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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8793t4tb>

Journal

Paroles gelées, 11(1)

ISSN

1094-7264

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Publication Date

1993

DOI

10.5070/PG7111003007

Peer reviewed

Mon semblable, ma mère: Woman, Subjectivity and Escape in *Les Fleurs du Mal*

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Unable to control the world around him, Baudelaire took every measure to control that which was in his power, his work. Not merely a haphazard collection of diverse verses, *Les Fleurs du Mal* appears as a whole, each poem relating dynamically to the others around it, allowing a new meaning to the notion of the recueil. Critics have attached the links of the chain composed by the various *Fleurs* in different manners, some, like D. J. Mossop, going so far as to read in it an almost novelistic structure. In *Baudelaire's Tragic Hero* (1961), he examines Baudelaire's creation as a *Bildungsroman*, recounting the tragic disillusionment of its poet-hero, a sort of Everyman on a quest for happiness, happiness that he cannot obtain because of his ill-fated destiny, his penchant for *le Mal*. This quest for happiness translates into a search for pleasure, which I will define in Freudian terms as a release from unpleasurable tension resulting from the frustrations of real life. In this quest, the theme of escape plays a central role, and the figure of the woman often provides the means of the poet's evasion from a harsh, unpleasant, spleen-filled reality. This privileged position as a vehicle of escape resides in a relationship between the feminine roles as object of ideal beauty and sexual desire, and as a maternal force of fantasized return to a paradisiacal state of fulfillment before the fall into reality that subjective differentiation marks.

The Baudelairean tragedy described by Mossop is the irreparability of this fall, the futility of the poet's attempts to escape reality by striving to attain the Ideal, to operate a return to fulfillment by leaving the material behind. This tragedy plays itself out in six cycles outlined by Mossop, in which the hero sinks progressively farther from his ideal of happiness. For Mossop, the Ideal is a "state of pleasurable excitement towards which man is constantly striving..." while Spleen, its contrary, ranges from "merely consciousness of the absence of excitement..." to outright suffering (17). Supplementing Mossop's theory with Freud's conception of the Pleasure Principle as outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

(1961), and Emmanuel Adatte's notion of the Baudelairean flight from reality in *Les Fleurs du Mal et le Spleen de Paris: Essai sur le dépassement du réel* (1986), my reading of what Mossop terms the "architecture" of the *Fleurs* assigns to the Ideal an opposite function. Adatte effectively argues that Baudelaire's two major poetic works represent the poet's attempts to transcend the real, the physical, sensory world of human existence, in which he finds only frustration and spleen. This notion parallels Freud's conception of the death drive, which seeks to go beyond the pleasure principle and its psychic submission to the reality principle, by which the ego's attempts to fulfill its desires must constantly submit to the strictures of its own physical capacities and the desires of others. The Freudian schema formulates pleasure in a manner completely opposite to that of Mossop, for pleasure is not "excitement," but in fact, absence of excitement, release from the physical tension caused by sensory stimulus.

This analysis of pleasure forms one of the bases of my readings of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. I posit that the Baudelairean Ideal, opposed to the real as outlined by Adatte, parallels the nirvanic "beyond" of the pleasure principal, which is, at once, total absence of stimulus and complete fulfillment of desire. That is, Baudelaire's tragic poet-hero searches not for Mossop's Ideal of "pleasurable excitement,"¹ but rather he seeks an ideal means of escape from the unpleasurable reality of life. This escape, unrepresentable as it transcends the symbolic expression of the real, can only be likened to the *au-delà* or the *en-deçà*, to a return to the womb or to death itself. This notion turns around the woman, who figures as both the original source of pleasure (through her role as mother) and as object of sexual and visual desire for the male hero. Before birth, the human being resides within the womb of the mother, and after death, the human is interred in the womb-like structure of the grave. As the figure of the womb/tomb, the woman represents both the *en-deçà* and the *au-delà* sought in the flight from reality.

As an escape from the reality of existence, this flight relates to the issue of subjectivity so problematic in Baudelaire. In psychoanalytical terms, before it recognizes itself as subject, the infant knows itself only as part of the mother. Subjectivity and desire only come about through the rupture of this period of union with the mother, in the womb and at the breast, which represents a complete fulfillment of needs. This rupture with the paradisiacal

moment of the ignorance of lack (of the mother) posits both the individual's separateness and its desire for fulfillment of needs. Forever after, the subject will be torn by the knowledge of its isolation in separation and by the tension of drives desiring fulfillment. After this irremediable rupture, after this Fall (for the biblical fall was a fall into self-consciousness), the only hope for the subject lies in a beyond which will imitate this original moment of un-(self)-conscious unity.

The agonistic knowledge of the split nature of the subject, as cut-off (or castrated) from others and from pleasure is the spleen of Baudelaire. His poetry represents an attempt to fill the void of the lack caused by this rupture. As a separated, self-conscious, lacking, desiring subject, Baudelaire's hero finds himself an outsider "knocking at the door of the sanctum from which he feels expelled."² Having been born, the poet has been expelled from the sanctum of the womb. As a man, he finds himself doubly excluded because of his inability to work through his own birth trauma by giving birth to another and his only means of redemption appears through writing. He can escape his tragic fate and undo this fall through various fantasies, among these: writing a return to the womb, the privileged moment of union with the mother; defying differentiation in boundary-obscuring acts of sexual or spiritual "union"; taking control of the power of the womb by operating a poetic parthenogenesis or by violating, dissecting the womb to seize it—all means of escaping the reality of the split that forces lack, desire, unpleasurable tension.

The hero of Baudelaire's tragedy closely resembles the portraits of various artists made by Colin Wilson in *The Outsider* (1956). He describes a personality type that appears both as characters in literature and as literary figures themselves, a type that casts itself outside the norms of society and which, worshipping at the altar of death, opts for the negative in the ultimate question "To be or not to be." The Outsider is cut off from society by his desire, which does not conform to that of the average man. Yet his uniqueness is not in the oddity of his desire, but in the fact that he does not repress it as others do. He stands for Truth in that he acknowledges the *Mal* that others hide; he is "a man who knows himself to be degenerate, diseased, self-divided" (14). While he honestly acknowledges his sickness and that of society, "the Outsider's chief desire is *to cease to be an Outsider*" (105, Wilson's emphasis). Hindered by the frustra-

tions of real life, he finds himself impotent to operate the changes necessary to do so: he can't be true to himself and simply conform, yet he hasn't the physical or psychological resources to gain control and effect real social or political changes upon others or his environment that would allow his reinsertion. Thus his ultimate choice becomes not "to cease to be an Outsider," but simply "to cease to be," bringing us back to the options of the before and the beyond of existence, the womb or the tomb.

This is exactly the type one sees in Baudelaire himself in the *Journaux intimes* and in the poet-hero of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*. Baudelaire attempts to gain control, to cease to be an Outsider, through his work: on a real level, he wishes to gain control over his surroundings through his verse, that is, by becoming an important and influential man in society, a great poet and he symbolically controls those elements of his surroundings, *le réel* of Adatte, that frustrate him by escaping the physical into his imagined ideal, and even further, interfering in its basic elements of time and space to create an immortal reality of his own through verse. This project is tragically damned because the poet is essentially an outsider because he wishes to create/recreate/procreate not any real thing, but the Ideal. That is, he wishes to escape, to transcend the reality of the physical and immortalize himself, not as others do, through sexual reproduction, but through the ideal forms of verse.

Baudelaire's ambivalence toward sexuality and women has been studied by feminist critics like Jean Anderson, Tamara Bassim and Christine Buci-Glucksmann. This ambivalence relates to the elemental struggle between Spleen and Ideal, reality and pleasure, life and death being played out in the "tragedy" of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. While the principle of *s'enivrer* guides the poet-hero in his search for the Ideal, the tragedy is the illusory and addictive nature of the escape which becomes increasingly necessary to support life. Baudelaire's subject-hero, governed by the pleasure principle, desires an end to all this pressure, all these stimuli, seeking the total gratification of desire he had in the womb. The sexual and visual gratification provided by the beautiful woman offers a means of temporary escape, as does the power of imagination, yet it ultimately appears that death provides the only permanent solution to his problem.

On both a real and conceptual level, women hold a privileged, but ambivalent, symbolic role in Baudelaire's work as representa-

tions of both the absence causing desire and of the presence that can fill the lack, restoring the subject to the original state of paradise. The female body, Baudelaire's *beau navire*, at once represents the means of escape from the tragedy of self-consciousness, yet is also ultimately to blame for his tragic position, being "of woman born." Woman's fault in the hero's tragedy is clearly stated in the first poem of the body of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "Bénédiction" represents the poet-child's birth as a divine punishment for the mother's sexual sin: "Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères/Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation!" (l. 7-8). Giving birth to her son, the mother curses him with his own existence, a curse all the women in his life will repeat through cruelty and unfaithfulness. What places the subject-poet in the unhappy position in which he finds himself is precisely the subjectivity, the desire of the mother, of the woman herself. The Fall/fault is hers in a double sense. First, a woman's sin, the mother's sexual desire for the father, represents the ultimate cause of the poet's being brought into the curse of life. Secondly, feminine desire and feminine subjectivity prevent both mother and wife/mistress from maintaining the paradisiacal bliss of the original couple, imagined as the plenitude of the mother/child dyad. Cursed, the poet-child is abandoned by the women in his life as they pursue their own desires, and ultimately that is why he wants.

The tragedy represented by *Les Fleurs du Mal* plots out the course of the poet-hero's voyage of escape from the burden of consciousness of the wanting, desiring self—a voyage damned from its inception by its very nature: by definition, that self must accept its separation from the mother, from the woman in order to exist. The fantastic voyage constantly referred to in Baudelaire's work consists of the fantasized fulfillment of this feared desire to undo the separation, to reach the beyond of the pleasure principle, found only in death or in the mother's womb. The dynamic caused by the poet-hero's alternating hope for deliverance from and resigned acceptance of his damnation is represented in three groups of poems. The first cycle (*Fleurs* XII-XIV3) has been called "le chant de l'évasion" by Marcel Ruff (Mossop 105). These poems point to the poet-hero's efforts to effect a spatial or temporal escape from reality through symbolically feminine vehicles. This effort extends as well to those cycles identified by Mossop as directly related to real women in Baudelaire's life, "The Cycle of the White Venus" (*Fleurs* XL-XLVIII), the poems directed to Mme Sabatier, and "The

Cycle of the Green-Eyed Venus" (*Fleurs* XLIX-LIV), whose dedicatee (to use Ross Chambers' term) remains a subject of debate.

"Le chant de l'évasion" is comprised of "La vie antérieur," "Bohémiens en voyage," and "L'invitation au voyage." These three poems all propose some type of escape for the poet-narrator. The title of the first, "La vie antérieur," (*Fleurs* XII) gives a clear notion of the type of escape involved: an escape to a paradisiacal past before the fall. In addition, if we read "anterior" as the opposite of "posterior," and refer to the analogous antonym pair "ventral" and "dorsal," we realize then that this preceding life, this past life, represents life in the *ventre*, in the womb. The first strophe establishes the womb-image as the "vastes portiques" (l. 1) defined by Robert as a "galerie ouverte soutenue par deux rangées de colonnes," whose "grands piliers" (l. 3) mirror two legs rising up to make them resemble "grottes" (l. 4). The second strophe begins "Les houles," recalling the sea and forming the French homonym: la mer=la mère. The rolling waves remind of the rocking maternal *bercement* noted by Bersani (42-45), whose rhythm and the "tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique" (l. 7) reflect the undulations of the Kristevan semiotic, the pre-symbolic forms associated with the plenitude of imaginary expression, the omnipotence of the pre-Oedipal mother, not castrated by the symbolic expressions of language, in which the signifier is eternally cut-off from the signified.

This womb-like imaging of past life recalls to the poet, in the third stanza, the pleasure and fulfillment experienced in it: "C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes" (l. 9). This last oxymoron reveals the nature of pleasure within the prenatal paradise of the womb. While an excitement-based reading of pleasure like that of Mossop dictates that a *volupté* be anything but calm, my reading of the Baudelairean concept of pleasure resolves the contradiction in effect here. As a state of complete fulfillment of desire, to such an extent that desire does not even yet exist for the undifferentiated subject, the mythicized union of the mother/child dyad represents a state of *voluptés calmes*, pleasures free of tension. In the "beyond" of the pleasure principle—in the womb, at the breast, in death—only voluptuous, sensual, desiring pleasures exist. The "beyond" is calm in the sense that the tension of non-fulfillment would be completely absent—desire and fulfillment would be simultaneous, as for the infant bathing in the warm sea of the amniotic fluid. The

mother figure can even be seen in the slaves, “imprégnés d’odeurs” (l.11), who serve the poet-hero in this past life. They are pregnant, full of the *odor di femina*, perhaps and the poet is their “unique soin.” They are solely devoted to him, to keeping his “secret douloureux,” which is the secret sin, the fall, requisite to his existence but which he refuses to face in this poem.

The idealized life of carried child for whom the breast is always available to fulfill his needs, appears again in “Les Bohémiens en voyage” (*Fleurs* XIII). As ontogeny reflects phylogeny for Freud, Baudelaire allows his fantasy of individual union in the womb to wander with the Bohemians, a more “primitive” people who, unlike the urban-industrial bourgeois, experienced life in greater union with nature. The feminine and prophetic/poetic gypsy tribe leaves on its journey of continual escape with the child: “Sur son dos, ou livrant à leurs fiers appétits/Le trésor toujours prêt des mamelles pendantes” (l. 3-4). Cybele, the earth-mother, magically offers her resources (“Fait couler le rocher et fleurir le désert” (l. 12)) to these visionaries who, unrestrained by the enemy time, may see “L’empire familial des ténèbres futures” (l.14). While the poet perceives this prophetic vision as a blessing, he notes that the future—his own present bears a dark, unpleasant, shadowy aspect.

The relationship of the child to the mother, and the subjective tensions related to the desire for escape, appear more clearly in “L’homme et la mer” (*Fleurs* XIV). The homonym *mer=mère* in the title of this poem allows it to be repositated as “l’homme est la mère,” a version of Lacan’s mirror stage. Here the developing subject confronts its difference, its separateness from the mother by seeing itself reflected in the mirror, a mirror she also represents as she reflects back through love or rejection an image of itself, of its own desirability, to the child. One can read “La mer est ton miroir” (l. 2), literally as the myth of Narcissus, the man looking in the water and falling in love with his own reflection, but when one reads “la mère est ton miroir” one realizes that the man sees his reflection in the mother. He sees himself in her, he seeks his identity in her gaze, in the reflection of her desire. Through poetic reversal and word play, he can also make the mother become his image: she becomes a reflection of him and reflects what he wishes to see. He can undo her subjectivity, undo the damning of his birth in “Bénédiction” as he re-creates both her and himself.

The problematic nature of identity becomes apparent as the poem begins with a paradox: "Homme libre, toujours tu chéris la mer" (l. 1). He who is free, *libre, qui n'a pas d'attache, s'attache*, borrowing Robert's synonym for *chérir*, we observe that the man ties himself to the mother/sea with the eternally (*toujours*) binding force of affection. As he becomes bound to his reflection in the sea, throughout the rest of the poem, like Narcissus to his image in the pond, one sees that the freedom of self-reflection is really a lie, that the self can not conceive of itself without the mirror of the mother and cannot be conceived without an-other. When the poet tells him(self), "La mer est ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme/Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame" (l. 2-3), he sees his soul reflected, not in a mirror-image of himself, but in the eternal rocking of the mother. *La mer/mère* is the (m)other, described by Madelon Sprengnether, the original other/object against which his identity/subjectivity must develop. He also discovers that his "esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer" (l. 4). His mind, his soul, not just his body, *n'est pas = naît/pas un gouffre*. It is born out of the separation from the *gouffre* of the womb. He is not the womb or the mother, but without the mother, for he is *moins amer = moins [l]a mère*: he is born, less [than] a mother. In the contemplation of the sea, the man perceives his own inadequacy against nature, and his own reproductive inadequacy. Yet he replaces the *gouffre* with the mind. If the woman can reproduce sexually, he then will (re)produce with his mind, poetically. He is not the mother, still he is her as she reflects his image. He is not her as he has no womb, yet he is her equal because he has a mind.

At the heart of this self-contemplation in the (m)other lies pleasure, or rather pleasure lies at the breast of the mother: "Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image" (l. 5). In an instance of psychological folding-back, overlapping, the narcissistic poet enjoys his own reflection, knows the infantile pleasure at the breast of his image in the mirror/mother, and experiences the sexual pleasure of genital penetration. As the poet accuses the man—"Tu l'embrasses des yeux et des bras" (l. 6)—the "innocent" desire for the mother's breast becomes sexual fantasy, at once incestuous and narcissistic, and ultimately parthenogenetic. This pleasure of plunging himself into the breast appears highly suspect when read in the context of sadistic, misogynistic fantasies which can be found in "À

celle qui est trop gaie," when the poet plunges phallic knives into women's breasts, simultaneously raping and killing them.

L'homme literally dives into his own image, embracing himself, but in this diving-in, he mingles his existence with that of the water, he plunges into the amniotic depths, and hearing his own heartbeat, becomes confused: "ton cœur/Se distrait quelquefois de sa propre rumeur/Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage" (l. 6-8). In addition to the odd visual doubling caused by the "image" in the water read as both a narcissistic reflection of the self and the mirror image of the mother, this doubling continues on an auditory level. The poet, somewhat like the protagonist of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," hesitates and *se/distrait*—separates himself and splits—as he hears his own heartbeat doubled. Returning to that *unheimlich* place "the former *heim* (home) of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning" (Freud "The Uncanny" 51), he experiences an uncanny moment, that is, the womb experience reflects a time when the one person hears two heartbeats: the child feels its own and its mother's, while the mother feels her own and the child's. A problem, however, arises here: whose heartbeat takes precedence? Who is the person and who the image? Which one is the subject, mother-sea or child-poet?

That there are two similar, but distinct presences in the poem becomes clear in the third stanza:

Vous êtes tous les deux ténébreux et discrets:

Homme, nul n'a sondé le fond de tes abîmes;

O mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes... (l. 9-11).

The narrator separates the man from his narcissistic image here, but places him in union with the *mer/mère*. They are "deux" and "discrets," two separate, discrete and discreet beings, hiding the secret of incestuous desire at the heart of which is their own narcissism, as they each love the image of him- or herself reflected in the other. Seeking pleasure gazing at his own image in the sea, the poet fantasizes an incestuous union with his mother that allows him to create himself, realizing the parthenogenetic act that permits him to be both father and son.⁴ But necessary to the real success of this fantasized self-loving, self-creation is the virginity of the mother: to erase her unfaithfulness to the son, he must write out her contamination, her sin with the father, a writing-out established in this stanza. Both mother/sea and the man maintain their integrity,

are unsullied by intimate contact as "nul ne connaît [l]es richesses intimes" of the virgin sea, and the man is whole, unpenetrated because no one knows "le fond de [s]es abîmes." They keep this secret to themselves: "Tant vous êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets!" (12). The virginity and the secrecy, the no one knowing—in both biblical and secular senses—allows their return to Edenic ignorance and purifies any potential sin. Thus we have a nearly perfect fantasy of the pure, pre-fall union of the mother/child dyad, in which the poet creates himself until the last stanza.

What has seemed like a carefully guarded secret of blissful self-embracing in self-contemplation becomes an eternal battle. This man versus nature battle metaphorically represents the battle for subjective primacy: who gets to be on top? Man versus woman, son versus mother: who is really the subject, who is hearing whose heartbeat? At this moment, what I have heretofore read as an incestuous mother/son union becomes a sibling rivalry between brothers, "frères implacables" (l. 16) locked in an eternal battle. In this poem, Baudelaire plays with the two traditional notions of doubling outlined by Eric Gans. The first type of double reflects the romantic narcissistic re/version of the Hebraic double, as it pretends no longer to see in itself the reflection of the other (man in God's image/son in mother's), but sees in the other a reflection of itself ("Mon semblable, mon frère," 1984). This allows union with the other for completion. This vision shifts to the Greek model, which posits the double as a rival and engenders a battle for the identity, for the assignment of roles to decide who will be the subject and who the object.

The poet-hero resolves this battle to a degree through the increasing objectification of the female figure throughout the *recueil*. His self-confidence often wavers as his fantasized means of escape from the real demonstrates her own reality, her own subjectivity. This can be seen in *The Cycle of the White Venus*. These poems sent to Mme Sabatier allow a certain *misc-en-abîme* of the subjective confusion occurring in "L'homme et la mer." The reader is engaged in the text as a character by the address "Au lecteur." Unlike the imagined reader of that initial poem, this group bore a real dedicatee. This "original" reader, Mme Sabatier, to whom the poems were first sent, also appears as the imagined woman who inspired them. She is, then, the subject of the poems. The reader assumes the burden of confusion harrowing the poet-hero himself. As "mon

semblable, mon frère," this reader might identify with the poet-hero. Yet, as the mistress-muse also was meant to read them, the reader may be identified with her. In that case, the reader finds him- or herself doubly implicated in the problematization of subjectivity inherent in these poems as both their reader and their subject.

This confusion deepens for the critical reader because of the debate over the sincerity of the poems. Critics and biographers (Mossop, Porché) seem to agree that Baudelaire did not feel that Mme Sabatier herself was the Ideal represented by her image in the poems. Mossop attributes a certain irony to the poet's "attempt at spiritual regeneration through a pure Platonic love" in his reading of this cycle (149). This attempt, ironic or not, contrasts with the spiritual degeneration evident in "The Cycle of the Black Venus," which it follows. In that cycle of poems presumably written about Jeanne Duval, the poet initially seeks escape through the other, seduced by her exoticism and his own need to assuage his ennui ("Parfum exotique," "La chevelure," "De profundis clamavi"). He subsequently experiences disgust at her physicality ("Tu mettrais l'univers...dans ta ruelle," "Une charogne"). Realizing that she is preying on his life ("Sed non satiata," "Le vampire"), he wavers between giving up his life to her ("Le Léthé" (1857), "Le possédé") and killing her ("Remords posthume"). Ultimately he kills only her physical aspect, because she keeps reappearing in his memory, in his verse, where she comes back the way he wants her to ("Le chat," "Le Balcon"). "Un fantôme" provides a transition between the two cycles of the Black and White Venuses. The poet appears as a sort of Dr. Frankenstein, who has killed the woman to bring her back as his ghostly muse. Alive she can do nothing for him, but dead, her phantom can provide the material for him to re-create, re-animate his Ideal, civilizing her, separating her from her physical nature with "Le cadre," then painting "Le portrait" in his eternal memory—eternalized in the final poem of the cycle "Je te donne ces vers afin que si mon nom/Aborde heureusement aux époques lointaines" (*Fleurs* XXXIX).

The Cycle of the White Venus begins with "Semper Eadem" (*Fleurs* XL) in which the poet once again seeks to escape the real through his new and improved Venus. This Venus can talk, in fact, her words begin the sonnet, as she asks him "D'où vous vient...cette tristesse étrange..." (l. 1) The poet explains the source of his spleen to her, "Vivre est un mal" (l. 4), and quickly silences her, "taisez-

vous!" (l. 8) He is seduced by, yet hostile toward her laughter and gaiety. She must be silenced because her voice, proof of her subjectivity, interferes with his using her as an object of escape, as he prays her to "laissez mon cœur s'enivrer d'un mensonge,/Plonger dans vos beaux yeux comme dans un beau songe..." (l. 12-13). He tragically refuses her attempt to understand him, desiring only to plunge into the lie of his dreamed escape, through her objectification, from the possibility of health and happiness she offers.

In the second poem of the cycle, "Toute entière" (*Fleurs* XLI), a third player enters the field to address the poet, "Le Démon." Satan brings the poet back to the physical reality of the Venus, asking him to name the most seductive aspect of her body. But, he is unable to fetishize her, to break her down into her various parts (as he has done with the Black Venus). He claims that:

'...l'harmonie est trop exquise,
 Qui gouverne tout son beau corps,
 Pour que l'impuissante analyse
 En note les nombreux accords.
 'O métamorphose mystique
 De tous mes sens fondus en un!...' (l. 19-22)

Through the metamorphosis operated by the poet's verse, her body becomes disembodied, it becomes a harmony, a perfume, a moment—recalling the instance of restored semiotic plenitude in "La vie antérieure"—in which the poet can feel, ecstatically, the unification of his desire, and thus his subjectivity. Satan represents, in a sense, the father tempting the son, trying to "[l]e prendre en faute" (l. 3), to convince him to perceive the mother's castration, to view the "objets noirs ou roses" (l. 7) that would reveal her difference. The poet's option for unity, his refusal to try the "impuissante analyse," signals his refusal to accept the castration this fetishization would also mark for himself.

The third poem of the cycle, *Fleurs* XLII, comprises another dialogue, this one between the poet and his own soul. He has progressively turned inward, moving from his dialogue with the real woman outside in "Semper Eadem," to his discussion with an external spirit in "Tout entière," he now addresses only his imagination. Once the image of the woman has been completely divorced from any physical reality and her castration has been denied, the poet finds the possibility of happiness, singing the praises of his maternal "Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone." In a curious self-

splitting, demonstrating his schizophrenic view of the world, which constantly refers to the mind/body split, the poet asks his "âme solitaire," his "cœur autrefois flétri," what it will say to the new beauty "Dont le regard divin t'a soudain refleurit?" The reflowering of the heart shrivels by its experience with the corrupt, physical Black Venus. This reflowering is possible because the poet has become able, for a time, to separate the Muse from her corporeality, referring to her "chair spirituelle," seeing only her "fantôme" coming to speak to him, to order him to love only the "Beau." But more importantly, it comes from the new reflection of himself the poet sees in a new admirer. While the rejection of the Black Venus rendered him spiritually impotent, shattered his self-concept, the new muse restores his vigor as he becomes the object of her gaze.

The importance of the regard, the least corporeal, most spiritual of an other's aspect, becomes clearer in the next poem in the sequence, "Le flambeau vivant." While in the preceding poem the Muse's regard re-awakened the poet's hope, here it becomes the guiding force of his existence. Further distanced from the body, the Muse guides him as a disembodied pair of eyes. They erase all of the threatening sexual difference that marked the Black Venus who could consume the universe with her *vagina dentata* (*Fleurs* XXV). These phallicized eyes become "frères" to the poet, and can save him from "tout piège et de tout péché grave" (l. 5), leading him toward the Ideal. Hope is so strong for the poet that he believes the possibility of a *réveil* from the death his soul felt before.

This vein of hope continues in the following poem of the 1861 edition, "Réversibilité" (*Fleurs* XLIV), in which the poet demonstrates that he has not yet sunk to the depths he later will in "L'Irrémédiable." Praying to the "Ange" full of gaiety, goodness, health, beauty and happiness, he feels that he may yet be saved. But this poem loses much of its impact in the 1861 edition because of the banning of "A celle qui est trop gaie" (Pléiade 156-57), which directly preceded it in 1857. The banned poem represents one of Baudelaire's most vicious and violent expressions of need for and hatred of the other, of the woman.

The first four stanzas demonstrate the aspects of health and gaiety of the White Venus, which simply blow away any "passant chagrin" she might feel. Her carelessness is so extreme that she appears insane: "Folle dont je suis affolé" (l. 15), but this carelessness drives the poet crazy: "Je te hais autant que je t'aime!" (l. 16)

Humiliated, he parallels her cheer to the beauty of nature—the shining sun, “le printemps et la verdure” (l. 21)—taking it as a personal reproach, an insult to his own sulkiness, *atonie*, which in his egocentric fantasy he feels should be reflected in all around him. What he describes as “L’insolence de la Nature” (l. 24) threatens his narcissistic ego and metaphorically rapes him, as it tears his breast and humiliates him (l. 20-22). Now, since he cannot take on the cheery mood of his mistress who expresses her subjective difference from his own, he wishes to punish her and force her to take on his evil humor. Taking the last three stanzas to an extreme reading, the poet fantasizes the ultimate rape in which he castrates his victim as he carves “Une blessure large et creuse” (l. 32). Then he metaphorically penetrates every orifice, as this new one in her “flanc étonné” (l. 31) represents anus and both oral and vaginal lips, and passes on his spleen, as he would a syphilitic infection, carving a new orifice into her flank, and dreaming:

Et, vertigineuse douceur!
 A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
 Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
 T’infuser mon venin, ma sœur! (l. 33-36)

The parallel between “Au lecteur”’s “mon semblable, mon frère” cannot go unnoticed. This moment reflects the same hate and violence for “La Présidente,” that the earlier poem did for his complacent, bourgeois reader. This hatred arises equally from the poet’s exclusion from happiness, from the threat their happiness seems to pose to his own subjectivity, as from his need to feel a community, a familiarity, to feel that he has brothers and sisters, that he is not alone, not an Outsider.

“Réversibilité” (*Fleurs* XLIV) refers to the changing mood of the poet-hero, and allows an almost incredible return of hope for him after the violence of “À celle qui est trop gaie.” Reaching out in an act of reconciliation and a plea for the understanding he first rejected in “Semper Eadem” and feeling himself denied in the previous poem, the poet asks this “Ange plein de gaieté” (l. 1) if she, so full of health and beauty, ever knows the fevers, anguish and hate that he feels. He asks her to pray for him, hoping for a possible remittance from his suffering. His prayer is followed by a “Confession” (*Fleurs* XLV), a confession not of his own sins, but of hers; her imperfection provides the answer to his prayer. The poet recalls a single evening stroll with the “aimable et douce femme” (l. 1) who

finally utters "une note bizarre," a note that resembles the shame of an unwanted child—a monstrous child like the poet himself in "Bénédiction," a child which represents the sin she is about to confess:

Comme une enfant chétive, horrible, sombre, immonde,
Dont sa famille rougirait,
Et qu'elle aurait longtemps, pour la cacher au monde,
Dans un caveau mise au secret (l. 21-24).

She speaks, admitting her shameful truth, "cette confidence horrible": "'Que c'est un dur métier que d'être belle femme...'" (l. 29).

Making a living from her physical beauty, she confesses her own prostitution. This, however, reassures the poet: even she "who is too gay" has troubles, imperfections. The poet gains the sympathy and understanding he wishes, the spectacle he has drawn of her admission of sins has placated him, allowed him to view her as his semblable. "L'Aube spirituelle" (*Fleurs* XLVI) sustains this ray of hope for the poet-hero, as the sun/Son-like Muse/Savior appears "Pour l'homme terrassé qui rêve encore [en-corps] et souffre" (l. 6). The poem recounts the spiritual awakening of the poet, seduced or blinded, by the brightness of the Muse. He is "la brute assoupie," for whom her "souvenir," her "fantôme," appear like the sun, blocking out "les débris fumeux des stupides orgies" (l. 9). He can forget the regrettable material aspect of his being in her spiritual light. However, the fallacy of this hope is foreshadowed here; in a slip the poet reveals that the "inaccessible azur" opening up for him as he sheds his materiality, beckons like the "gouffre" (l. 5, 7). The gaping hole of the abyss, of the seductive woman is revealed, if only for a moment, to cast its shadow over the poet's fate, just as "le soleil a noirci la flamme des bougies" in line 12.

"Harmonie du soir" (*Fleurs* XLVII) reveals once again the illuminating power of the memory of the Muse. The poet describes the fading of the day as perceived by each of the senses: the scent of the flowers evaporates, the melancholy suffering of a violin floats to the ear as the setting sun reveals a vision of itself drowning in the pool of its own red blood. All of this overwhelming sensory input may evoke fear of the gouffre glimpsed in the previous sonnet, here seen as "néant vaste et noir" (l. 9), but for the poet the past, his memory of the Muse guide him: "Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!" (l. 16) The beauty of this remembrance, however, becomes a bitter poison in "Le Flacon" (*Fleurs* XLVIII). Using the

flask as a double metaphor for both himself and the poem, the poet wishes the memory he leaves with others to linger like a vile poison, to remind those who read the verse of its force and virulence. Subjective confusion returns as this image of the poet feminizes and objectifies him, as he becomes a uterine flask, and the odor he leaves resembles the *odor di femina*. This scent, which might also be attributed to the Muse causes a voluptuous phallic "Vertige" (containing the *verge*), a vertigo, which is, although seductive, extremely dangerous. In his desire to please, the poet wishes to affect others as she has him, leaving them perched at the edge of this gouffre where he could lose his balance and finally fall into nothingness, death. The *néant* that the Woman–Muse represents and that he so desires also bears a frightening aspect.

The Cycle of the White Venus begins hopefully for the poet, as that escape from self-consciousness, from reality, from spleen seems possible in the creation of a Muse who evades the flesh, thus avoiding *le Mal* and achieving a positive Ideal. He can evoke a memory, a phantom woman, in which he can lose himself, "s'enivrer," without grave danger. Yet her perceived antipathy eventually angers him, and her subjectivity explodes his illusion of a real and permanent solution to his problems; no longer able to escape through her, he wishes to destroy her. For a moment he is able to resuscitate the illusion, to recreate her beautiful memory, but ultimately this memory becomes the poison held by "Le Flaçon."

This cycle of poems demonstrates the Baudelairean poet-hero's flight from the real, the physical, the sexual (whose horror he recounted in The Cycle of the Black Venus), and shows his desire to create only on an imaginary, ideal plane. He gains increasing control of himself by silencing the other's subjectivity by taking away her body and her voice. This desexualized object, is soon left only with a powerful phallicized regard—operating a return to a time before differentiation, when mother and son were one, undivided by the father's revelation of sexual difference. As the Muse is broken down and transformed by the poet's imaginative power, she loses even that power to become a formless light which represents an ideal beyond, a "happy death," that seduces the poet, lulls him into a sense of security. But lying just beyond this dream of total fulfillment, as the poet soon senses, lies the black nothingness of the *gouffre*, the total absorption of his self, the menace of her ubiquitous

subjectivity, constantly returning, just when he thought he had annihilated it.

The Cycle of the Green-Eyed Venus begins with "Le poison" (*Fleurs* XLIX), which describes the contents of "Le Flacon" from a new perspective, and seems to be one of Baudelaire's clearest enunciations of the woman as the ultimate means of escape. Poison is one of the more interesting words in Baudelaire's arcana; it has connotations of both one meaning and its contrary, reflecting the ambivalence of the poet-hero's attraction to/repulsion from the woman: on the one hand, poison overtly evokes death, but its latin etymology *potio*, potion, evokes on the other hand, a cure for illness, life. Furthermore the magic potion can be one of transformation, and in this case the definite article emphasizes that it is not just any poison, but the poison.

Baudelaire teases the reader, though, saving the best for last, as he first describes two potions of lesser value: wine and opium. In the first stanza of the poem, wine is attributed the alchemical power to gild reality:

Le vin sait revêtir le plus sordide bouge
 D'un luxe miraculeux,
 Et fait surgir plus d'un portique fabuleux
 Dans l'or de sa vapeur rouge,
 Comme un soleil couchant dans un ciel nébuleux (l. 1-5)

It creates a state of "luxe" in the most sordid hovel, which harks back to that womb-like luxury of "La vie antérieure," where the image of the "portique" is seen. Having to do with fables or with the "merveilleux antique" according to the *Robert*, this "portique" is *fabuleux* and thus relates to a pre-rational time, the maternal imaginary. The wine opens the door onto the ancient marvel of the previous existence. Its alchemy gilds, but perhaps we can also divine the little alchemical homunculus floating around in "sa vapeur rouge," waiting to "surgir" at the moment of the "couchant" / "accouchement." While wine allows for the "centralisation du Moi" mentioned by Baudelaire at the beginning of "Mon cœur mis à nu," in contrast the opium of the second stanza of "Le poison" operates its "vaporisation." The boundaries of self are lost as the drug "aggrandit ce qui n'a pas de bornes," filling the soul "au-delà de sa capacité" (l. 6, 10).

The reader discovers at the onset of the third stanza that the powers of these potions "ne vaut pas le poison qui découle/...de tes

yeux verts" (l. 11-12). The other's gaze contains the most powerful poison/potion, source of and cure for the poet's ills. These eyes are likened to "Lacs où mon âme tremble et se voit à l'envers..." (l. 13); just as in "L'homme et la mer," the poet sees himself reflected in the water, but he sees himself in reverse. In the woman's eyes, he sees his opposite (the woman herself), and he sees himself as opposite (himself feminized/as other). The poison then, is not just transforming, but also self-revealing. And it seems to reveal that the self is a sham, bringing us back to Lacan's mirror stage where the self is really constituted out of nothing but the desire reflected in the regard of the other.

The poet is transfixed in this gaze, seeing himself backwards (*à l'envers...*). Fortunately, his dreams come along to save him from this suspended moment: "Mes songes viennent en foule/Pour se désaltérer à ces gouffres amers" (l. 14-15). They come to drink the potion of transformation that will transform him back into himself, "le dés-altérer," figuratively fulfill his desire for union, make him un-other. And they will un-other him from none other than "ces gouffres à mères," (also present in "L'homme et la mer"), these mothers' wombs, these yawning chasms that separate him from the mother, from himself and from his desire. These "gouffres amers" correspond grammatically to the "yeux verts" of the mistress, from the "gouffre" of the womb as well as the gash of the female sex. In this equation of the eye with the sex, we realize that the poison drips not only from her eyes, but from her "gouffre." The fourth stanza permits a further extension as the "terrible prodige" of the poison becomes the woman's saliva, a bodily fluid excreted from the lips and by extension from her vaginal lips. If the poet were to taste this poison, one sees again through the image of cunnilingus, a reiterated attempt to return to the womb, to climb right back in head first.

The brilliance of this last stanza lies in its taking this cunnilingual image and turning it into an instance of fellatio, and finally into a possible instance of vaginal penetration. This complete confusion of sexual organs—reminiscent of the polymorphous perversity of the infant—brings us back to the confusion about the mirror image, this wondering "who is who? which one is the subject, which one is the image?"

Tout cela ne vaut pas le terrible prodige
 De ta salive qui mord,
 Qui plonge dans l'oubli mon âme sans remords,

Et, charriant le vertige,

La roule défaillante aux rives de la mort! (l. 16-20)

The woman's saliva bites (and is death: *mord=mort*). Are her lips these "rives de la mort," the mythical source of life and death? They seem to roll around the "ver[t]ige," which is also a *vert tige*, his phallic stem is of the same color as her eyes—the eye that can be both symbolically phallic or vaginal. In this total sexual union/confusion of bodies are figured and combined the effects of the wine and the opium together: the poet seemingly returns into the womb, and knows *la (petite) mort*, the death of orgasm at the same time. He experiences at once "la centralisation et la vaporisation du Moi." But there is one problem—the orgasm arrives too soon. The poem ends in an exclamation, a premature ejaculation on the shore, at the banks of death, never really breaking through to the other side.

In a sense, though, during sexual contact with the woman, the poet does operate the most valuable form of escape, for in the complete physical confusion of sexual organs and mental erasure of his sense of a distinct self, he operates an escape from the burden of self-consciousness. The next poem of the cycle demonstrates the transient nature of this type of escape. In "Ciel brouillé" (*Fleurs* L), however, the poet can no longer read what is in the eye of the woman. The poison allowing escape is not always there, he can no longer tell if these eyes are green, or blue, or grey. He cannot predict her mood any more than he can predict the weather. This manifestation of her subjectivity, of the changing nature of her desire, profoundly destabilizes him, causing him to question his own identity, his own desire, and his own potency: "saurai-je tirer de l'implacable hiver/ Des plaisirs plus aigus...?" (l. 15-16)

The doubling effect of the mirror seen in "L'homme et la mer" and "Le poison," becomes an internal doubling, or haunting in "Le chat" (*Fleurs* LI). While in the first two poems the mother is linked to the double, the question of the ghost of the father also arises in this poem. The cat walking around in the poet's head manifests itself as a feminine voice, and is, in effect, a sort of muse filling up the poet with/like a good poem "Me remplit comme un vers nombreux" (l. 11-12). He enjoys this sensation as he would a "philtre," returning to the trope of the poison. Because this cat is, in fact, often read as an internalized representation of the mistress,

one can say that, once again, the woman operates as vehicle of escape.

The voice of the Muse, so important in "Confession," provides the poet a means of escape through the cat's purr: "Elle endort les plus cruels maux/Et contient toutes les extases" (l. 13-14). He has a purely intuitive understanding of it: "Pour dire les plus longues phrases,/Elle n'a pas besoin de mots" (l. 15-16). In fact this cat's voice seems like Cixous's depiction of the voice of the mother which expresses the non-symbolic, pre-linguistic communications of plenitude allowed in the imaginary and longed for in the theory of the Correspondances. The poet explains the pleasure this voice causes him:

Non, il n'est pas d'archet qui morde
 Sur mon cœur, parfait instrument,
 Et fasse plus royalement
 Chanter sa plus vibrante corde (l. 17-20)

The voice of the cat becomes the bow that pulls at the poet's heartstrings, in fact the voice of the cat makes the poet purr. Here we see an internal doubling. The poet no longer sees himself reflected in the mother's eyes, but now the mother's voice seems to sing through him in an angelic and harmonious manner that needs no words in this instance of perception of the maternal imaginary. This would be totally harmonious, being beyond the linguistic, beyond the frustrating incapacities of signification, and would avoid the gap—the "manque de communication"—necessary between signifier and signified. This conception of language is reflected in the idea of the Correspondance, a desire to conceive of Nature without these gaps, and reflects the frustrating nature of the lack felt by the subject at its separation from the mother.

The second part of the poem problematizes this reading as it allows both an equation of the cat with the mother and with the ghost of the father. In *Fusées* XII, Baudelaire discusses the connection between his taste in women and his mother's furs and the smell of furs in general. The first stanza of the second part of "Le chat" brings this connection to bear:

De sa fourrure blonde et brune
 Sort un parfum si doux, qu'un soir
 J'en fus embaumé, pour l'avoir
 Caressée une fois, rien qu'une (l. 25-28).

The poet strokes the mistress's sex (or masturbates an internalized female sex)—*une chatte* in slang terms—and from the fur/pubic hair (both *poils*) arises the *odor di femina*. This odor embalms him—turns him into a *momie*, which is both his “sosie”⁵ and his mommy; as he is the “mummy” of his “mommy.” He has allowed himself to (re)produce her, and to produce in her the premature orgasm with a single caress which inverts the necessities of sexual reproduction and yet maintains its perpetuation of self beyond death.

But in the real-life Baudelaire family drama, the one who is dead is the father. And in the next stanza one discovers that this male cat, mimicking a female sex and the voice of the mother, also appears as the ghost of the father:

C'est l'esprit familier du lieu;
 Il juge, il préside, il inspire
 Toutes choses dans son empire;
 Peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu? (l. 29-32)

This familiar spirit still reigns over his empire like the ghost of Hamlet's father. He holds the keys to the law, judging. God-like he inspires, but this spirit is also “fée” and therefore feminine. One can read this poem as a description by the poet of the bisexual nature (in the sense of *anima/animus*) of his personality and more importantly, of the bisexual nature of the superego, in which both the voice of the mother and the law of the father have been internalized. “Le chat,” one of the most positive poems of the *Fleurs du mal*, allows the poet to express love in many ways. Literally, while he loves the cat about which he is writing, he also can be seen as loving the mistress which the cat can symbolize. Internally, he loves the mother/father super-ego represented by the cat and, even more, it seems to also represent an Ideal ego, internally reflecting back to the poet that which he loves in himself: “ce chat que j'aime.../Et que je regarde en moi-même...” (l. 33, 36). This astonishes him as it fixedly returns his stare.

The next poem in this cycle, “Le beau navire” (*Fleurs* LII), clearly demonstrates the privileged position of the woman as evasion, as she becomes the physical means of escape, the ship. The ship as a vessel, a container and a carrier, provides a metaphor for the pregnant, or nursing mother. She passively receives the poet-hero's *vers*: his verse and his sperm-worms. But the poet also seems to be carried off on a voyage by the ship; he enters it becoming the child, the fruit of his own loins, and his own verse. He is both the

creator of the verse and the verse itself. As he creates himself, he writes his sense of his self in the poem. He is both father and son, his poetic creation and the fruit of the fantasized incestuous union with the virgin mother (both sea and ship). He is both himself and his descendance, his legacy to the future.

The poem begins "Je veux te raconter...." The poet's desire is to tell or to re-tell, the woman. He will take her power to give birth to him and he will give poetic birth to her by painting her beauty. He will do this in an incestuous move "Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité" (l. 4). In the represented woman, the child and the adult will "come" together. He, as a mature man, can fantasize the incestuous union he desired as a child while the still youthful woman replaces the maturity of the old mother. The poet describes how her body is like a ship, swaying, reflecting the ship's rocking ("bercement") on the sea and of the child in the mother's arms. This swaying has "l'effet d'un beau vaisseau" (l. 6), turning her into a passive vessel to receive the poet's words. Repeating itself from verse to verse, the poem itself sways back and forth from the hips to the breasts, only to return to the hips of the woman. Her breast, also a vaginal chasm, "gorge," provides the site of polymorphous pleasure filled with those potions, with which the reader is already familiar, an "armoire à doux secrets.../De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs.../Qui feraient délirer..." (l. 22-24). Her legs torment his desire "comme deux sorcières qui font/Tourner un philtre noir dans un vase profond" (l. 31-32). Thus the woman's body with its milky potions acts as repository for the poet's escape from the tension, his spleen of dissatisfaction. The satisfactions in question are both infantile and sexual, oral and genital, as the focus shifts back and forth from the breast to the vagina. As the poet is both child and father, the woman is both mother and child, "majestueuse enfant" (l. 40). She becomes his child in the retelling of her that is the poem.

"L'invitation au voyage" (*Fleurs* LIII) continues this writing of the woman's body, which becomes a writing off of it, by means of which the poet can co-opt the woman's/mother's (re)productive power. He invites the fruit of the incestuous union of mother and son of "Le beau navire" on the voyage: "Mon enfant, ma sœur..." (l. 1). The obsession with incestuous generation continues as the poet wishes to to live with, and love his child/sister. This trip would bring them, siblings, back to a state of union with the mother, as

they would return to the "pays qui te ressemble!" (l. 6) With the female sister, the male poet finds an even closer identity to the mother. Only she can truly resemble the mother, as only she has the womb. This "pays" that looks like her resembles the images of the womb already outlined, the site of "Luxe, calme et volupté."

In this womb the voice of the mother reappears, like "Le chat" who spoke without words; all objects would communicate: "Tout y parleraient/A l'âme en secret/Sa douce langue natale" (l. 24-26). In this mother country, one would speak one's mother tongue, escaping the unfulfilling, frustrating condition of separation, of signification, where apart from the mother, both subjectivity and language can only be figured as lack. Both the vessel and the destination of the voyage are the mother's womb. But this trip is doomed and the poet expresses his realization of this in the next poem of the cycle, "L'Irréparable" (*Fleurs* LIV).

The hope to recapture the lost paradise is stopped short by the sense of the irreparability of the fall, be it the sin of the mother or the birth of the son that is the result. In any case, the depth of the sense of loss lies in the force of the burden of remorse: "Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords..." (l. 1). This remorse is a result of life, a fact of life, for as we live in time, time constantly passes. Through poetry, the poet has sought escape, but escape is only temporary. He has only been buying time. While remorse eats away at him like "le ver des morts" (l. 3), his own *vers* seem dead: neither his verse, nor his impotent sperm have been able to operate the permanent solution he seeks. He doesn't want merely to escape, but to use a poison—"philtre" "vin" "tisane" (l. 10) for true liberation. He asks a woman, the "belle sorcière" (l. 11), to tell him the secret potion. She, as Insider, knows the secret to life and death. She can and does reproduce herself, she triumphs through her progeny.

He, however, has lost all hope, "L'Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l'Auberge/Est soufflée, est morte à jamais!" (l. 26-27) His soul—his replacement womb—is completely barren, incapable of any joy, of any of the *jouissance* leading to production. His heart represents the "théâtre banal" (l. 45), the barren womb, where no spectacle of value is produced. He waits and waits, for a sort of assumption to occur, where he, like the Virgin Mary, will be visited by "l'extase," where the "Être aux ailes de gaze" (l. 50) will descend to fecundate him and produce the savior of the world. "L'Irréparable" expresses the depths of artistic frustration at the

incapacity to create, at the ultimate condition of the incapacity of the artist to re/create himself or to really signify himself or anything because of the flawed nature of linguistic structure. As the poet/child realizes he can not cover over the abyss that yawns between himself and the mother from whom he has been separated, the inadequacy of language reveals itself. For this same abyss gapes between the signifier and the signified, between the poem and the object of its art (the woman he wishes to describe as the Ideal of beauty), and finally between the reader and the poet. For ultimately the poet can not signify himself in the way he wishes the reader to see him signified.

For Baudelaire's protagonist, the reader resembles the mother. Just as the infant wishes to see himself loved in the eyes of the all-need-fulfilling mother, the poet wishes to recapture this paradise, not only in the fantasy of the poem, but also on a tangible level through the poem. The poem is not a gift, but a demand, a demand for the fulfillment of the need to be loved. The poet wishes to see himself as loved in the mirror of the eyes of his public, who approve his alchemy, who in fact are necessary to the achievement of his alchemy, by literally turning his verse into the gold of real, material success. The irreparable distance between the writer and the reader becomes fixed and concretized as Baudelairean spleen, fueled by perversity, working to take control of the situation of solitude and turning it into an active isolation, as he insulates himself from the hostile and rejecting, because not totally and completely loving, mother/world.

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Notes

1. This is something which we may observe in the prose poem "Le confiteur de l'artiste" (*Spleen de Paris* III), in which an excess of stimulus achieved through communion with nature results in the poet's near-breakdown.

2. I owe this phrase to Professor Peter Robinson (personal communication 1/29/92).

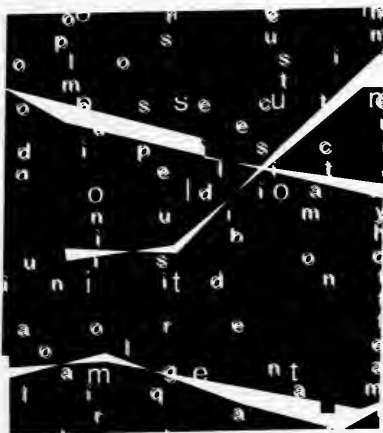
3. This numerotation follows the Pléaïde edition cited in the list at the end of the article, and all subsequent citations of line numbers correspond to those assigned in that edition.

4. An image Baudelaire explores with the parthenogenetic Phoenix in "Les sept vieillards" (*Fleurs* XC).
5. Blanchot brings out the connection *momie/sosie* in *Thomas l'obscur*.

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UCLA FRENCH STUDIES



*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvent ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

XI

PAROLES

GELÉES

93

PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

Volume 11 ❧ 1993

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Cover art:	Guy Bennett	

Paroles Gelées was established in 1983 by its founding editor, Kathryn Bailey. The journal is managed and edited by the French Graduate Students' Association and published annually under the auspices of the Department of French at UCLA. Funds for this project are generously provided by the UCLA Graduate Students' Association.

Information regarding the submission of articles and subscriptions is available from the journal office:

Paroles Gelées
Department of French
UCLA
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1550
(310) 825-1145

Subscription price: \$8 for individuals, \$10 for institutions
\$12 for international subscribers.

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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Poetry and Music: A Roundtable Discussion with Pierre Boulez	1
<i>Introduction by Andrea Loselle</i>	
A la recherche d'une voix féminine: Etude de <i>La Princesse de Montpensier</i> et de <i>La Princesse de Clèves</i> de Madame de Lafayette	17
<i>Karin Schiffer</i>	
Mon Semblable, ma mère: Woman, Subjectivity and Escape in <i>Les Fleurs du Mal</i>	31
<i>Amy Ransom</i>	
Desiring Venus	57
<i>Laura Leavitt</i>	
Recent Publications.	73
UCLA Departmental Dissertation Abstracts	77
Ordering Information	81

