eroticism. The statue's transformation into a living, breathing woman becomes the precursor to a sexual encounter which culminates in the statue bearing Pygmalion's child – a fantasy of 'female passivity and masculine control' that 'clearly resonated with nineteenth-century Pygmalions' (p. 33). However, earlier variations of the Pygmalion myth associate Pygmalion's statue-love with transgression, and sexual and moral violation. These differing responses to the same narrative demonstrate how the Pygmalion myth constructed a 'conflict between lewdness and impurity' that 'afflicts the story from its earliest incarnations' (p. 30) and filters down to reach the nineteenth century, where it was noted by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. As Pulham observes, Ellis defined the term 'Pygmalionism' as the condition of 'falling in love with statues' (p. 32) and linked it to necrophilia (p. 91), an aspect Pulham scrutinizes in further detail in Chapter 5.

Pulham returns to the Pygmalion myth's negotiation of feminine purity and passivity in a close reading of the sexual politics of William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris, or The New Pygmalion* (1823) and William Morris' 'Pygmalion and the Image' (1888). She details how these examples followed

on from other nineteenth-century Pygmalion narratives where the statue-woman is transformed back to her original impassive state, a concept referred to as 'reverse pygmalionism' (p. 33). This reading outlines how the Victorian appropriation of the Pygmalion myth encouraged the aestheticization of an impossibly ideal female body, which was then promoted as a site of artistic fantasy and escapism, reflecting a wider, entrenched cultural anxiety surrounding sexuality, desire, and embodiment.

Pulham's analysis of both Morris' work and Woolner's twelve-book poem *Pygmalion* provides further valuable discussion of the complex sexual politics behind touch, tactility, and the haptic at work within the Pygmalion narrative. Pulham observes how both narratives break away from the Ovidian version of the myth in their hesitation to describe any sexual congress between the sculptor and the image; ultimately it is the goddess Aphrodite's touch which imbues the sculpture with life (p. 43). Haptic hesitancy and tension over the sensual are implied in Edward Burne-Jones' *Pygmalion and the Image* series and made overt in the imagery of repression, restraint, and ethereality in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), which, as Pulham argues, anticipates Morris' later work (p. 55). Chapters 2 and 3 offer closer scrutiny of the creative yet sometimes fraught interplay between imagination, desire, and sculpture. Chapter 2 explores the problematics of touch and 'reverse pygmalionism' within Arthur O'Shaughnessy's poetic series 'Thoughts in Marble' (1881) and Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* (1897). Pulham articulates in detail how O'Shaughnessy's knowledge of 'the heightened cultural awareness of classical sculpture' (p. 71), interest in Parnassianism (p. 68) and enthusiastic engagement with the work of leading decadent figures such as Algernon Charles Swinburne (p. 69) and Théophile Gautier (p. 68) resulted in his work reflecting intersections between poetic, artistic, and sculptural craftsmanship, and a 'tension between art, aestheticism and desire' (p. 77). Within O'Shaughnessy's 'Thoughts in Marble', the purity of form evoked by classical sculpture is questioned by an increasingly sensualized portrayal of gaze and touch.

The same conflict between desire, sculpture, and purity is visible in Hardy's implicit treatment of the Pygmalion myth in *The Well-Beloved*. As Pulham shows, both O'Shaughnessy's poetic work and Hardy's novel result from their engagement with classical sculpture and aestheticism and exemplify how the proliferation of Victorian Pygmalion narratives blurred the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate in order to construct transgressive fantasies of aestheticized desire. The associations between sculpture, death, and eros are further highlighted in Pulham's discussion of the necrophiliac aspect of the statue-sculptor relationship. Drawing on the work of critics such as Elisabeth Bronfen and Lisa Downing, Pulham offers new insight into how the spectral imagery and language bestowed upon statuary worked to express necrophiliac desire. As Pulham argues, the plethora of sculptural bodies that haunt works such as *The Well-Beloved* displace the natural cycle of decay by effectively re-animating the bodies of the deceased, beloved women that they represent (p. 95).

Chapters 3 and 4 expand on this discussion by exploring transgressive sexual desire and homoeroticism within the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and Oscar Wilde. In analysing Hawthorne's treatment of the sculptural body in *The Marble Faun,* Pulham reconsiders Hawthorne's distaste for classical nude sculpture as a reflection of his unease over the paganly sensual connotations of neoclassical statuary. Pulham's analysis demonstrates how the titular marble faun – in fact the Faun of Praxiteles – becomes emblematic of pagan eroticism and the homoerotic bond between the four friends – Hilda, Miriam, Kenyon, and Donatello – at the heart of Hawthorne's novel. Scholars of Hawthorne will no doubt welcome Pulham's attentive reading of Hawthorne's work and his association with the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer, an association which lays the foundations for Pulham's insightful argument that both Hawthorne's and Hosmer's work suggests homoerotic desire. The study highlights how such desire is articulated through Donatello's resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles – 'Donatello's double' (p. 109) – and 'other aesthetic doublings that occur in the text' (p. 111), such as the intense relationship between Hilda and Miriam and their mutual fascination with Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice Cenci.

Pulham draws upon the work of Terry Castle, Lilian Faderman, and Vivien Green Fryd in discussing the homoerotic elements of Hosmer's own 1857 sculpture of Beatrice Cenci, arguing that lesbian desire is also reflected in Hawthorne's portrayal of Hilda and Miriam; a reading that has often been critically overlooked in favour of a focus on homoeroticism between the male characters (p. 114). Pulham notes that a similar desire to 'express "comradeship" through the tactility of sculpture and preserve the intensity of attraction across time' is also present within Wilde's poem 'Charmides' (p. 153), which she views as an implicit 'ode to homosexual and "perverse" love' (p. 155) that draws from the odes of John Keats. A similar subliminal homoeroticism can be found in Henry James' *Roderick Hudson* (1875), which, as Pulham argues, has strong parallels with Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. Both texts express a tactile, visual, and aesthetic homoeroticism through the medium of statuary, setting up an interplay between desire, touch, and the gaze.

In Chapter 5, Pulham provides persuasive evidence that nineteenth-century engagement with the Pygmalion myth was not limited solely to male creative figures, but also a rich source of inspiration for women artists and writers. Pulham notes how Hosmer and poets such as Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) and Olive Custance utilized sculpture to express same-sex desire and gender nonconformity, a reading that will assuredly be of interest to researchers of Field's and Custance's work. Pulham cites work such as Custance's 'Antinous' and Field's 'To Apollo—The Conqueror' to demonstrate how these writers subverted classical figures such as Apollo and Antinous into figures of encrypted same-sex desire. Pulham observes that the figure of Apollo in particular 'inspires Michael Field's decadent poetics', for the *Apollo Belvedere* acts as a 'sculptural counterpart' that 'encrypts the doubly transgressive desire between Bradley and Cooper' (p. 184). This appropriation foregrounds how an engagement with sculpture facilitated Field's own articulation of same sex desire.

Pulham returns to the concept of encrypted desire in her discussion of the 'figurative "burial" and containment of an active and transgressive eroticism that is retrieved from the

sculptural body through touch and metaphors of tactility' (p. 194). The study observes in detail how sculpture, with its sepulchral associations and imagery of excavation and confinement (pp. 194-95), can be used to express sexual ambiguity and forbidden desire – what Pulham terms 'libidinal entombments' (p. 183). As Pulham argues, within texts such as Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* O'Shaughnessy's 'Thoughts in Marble', Custance's 'Antinous', and James' *Roderick Hudson,* love and desire are often linked to the sepulchral, resulting in strikingly sensual textual and artistic monuments to death, loss, and grief. In her comparison of necrophiliac imagery within *The Marble Faun* and *Roderick Hudson,* Pulham pinpoints how Hudson's aestheticized corpse 'acquires a sculptural form' (p. 195) that still retains a tactile, 'sexually alluring and poetic' (p. 196) quality comparable to Edward Onslow Ford's 1893 *Shelley Memorial* (p. 195).

Pulham concludes that the 'libidinal economy that circulates between artworks, social transgression, and sexual repression in the Victorian sculpture gallery remains entombed but is revealed through metaphors of tactility that also inspire creative endeavours' (p. 197). In revealing the origins, function, and impact of this economy, Pulham's study leads the way in raising thought-provoking new questions over how love, desire, and beauty were moulded onto the sculptural body, transforming statuary into monuments that honoured transgressive desire and underscored the importance of touch. In foregrounding the impact of this creatively fecund cycle of inspiration and reinterpretation upon both significant nineteenth-century figures and lesser-known writers and artists, the study provides a rich, expansive, and incisive history of the nineteenth-century fascination with the Pygmalion myth, which Pulham asserts is a cultural phenomenon deserving of extended critical attention. The study's skilful discussion of statuary as a visual, tactile and immersive experience in the nineteenth century, and its clear, concise and confident analytical style will no doubt ensure its place as an essential resource for scholars, academics, and researchers keen to broaden their knowledge of this area of criticism.

Notes on Contributors

Helen Abbott is Professor of Modern Languages and a specialist in nineteenth-century French poetry and music at the University of Birmingham (UK). She explores ways of writing about word-music relationships in poetic language, in critical theories, and using digital methodologies. She led the *Baudelaire Song Project* collating 1,700+ songs in 25 languages and 40 different musical genres, and designed a new networked model for analysing and visualizing word/music relations in songs (AHRC-funded 2015-2019). She is author of three books: *Baudelaire in Song 1880–1930* (Oxford University Press, 2017); *Parisian Intersections* (Peter Lang, 2012); and *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé* (Ashgate, 2009). A classically-trained soprano, Professor Abbott is also in demand as a specialist language coach for professional and early-career classical musicians working on French repertoire, and was recently consultant and language coach on a Gramophone Classical Music Awards 2018 nominated album of Baudelaire songs, *Voyages* (Signum, 2017), with Mary Bevan (soprano) and Joseph Middleton (piano).

Joseph Acquisto is Professor of French at the University of Vermont, specializing in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry and the novel and the relations among literature, music, and philosophy. His books include *The Fall Out of Redemption: Writing and Thinking Beyond Salvation in Baudelaire, Cioran, Fondane, Agamben, and Nancy*; *Poetry's Knowing Ignorance*; *Living Well with Pessimism in Nineteenth-Century France*; and *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music*. He is currently at work on a book on dissonance and subjectivity in Baudelaire.

Erik Anspach holds a PhD in comparative cultural history and literature from the University of Washington, Seattle. He is currently the Academic Director at *L'École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle* (ENSCI-Les Ateliers), classed internationally as France's leading institution dedicated to design. Anspach's publications to date have concentrated on cultural narratives of transparency in the nineteenth century, their relation to formal and informal systems of power, and their impact on the collective imaginary in parallel with the industrialization of cultural artefacts and the media.

Matthew Bradley is Senior Lecturer in Victorian literature at the University of Liverpool. His research and teaching mainly focuses on the interaction between late nineteenth-century religion and culture; he has recently contributed to the C*ambridge Critical Concepts* volume on decadence and its links with theology, and he is currently writing a book on Victorian conceptualizations of the end of the world.

Sam Branton studied Fine Art at Norwich School of Art and Design, graduating in 2007. He has exhibited at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, as well as in London, Basel, Stockholm, and California. His most recent solo show was *Fauna Rampant* at James Freeman Gallery (11 February – 6 March 2021).

Alexandre Burin teaches French at the University of Manchester. His research focuses on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, culture, and media. He is currently working on a monograph about the self-construction of Jean Lorrain's myth through fragmentation, performance, and scandal, building on his doctoral research. More recently he contributed a chapter on the poetics and performativity of Lorrain to *Poétique du Chat Noir (1882-1897)* (Presses Universitaires de Paris-Nanterre, 2021).

Daniele Carluccio est docteur ès lettres. Il a enseigné aux universités de Genève et de Lausanne. Il est actuellement professeur de français et d'histoire de l'art au Centre de formation

professionnelle Arts de Genève. Ses recherches portent sur la modernité littéraire. Il est l'auteur, entre autres, de *Roland Barthes lecteur* (Hermann, 2019).

Peter Coles is an author, translator, and fine-art photographer, particularly interested in urban nature and veteran trees. He is the author of *Mulberry*, a cultural history (Reaktion Books, 2019) and has pioneered the use of veteran trees as markers of hidden history through the *Morus Londinium* project, winner of a 2021 European Heritage/Europa Nostra Award.

Matthew Creasy is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Glasgow. His critical edition of Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was published by Fyfield-Carcanet in 2014. He has published essays and articles on modernism, decadence, and periodical studies and he is currently working on an edition of George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* for the MHRA's 'Jewelled Tortoise' series dedicated to aesthetic and decadent literature.

Marie Kawthar Daouda enseigne la littérature et la langue française à Oriel College, Oxford. Elle a récemment publié *L'Anti-Salomé, représentations de la féminité bienveillante au temps de la Décadence (1850-1910)* (Peter Lang, 2020) où elle analyse les échos de la décadence latine et des premiers temps du christianisme dans l'art et la littérature de la fin de siècle française et britannique. Son prochain ouvrage, *La Prière désespérée, de Baudelaire à Bernanos* paraîtra aux éditions Garnier.

Régis-Pierre Fieu est doctorant en Études littéraires à l'Université du Québec à Montréal sous la direction de Jean-François Chassay. Il s'intéresse aux genres de l'imaginaire (politique-fiction, fantastique, science-fiction) mais surtout aux connexions entre la littérature et la politique. Le cinéma est également un de ses domaines d'intérêt. Il est rédacteur en chef du site de critiques cinéma *Écran d'Arrêt* et écrit depuis plus de dix ans dans la presse musicale en ligne. Sa thèse porte sur un mouvement qu'il appelle 'néo-décadentiste', reprise du décadentisme fin-de-siècle, qui se développe dans la littérature contemporaine.

Suvendu Ghatak is a PhD student in English at the University of Florida, working at the intersection of Victorian and Postcolonial Studies. He has published essays on Jonathan Swift and Alfred Tennyson. In his dissertation project, he examines the historical co-constitution of malaria and modernity in British India from the second half of the eighteenth century to the second half of the twentieth.

Silvia Giudice est agrégée de Lettres modernes et doctorante en littérature comparée à l'Université Paris-Nanterre. Ses recherches portent sur la poésie italienne et française du XIX^{e} au XX^{e} siècle: notamment sur les liens entre poésie et philosophie, et sur la conception de la condition humaine dans la poésie de Leopardi, Baudelaire, Valéry, et Montale.

Salsabil Gouider. Études à La Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Sfax, Université de Sfax, Docteur en langue et littérature françaises, son sujet de thèse porte sur L'écriture imagée dans les récits fantastiques de Théophile Gautier, elle est un membre de LARIDIAME. Assistante contractuelle à l'Institut Supérieur des Études appliquées en Humanités de Mahdia, Université de Monastir. Elle consacre ses publications à l'analyse du discours et la stylistique principalement dans les textes de Théophile Gautier ainsi que les écrivains de XIXe siècle

Michel-Guy Gouverneur is a teacher of English language and literature, and a translator of philosophical texts. He holds a PhD in English-language philosophy (Sorbonne, supervised by Prof. J.-T. Desanti) and a PhD in Philosophy and Literature (Amiens, supervised by Prof. Sandra Laugier). His website: https://ambitrad.hypotheses.org/.

Melanie Hawthorne is Professor of French at Texas A&M University. Her work focuses on French women writers of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, such as Rachilde. Her most recent book is *Women, Citizenship, and Sexuality: The Limits of Transnationalism* (Liverpool University Press, 2021), and a dual-language edition of Renée Vivien's short story collection *La dame à la louve* is due out from the MLA later this year. Her current work-in-progress is a biography of Vivien in the form of a virtual museum. An ongoing project documenting Vivien's gravesite in Paris can be viewed at melaniehawthorne.com, along with the 'Renée Vivien Cocktail Hour', pairing Vivien-themed cocktails with readings of her poems.

Neil Hultgren is Professor of English at California State University, Long Beach, where he teaches courses on Victorian literature and culture, the novel, the Gothic, and science fiction. He is the author of *Melodramatic Imperial Writing from the Sepoy Rebellion to Cecil Rhodes* (Ohio University Press, 2014) and has published articles and book chapters on Oscar Wilde, Richard Marsh, Arthur Machen, and Guillermo del Toro. With Dustin Friedman, he recently co-edited a cluster of essays on decadence and the weird for *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism*. He is at work with Elizabeth Carolyn Miller and Joseph Bristow on the 2021-2022 William Andrews Clark Memorial Library Core Program, 'Victorian Apocalypse: The *siècle* at its *fin*'. His current book project, titled 'Cosmic Romance: The Universe in British Fiction, 1885-1930', explores the unique formal configurations of popular romance from H. Rider Haggard to Olaf Stapledon.

Anne Jamison is Professor of English at the University of Utah, where she teaches literature, popular culture, and critical theory. She is the author of *Poetics en passant: Redefining the Relationship between Victorian and Modern Poetry* (Palgrave, 2010); *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World* (Smart Pop, 2013); *Kafka's Other Prague: Writings from the Czechoslovak Republic* (Northwestern, 2018); and a number of articles, reviews, and essays on topics from Flaubert to fanfic archives. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Princeton University.

Eleanor Keane is a PhD student in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a member of the Decadence Research Centre at Goldsmiths and the British Association of Decadence Studies (BADS) Executive Committee. Her research interests focus on literary decadence and the visual arts, and expressions of gender, decadence, and sexuality within the late nineteenth century. Eleanor graduated from Goldsmiths in 2019 with an MA in Literary Studies, and in December 2019 she presented her paper, 'Princesses of Glass and Silence: Renée Vivien's (Re)translation of the Fairy Tale' at the Decadence and Translation Network's 'Translating Decadence' workshop. She has written on Renée Vivien for the Rimbaud and Verlaine Foundation blog and the British Association of Victorian Studies 'Victorianist' postgraduate researcher blog.

Niall McDevitt is the author of three collections of poetry, *b/w* (Waterloo Press, 2010), *Porterloo* (International Times, 2013) and *Firing Slits Jerusalem Colportage* (New River Press, 2016). He read at Yoko Ono's *Meltdown* in 2012. He performed in Iraq at the Babylon Festival in 2016. He featured in *The Bard*, a multi-media tribute to William Blake and John Latham at Flat Time House 2020. He occasionally blogs at poetopography.wordpress.com.

Jamie McKendrick was born in Liverpool in 1955 and has published seven books of poetry as well as two *Selected Poems*. A recent pamphlet of poems with his artwork, *The Years*, won the Michael Marks Poetry Illustration Award. He edited *The Faber Book of 20th-Century Italian Poems*, and his translation of Giorgio Bassani's *The Novel of Ferrara* was published by Norton in 2019. He has also translated selections of Valerio Magrelli's poems, *The Embrace* (Faber, 2009) and of Antonella Anedda, *Archipelago* (Bloodaxe, 2014). His book of essays on art and poetry, *The Foreign Connection* (Legenda) was published in 2020.

Stephen Minta currently teaches in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York. He is the author of books on Renaissance French poetry, Petrarch, Garcia Marquez, and Byron. A travel book, *The Recreation of a Sixteenth-Century Journey Across South America*, was a New York Times Notable Book.

Ian Murphy recently obtained a PhD from Manchester Metropolitan University, where he teaches as an Associate Lecturer. His current research focuses on the *femme fatale,* androgyny, and fatality within aestheticism, decadence, and the visual arts of the fin de siècle.

André Naffis-Sahely is the author of *The Promised Land: Poems from Itinerant Life* (Penguin, 2017) and the editor of *The Heart of a Stranger: An Anthology of Exile Literature* (Pushkin Press, 2020). He is the Editor of Poetry London.

Lamia Oucherif est maître de conférences en littérature, au département de français, à l'Ecole Normale Supérieure de Bouzaréah, à Alger. Elle a soutenu son doctorat en mars 2010. L'intitulé de la thèse est: 'Pour une poétique de la relation père/fille chez M. Dib, A. Djebbar et S. de Beauvoir'. Elle est chef d'équipe au sein du laboratoire LISODIP, à l'ENS de Bouzaréah depuis 2011. Les recherches de l'équipe portent sur les littératures, française et francophone, de la fin du XXe siècle et du XXIe siècle. Ses derniers articles publiés sont: 'Ania Mérimèche entre l'art d'écrire et l'art de conter', in ouvrage collectif: *Écriture féminine maghrébine de l'extrême contemporain*, sous la direction de Rabia Redouane (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2020); 'Apprendre à lire une œuvre littéraire ou apprendre à vivre un désastre, avec Maurice Blanchot', in *La lecture des créateurs*, actes de colloque réunis par Saadia Yahia Khabou et édités par la librairie Alaa Eddine, Sfax, Tunisie, 2019; et 'L'Etranger d'A. Camus, le sourire sur le front… un effet du grotesque', in *Le sourire de Camus*, actes de colloque (l'institut américain d'Aix en Provence) réunis, présentés, et édités par David Walker, 2018.

Jonathan Petitot. Professeur agrégé de lettres, titulaire d'un doctorat en langue et littérature française de l'université d'Aix-Marseille, il enseigne actuellement dans le collège d'un quartier défavorisé de Marseille. Ses recherches portent sur les influences des prosodies antiques ou étrangères sur le modèle théorique du vers français au XIXe siècle.

Anne Rainey is a PhD researcher in Modern Languages and Linguistics at Ulster University. At Queen's University Belfast she gained a BA Hons in French and Italian and was awarded the Swiss Council for the Arts Prize in Italian Literature. Having completed a PGCE in Modern Languages and English (QUB), she taught French and Italian for several years. Anne's MA thesis, 'France, Prends Garde de Perdre ton Âme' (Ulster University), explores the restorative power of French Resistance poetry. In her current PhD research, she has designed a translation and neo-Gricean hybrid theory to examine implied meaning in Ciaran Carson's translations of Dante and Rimbaud. Her recent publications include 'Quarrels in Translation: Translating Discordantly to Achieve Harmonious Resolution', *Intersections*, (Ulster University, 2019) and an original poem, 'Ipso Facto', in a Belfast anthology, *Heartland* (2021). Anne has recently presented on Carson's translations at conferences in Maynooth University, University of Glasgow, and Queen's University Belfast.

Joanna Rajkumar. Agrégée de lettres modernes, docteur en littératures compares, professeur de lettres et de cinéma en classes préparatoires en region parisienne, auteur de *Lignes sans réponses. Trois experiences poétiques des limites du langage*, Paris, Classique Garnier, 2019 (version refondue de la these de doctorat) https://classiques-garnier.com/lignes-sans-reponses-trois-experiences-poetiques-des-limites-du-langage.html. Parmi ses articles sur Baudelaire : 'Désir de langage et aventures de lignes, littérature et peinture chez Baudelaire, Hofmannsthal et Michaux', la Revue *RiLune*, 2005,

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Hugh Roberts is Professor of French Renaissance Literature at the University of Exeter.

Stephen Romer taught for many years at the University of Tours. He is now Stipendiary Lecturer in French at Brasenose College, Oxford. Poet, critic, translator and anthologist, he has published a selection of fin-de-siècle stories, *French Decadent Tales* (Oxford University Press World Classics, 2013). A selection of his poems *Set Thy Love in Order: New & Selected Poems* (Carcanet, 2017) and a translation of Yves Bonnefoy's final prose work, *The Red Scarf* (Seagull, 2020) are among his recent publications.

Maria Scott is Associate Professor of French Literature and Thought at the University of Exeter. In 2005, she published Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives* (Ashgate). She has also published numerous articles on Baudelaire, including a recent survey essay in the journal of French Studies, and is currently working on a book on Baudelaire and empathy. Scott has also published *Stendhal's Less-Loved Heroines: Fiction, Freedom and the Female* (Legenda, 2013), translated as *Stendhal, la liberté, et les héroïnes mal aimées* (Classiques Garnier, 2014), and *Empathy and the Strangeness of Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

Martin Sorrell taught French at Exeter University. His translation of Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* appeared in the Alma Classics series. He translated Verlaine, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Lorca for Oxford University Press's World's Classics series. His translations of poems by Claude de Burine, *Words Have Frozen Over*, were published by Arc, and *Elles: Modern French Poetry by Women* by University of Exeter Press. His translation of Apollinaire's *Bestiaire* poems is forthcoming from Arc. His memoir of his French mother, *Paulette*, was published by Impress Books. Sorrell has also written plays, stories and features for BBC radio.

Robert St. Clair is Associate Professor of French at Dartmouth College (USA). He is the author of *Poetry, Politics, and the Body in Rimbaud* (Oxford University Press, 2018) and the co-editor-in-chief of *Parade sauvage*, the international journal of Rimbaud studies published annually with Classiques Garnier. He is currently working on a study of the question of historical loss and the figure of 'losers' in nineteenth-century French counter-modernisms.

Robert Stilling is Associate Professor of English at Florida State University. His book, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Harvard, 2018), won the Modernist Studies Association Prize for a First Book and received Honorable Mention for the Modern Language Association Prize for a First Book. He has published in *PMLA*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, and the *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*.

Adam Thorpe was born in Paris and brought up in India, Lebanon, the Congo, Cameroun, and England. For the last thirty years he has lived in southern France. He has published poetry, novels, short stories, translations, and two books of non-fiction.

Thomas Vranken's work focuses on nineteenth-century literature's relationship with technology and print culture. He is a Research Associate in the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Contemporary

Culture Research Unit at the University of Melbourne. Between 2019 and 2021, he was a Killam Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of British Columbia. In *Literary Experiments in Magazine Publishing: Beyond Serialisation* (Routledge, 2020), he explored alternative modes of magazine publishing, including the one-shot publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a single issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. With Suzy Anger, he is editing the collection *Victorian Automata: Mechanism and Agency in the Nineteenth Century* for Cambridge University Press.

Chris Waters was born in South London in 1946, and now lives in Devon where he works as a freelance tutor in Adult Education and creative writing. He read English and European Studies at Sussex University in the mid-sixties. Waters has published three poetry collections with Mudlark Press (*Arisaig*; *Through a Glass Lately*; and *Dancing Satyr*), with a fourth, *On London Clay*, due Autumn 2021.

David Weir is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Cooper Union in New York City. He has written three books on decadence, including, most recently, *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2018), and edited one, *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge, 2019), with Jane Desmarais. His study of Ernst Lubitsch's 1932 film *Trouble in Paradise* will be published by BFI this October in the Film Classics series. His current editing project, also with Desmarais, is *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (online version forthcoming 2021); his current writing project with Oxford University Press is *Bohemians: A Very Short Introduction*; his current dream project is another BFI Film Classics study – on Luchino Visconti's adaptation of Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo.*

GUEST EDITOR

Ellis Hanson is Professor of English in the Department of Literatures in English, Cornell University (USA). He teaches courses on Victorian and Modernist literature, visual studies, critical theory, and gender and sexuality studies. He is currently working on two books, one on Aestheticism and the erotics of style and the other on the visual representation of child sexuality in contemporary American culture.

EDITORIAL

Jane Desmarais (Editor-in-Chief) is Professor of English and Director of the Decadence Research Centre in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has written numerous essays on the theme of decadence and has co-edited several works, including *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (with Chris Baldick, Manchester University Press, 2012), *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems* (with Chris Baldick, MHRA, 2017), and *Decadence and the Senses* (with Alice Condé, Legenda, 2017). She is co-editor with David Weir of *Decadence and Literature* (2019), a volume in the Cambridge Critical Concepts series, the *Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (also with David Weir, 2021) and *Decadent Plays, 1890-1930* with Adam Alston (forthcoming with Bloomsbury in 2023). Her monograph, *Monsters Under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers, 1850 to the Present*, was published by Reaktion in 2018.

Alice Condé (Deputy Editor) is Lecturer in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is co-editor of *Decadence and the Senses* (with Jane Desmarais, Legenda, 2017) and *In Cynara's Shadow: Collected Essays on Ernest Dowson* (with Jessica Gossling, Peter Lang, 2019). Her essay on 'Decadence and Popular Culture' appears in Jane Desmarais and David Weir's *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), and 'Contemporary Contexts: Decadence Today and Tomorrow' is forthcoming in Desmarais and Weir's *Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Jessica Gossling (Deputy Editor) is Lecturer in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Assistant Editor of *The Literary Encyclopedia*. She has a forthcoming chapter on decadence and interior decoration in the *Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (2021) and is co-editor with Alice Condé of *In Cynara's Shadow: Collected Essays on Ernest Dowson (1867–1900)*. Her essay on '*À rebours* and the House at Fontenay' is published in *Decadence and the Senses* (Legenda, 2017) and her chapter 'Decadent Magic: Arthur Machen's The Hill of Dreams' is due to be published in *Magic: A Companion*, edited by Katharina Rein (Peter Lang, 2021). Jessica is currently working on her first monograph on the decadent threshold poetics of Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Arthur Symons, and Ernest Dowson. Jessica and Alice are the webmistresses of *volupte.gold.ac.uk*.

Robert Pruett (Reviews Editor) is a DPhil student in French at St Cross College, Oxford, where he is preparing a thesis on eros and idealism in the work of Remy de Gourmont. Alongside the Cercle des Amateurs de Remy de Gourmont (CARGO), he co-organized the *Fin de Siècle Symposium* (Balliol College, Oxford, 2016). In 2018, he co-organized *Decadence, Magic(k), and the Occult* at Goldsmiths, University of London. His chapter on 'Dowson, France, and the Catholic Image' appears in *In Cynara's Shadow: Collected Essays on Ernest Dowson* (ed. by Alice Condé and Jessica Gossling, Peter Lang, 2019).