

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

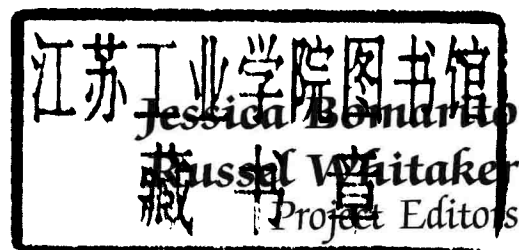
NCLC

155

Volume 155

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800
and 1899, from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations



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Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 155

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Data Capture

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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)* has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, *NCLC* has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *NCLC*.

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NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, *NCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *NCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *NCLC* is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*.

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An *NCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting

those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Each volume of *NCLC* contains a **Cumulative Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *NCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Berstein, Carol L. "Subjectivity as Critique and the Critique of Subjectivity in Keats's *Hyperion*." *After the Future: Postmodern Times and Places*. Ed. Gary Shapiro. Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990. 41-52. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 121. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 155-60.

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Charles Baudelaire

1821-1867

French poet, critic, translator, novelist, and diarist.

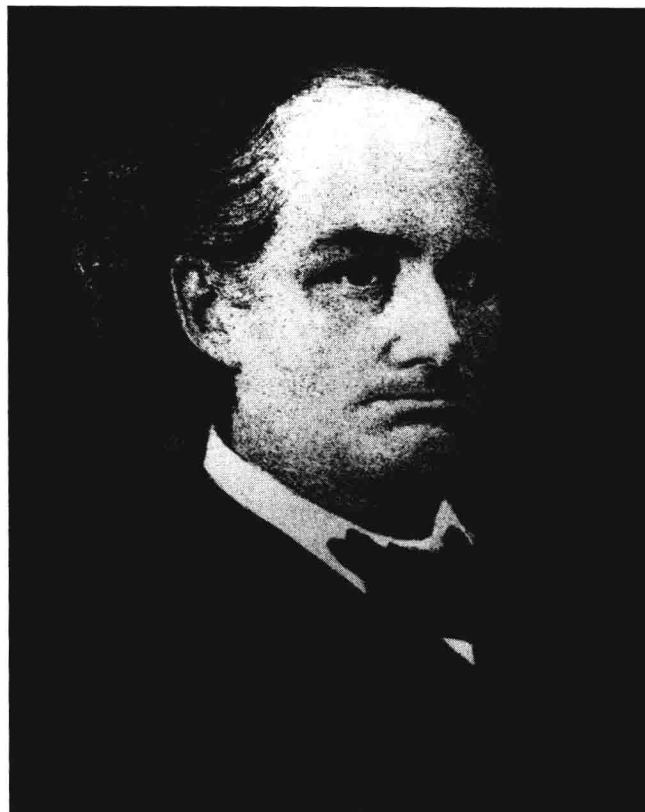
This entry presents Baudelaire criticism from 1985 to 2002. For further information on Baudelaire's career, see *NCLC*, Volumes 6 and 29; for discussion of the work *Les fleurs du mal*, see *NCLC*, Volume 55.

INTRODUCTION

Baudelaire is best known as the author of *Les fleurs du mal* (1857; *The Flowers of Evil*). Considered shocking because of its amoral tone and explicit portrayal of such topics as prostitution, sexual perversion, urban lowlife, and the poet's own tortured and conflicted psyche, *The Flowers of Evil* was neither a popular nor a critical success upon its publication. While only a few nineteenth-century reviewers recognized Baudelaire's highly individual talent, today he is widely appreciated for his style, daring subject matter, and distinctly modern point of view.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Baudelaire was born in Paris to financially secure parents. His father, who was three decades older than his mother, died when Baudelaire was six years old; Baudelaire's mother remarried seven years later. Exceptionally close to his mother, Baudelaire deeply resented his stepfather and, as he grew older, became rebellious, neglecting his studies in favor of a dissipated lifestyle. His parents sent him on a two-year trip to India in hopes of reforming him, but Baudelaire returned much the same. It was during this trip, however, that he began experimenting with writing verse and wrote some of the poems that would later become part of *The Flowers of Evil*. When he returned to Paris, Baudelaire received an inheritance that allowed him to live for a brief time as a dandy intent on challenging the norms of what he viewed as the corrupt bourgeois society around him. He fell in love with Jeanne Duval, a Parisian woman of African descent, who inspired his "Black Venus" cycle of love poems. Their highly sensual and volatile relationship eventually ended, leaving Baudelaire introspective and disillusioned. He began to experiment with opium and hashish—which also inspired his interest in the work of Thomas De Quincey—and eventually published several poems in the journal *Revue de deux mondes*.



Except for a few literary figures, notably Victor Hugo and Algernon Charles Swinburne, reviewers roundly condemned his work as scandalous.

Baudelaire was similarly attacked upon the publication of *The Flowers of Evil* in 1857, when even his close friend Charles Sainte-Beuve, an author and critic, refused to praise the book. Shortly afterward, Baudelaire and his publisher, Auguste Poulet-Malassis, were prosecuted and convicted of immorality. Six poems deemed morally offensive were removed from the book and published later the same year in Belgium as *Les épaves*. These poems scandalized Paris with their graphic eroticism and depiction of lesbianism and vampirism. For both the 1861 and the posthumously published 1868 editions of *The Flowers of Evil*, some poems were added and others revised, but the ban on the suppressed poems was not lifted in France until 1949. After the publication of the 1861 edition, Baudelaire's publisher went bankrupt. In an attempt to regain both his reputation and his financial solvency, Baudelaire traveled to

Belgium on a lecture tour. The tour was unsuccessful and Baudelaire returned to Paris in 1866, where he suffered a severe stroke. He died in 1867.

MAJOR WORKS

Critics agree that *The Flowers of Evil* is Baudelaire's masterpiece. Written and revised over a number of years, the poems of this collection combine his passionate Romanticism, fervent striving for stylistic perfection, and his religious quest. In his desire to depict the horror and ecstasy of life, Baudelaire explored the beautiful as well as the ugly and the sinful as well as the repentant. Many critics have called attention to these polar opposites, which drive the themes of *The Flowers of Evil*. Pervaded with satanic themes, the poems also attest to Baudelaire's search for spiritual perfection amid a life of temporal pleasure, culminating in his search for peace in death. Baudelaire's most controversial poems in *The Flowers of Evil* are his love pomes, written for his three mistresses (Duval, Apollonie Sabatier, and Marie Daubrun). Their raw, sometimes brutal sensuality testifies to what many scholars regard as Baudelaire's conflicted feelings toward women.

Baudelaire is also acknowledged as one of the first French poets to delineate the plight of the urban underclass. Unlike his artistic predecessors who located beauty in art, Baudelaire discovered artistic possibilities among the outcasts of Parisian society. The beauty and cruelty of Parisian existence, Baudelaire contended, mirrored the complicated and irrational nature of all humanity. Scenes of the Parisian underworld are vividly depicted in his *Petits poèmes en prose: Le spleen de Paris* (1869, *Poems in Prose from Charles Baudelaire*). Comparable in lyrical imagery and language to *The Flowers of Evil*, this work conveys in melancholy tones a desire to escape the misery of earthly existence. Critics note that the stylistic innovations of Baudelaire's prose poems strongly influenced the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Claudel, and Arthur Rimbaud.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Despite his dismissal by reviewers in his own era, Baudelaire's reputation in the twentieth century is secure. Critics consistently rank *The Flowers of Evil* among the greatest works of Western poetry and they fully acknowledge Baudelaire's influence on Symbolist poetry and such later modern poets as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. For the most part, scholars have focused on Baudelaire's transformation of Romantic themes, the religious elements in his work, his rigorous concern for the formal aspects of his verse, and his emphasis on emotion and the senses. Toward the end of the twentieth

century and the beginning of the twenty-first, scholars expanded their exploration of Baudelaire's poetry. While critics like Margaret Miner, Nicolae Babuts, James R. Lawler, Peter Broome, Maria Scott, and Rosemary Lloyd continue the tradition of close stylistic study of Baudelaire's work, other critics have probed, for example, the influence of caricature on Baudelaire's style (Ainslee Armstrong McLees), the poet's handling of the metaphor of surgery in his work (Cheryl Krueger), and Baudelaire's technique of writing about prostitution as an intermediary for homoeroticism. Sonya Stephens and Jean-Christophe Bailly discuss Baudelaire's blurring of the boundaries between the genres of poetry and prose in the context of modernism, while Ross Chambers and Kalliopi Nikolopoulou comment on his attitude toward the city, with Chambers pointing out that noise and disorder become incorporated into Baudelaire's poetic style. Baudelaire's political ideas have also attracted critics' attention, and Beryl Schlossman, Geraldine Friedman, Timothy Raser, and Dabarati Sanyal chart the effects of revolution and its aftermath in some of his works.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Salon de 1845* (poetry) 1845
- La fanfarlo* (novel) 1847
- Histoires extraordinaires* [translator; from the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe] (short stories) 1856
- Les épaves* (poetry) 1857
- Les fleurs du mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*] (poetry) 1857; revised enlarged edition, 1861
- Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* [translator; from the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe] (short stories) 1857
- Aventures d'Arthur Pym* [translator; from the novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* by Edgar Allan Poe] (novel) 1858
- Les paradis artificiels: Opium et haschisch* [*Artificial Paradises: On Hashish and Wine as a Means of Expanding Individuality*] (autobiography and poetry; includes Baudelaire's translation of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*) 1860
- Curiosités esthétiques* (criticism) 1868
- L'art romantique* (criticism) 1869
- Petits poèmes en prose: Le spleen de Paris* [*Poems in Prose from Charles Baudelaire*] (prose poems) 1869; also published as *Paris Spleen*
- Journaux intimes* [*Intimate Journals*] (diaries) 1887
- Lettres: 1841-1866* (letters) 1905
- Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*. 19 vols. (poetry, criticism, essays, novel, letters, journals, autobiography, and translations) 1922-53
- The Letters of Charles Baudelaire* (letters) 1927
- Baudelaire on Poe; Critical Papers* (criticism) 1952

The Mirror of Art, Critical Studies (criticism) 1955
Baudelaire as a Literary Critic (criticism) 1964
Art in Paris, 1845-1862. Salons and Other Exhibitions
 Reviewed by Charles Baudelaire (criticism) 1965
Selected Writings on Art and Artists (criticism) 1986

CRITICISM

Ross Chambers (essay date summer 1985)

SOURCE: Chambers, Ross. "Baudelaire's Street Poetry." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 13, no. 4 (summer 1985): 244-59.

[In the following essay, Chambers describes the poems of the "Tableaux Parisiens" section of *The Flowers of Evil* as being about Paris street life, and as stylistically reflecting the concept of disorder inherent in their subject.]

When, in the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire introduced a new section entitled "Tableaux Parisiens," he included in it a series of eight poems (from "Le Soleil" to "Le Squelette Laboureur")¹ which constitute the "diurnal" sequence of the section, corresponding to a "nocturnal" sequence which runs from "Le Jeu" to "Rêve parisien."² One unifying feature of the eight diurnal poems is that they are all set in the street; and my first purpose here is to show that in these texts the street should be understood as the place in which the "I" subject of the poems encounters the conditions of "modernity." For the street is a metonym of the city, but its very metonymic status is what makes it a metaphor of urban existence, the "chaos des vivantes cités" (of "Les petites vieilles") which is also "la forêt où mon esprit s'exile" (of "Le Cygne"). *Pars pro toto*, when the "whole" is itself elusive, indefinable, chaotic—a jumble of unrelated parts—becomes an experience of fragmentation and disconnectedness: it produces enigma and poses the problem of meaningfulness. Thus Baudelaire uses synecdoche, not to reconstitute a missing unity, but to express its disintegration. The Baudelairean street is a place in which encounters occur but their finality is obscured, in which knowledge of their origin and certainty as to their end are unavailable: "Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais" ("A une passante"); a place which thus comes to signify that disconnectedness of experience which, since Marx, we have learned to call alienation.³

However, the street is not only the place in which the "action" of the poems occurs, their setting; it serves also, within the poems, as a figure of poetic discourse

itself. By this means, the poems describe themselves as places of encounter for the reader—of encounter with beauty, the bizarre, the fantastic, the grotesque, the absurd, the enigmatic; of encounter, as I shall suggest, with figures of death. And by extension of the analogy, they define themselves also—*pars pro toto*—as fragments of some chaotic and ungraspable discursive whole from which they are disconnected but through which moments of human communication can occur and the questions of significance they raise can be posed. Like the street, the Baudelairean poem is a "cana/l/étroit du colosse puissant" in which one encounters a fantastic proliferation of sameness, as in "Les sept vieillards,"⁴ or through whose meandering verses, like "les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales," one may "follow" little old women and reconstruct their lives. Like the Baudelairean street, the poem is often fluvial, whether after the manner of Andromache's "Simois menteur"⁵ or, like the *faubourg* of "Les sept vieillards," leading to the "mer monstrueuse et sans bords" of absurdity. Of the poems, as of the experience they are concerned with, it can be said that "tout . . . devient allégorie" (as in "Le Cygne") and that "tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements" (as in "Les petites vieilles"), so true is it that this is poetry which simultaneously raises the question of meaning and posits the proximity of horror and enchantment, beauty and death.

But the beauty and death one encounters in the street or in the street-poem are of an untraditional kind. Death does not necessarily put an end to life, as is shown in the final poem of the series by the anatomical engravings one encounters in the streets that border the river,

Qui traînent sur les quais poudreux
 Où maint livre cadavéreux
 Dort comme une antique momie.

("Le squelette laboureur")

The digging skeleton suggests that "tout, même la Mort, nous ment" and that there is no end to the labor and questioning of existence. In the poet's book, too, death is not an escape from life so much as what we encounter in life itself, "sur les quais poudreux": it is death-in-life—life defined as death-in-life—which is the subject of these poems. And in them, too, as in the drawings,

. . . auxquels la gravité
 Et le savoir d'un vieil artiste,
 Bien que le sujet en soit triste,
 Ont communiqué la Beauté,

death appears with a strangely enhanced quality—a quality of beauty.

But if we go back now to the first poem of the sequence, "Le Soleil," we can see that beauty, although it is attributed to the work of an artist, his "fantasque escrime" in the street, appears in a way which itself differs mark-

edly from conventional conceptions. If, like the sun, it “embellit le sort des choses les plus viles,”⁶ beauty is here the chance result of an inefficient performance which contrasts with the strength and precision of the sun’s action, an aleatory act indistinguishable, in the domain of language, from the poet’s stumbling progress along a street:

Le long du vieux faubourg, . . .
Je vais m’exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés.

It seems, indeed, if the suggestions of these two framing poems can be extrapolated, that beauty, inasmuch as it results from poetic performance, has now less to do with “la gravité / Et le savoir d’un vieil artiste” than with the modern artist’s grotesque grappling with the forces of chance *in language*. And similarly, it is the poet’s encounters *in the street*, which, posing the question of their meaning like the skeletal diggers:

Dites, quelle moisson étrange,
Forçats arrachés au charnier,
Tirez-vous, et de quel fermier
Avez-vous à remplir la grange?

raise the spectre of death in life to which his poetry seeks to give its strange beauty. If so, what I have called the question of meaning (the presence of death in life) and the question of beauty (the proximity of horror and enchantment) are not separate questions but aspects of a single problematic which has at its core the random quality of the encounters that make up city life. And it is the street, as locus of such encounters (without which they could not take place, but in which they can only occur randomly) which consequently lies at the heart of a poetics of modernity. For the street stands both for the question of the meaningfulness of urban experience, and for a language in which poetic meaning is subject to chance.

Philippe Jaccottet has defined poetry somewhere as “la voix donnée à la mort.” Baudelaire’s street poetry defines itself both as a place in which death walks in the guise of beauty (it is a street-walker), and as a discourse whose beauty is regained from chance; so that here the place and the discourse are one in their apprehension of the presence, in beauty, of the forces of disorder, disharmony and destruction. In surveying briefly the remaining six poems of the street sequence—framed, as we have seen, by a poem which establishes the equivalence of street and poem and a poem which makes the street (-poem) a place of encounter with death-in-life—I will need to examine both a thematics and a poetics, and I shall do so sequentially. But the discontinuity between them is not great if one accepts that disorder is what underlies both; for the thematics is

a thematics of encounter—but of encounter with “bizarre” forms of beauty whose strangeness is the sign of the presence of death⁷—and the poetics (presented already in “*Le Soleil*” as a poetics of encounter) is that of a language traversed by death in the form of communicational disorder, or noise.

For where, as Jonathan Raban points out,⁸ English city-writers identify it as a place of dirt (Baudelaire’s “quais poudreux”), the Baudelairean street manifests the phenomenon of entropy most obsessively in the form of noise. Indeed, it is as a place of noise—“Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombe-reaux” of “*Les sept vieillards*”—that the street achieves its fundamental unity as a place where death makes itself manifest and poetic language becomes problematic; such, at least, is the case I wish to make. But this means that a certain question of communication is of the essence: the thematics of encounter explores the relationship between the lonely poet, the *flâneur* “I,” and the beings he fleetingly meets; while the poetics of noise makes of his voice that “voix donnée à la mort” which, speaking in solitude, dramatizes as clumsy gesticulation the need to communicate through art. Death’s most pervasive manifestation, in “life” as in “art,” is as that which problematizes human communication.

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A complex network of motifs connects the six “inner” poems: I cite at random those of widowhood, the river of tears, the shock of eye-contact. . . . But the major themes can be allowed to emerge by pursuing the “coupling” technique I have already adopted. Proceeding inwards from the two frame poems, one can link “*A une mendiante rousse*” and “*A une passante*” as explorations of the ambivalence of beauty, “*Le Cygne*” and “*Les Aveugles*” as treatments of exile in an alienating world, and finally “*Les petites vieilles*” and “*Les sept vieillards*” as exemplifications of the enveloping theme of encounter itself, in its dual aspect (the establishment of human contact, the brush with absurdity and death).

“*A une mendiante rousse*” concerns the proximity, in modern times, of poverty and beauty. The fantasy of Renaissance splendor suggested by the beggar-woman is not incompatible with the sordid reality of her prostitution in the present:

—Cependant tu vas gueusant
Quelque vieux débris gisant
Au seuil de quelque Véfour
De carrefour.

She is a Muse entirely appropriate to the poet, himself a sickly figure (“poète chétif”); and her “jeune corps mal-adif” adorned only by its own “maigre nudité” (since the poet cannot afford to buy her the tawdry jewelry she covets) fittingly represents a form of beauty allied

with misery and death. Yet it simultaneously suggests that in beauty there is something timeless, since the beggar's rags might, in another age, have been a "robe de cour." So the contrast with the splendidly and fashionably dressed widow (I presume her mourning is for a spouse) of "**A une passante**" is, in the last analysis, only apparent. She, too, in her modern clothes, allows a glimpse of a timeless element, to which the poet responds, behind her contemporary exterior; so that both of these female figures can be seen as exemplifications of Baudelaire's theory of the double composition (eternal and contemporary, relative and absolute) of beauty.

But it is clear that something has changed between these two poems; and that the change affects the value attached to the two components of beauty. Whereas the present appearance of the beggar is one of poverty, sickness and death, while the underlying timelessness is suggested by the fantasy of a "superbe robe de cour" and the context of courtly lovers and poets that accompanies it, it is the classical nobility of the passerby in her magnificent mourning (a contemporary reprise of Renaissance splendor) that makes her a manifest figure of death, while what is glimpsed, through her eye—"ciel livide où germe l'ouragan"—is an eternity of chaos, disorder and tempest. Whereas, in the first case, the poet is moved to rival in some sense the sonnets of "maître Belleau," he is left "crispé comme un extravagant" in the second: struck electrically, and deprived of his means. In each poem, then, death walks the street in the guise of feminine beauty, but the timelessness it suggests is, in one instance, a form of continuity (that of the wretched present with the noble past), but in the other a vision of cosmic disorder capable of plunging the present into impotence, and the absurdity of problematized communication:

Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!"

The poems are suggesting, I think, that there has been a historical change, not in the dual nature of beauty nor in its essential affinity with death, but in the nature of the timeless component, which once was a matter of splendor, majesty and nobility but in which a rupture of continuity has occurred—some historic break—so that it has now become a matter of disorder and tempest. That, it would seem, is why modern art can no longer be a matter of "gravité" and "savoir," but has become rather an unhealthy business of spastic gesticulation (as in "**A une passante**") and clumsy stumbling (as in "**Le Soleil**").

So it is that "**A une mendiante rousse**" anticipates "**Le Cygne**," in which the grotesque swan in the contemporary Parisian gutter recalls—as the beggar recalls the courtly lady—Andromache and "l'immense majesté de

/ ses / douleurs de veuve." But here the theme of widowhood, of course, similarly foretells the "douleur majestueuse" of "**A une passante**," and it does so most interestingly, I would say, because in "**Le Cygne**" the nobility of this ancient widow is seen as being already, in the past, fatally tinged with the first signs of *déchéance*:

Vil bétail . . .
Veuve d'Hector, hélas! et femme d'Hélénus!

The plunge from former splendor into the mud of urban exile is what widowhood (and the consequent history of remarriage which in this case it entails) seems to connote: it not only exemplifies the proximity of the sublime and the grotesque (an essential theme of "**Le Cygne**," as Wolfgang Ietkau has pointed out, in another connection),¹⁰ but it suggests that the slippage from one to the other results from a manifestation of death. But of a death which has not, like Hector's, brought about an end to life: it is a death which, like Andromache, one survives. The death of the hero seems rather to be the historic event that has brought about a disruption in the serenity of the world of the eternal and produced a slippage there—from the sublime to the grotesque—which is responsible for the modern situation. This is a new disorder in the order of timelessness which requires of the artist that beauty be a beauty of death, and that it be regained from randomness and chance: these are the conditions of exile which define—as they do for the Swan—the heroism of modern life.

Just as "**A une mendiante rousse**" looks forward to "**Le Cygne**," then, so too the "I" of "**A une passante**," "crispé comme un extravagant," looks back to "**Les Aveugles**," where the subject of the poem already described himself as "plus qu'eux hébété." There, too, the sky to which the blind raise their sightless eyes, "d'où la divine étincelle est partie," has something in common—as the place where the determining event of modernity has occurred—with the "ciel livide" of "**A une passante**" as well as with the sky, "ironique et cruellement bleu" which the swan implores, "comme l'homme d'Ovide," in the earlier poem. And similarly, with their spastic gesturing and "pareils aux mannequins," the blind not only anticipate the crispation of "**A une passante**," but they also recall the swan, with its "gestes fous," "**Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime**."

Thus the sense of exile in all these poems is attributed to a loss occurring originally in a transcendent and irrecoverable beyond which is at the origin of disorder, "où germe l'ouragan." The city, in "**Le Cygne**," is a place of entropic disorder:

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

in which only human work (the "voirie" perhaps, but it too is a noisy and "sombre ouragan," and certainly the ordering activity of the poetic mind, working with association and memory) represent negentropic forces, opposing *change* ("Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie n'a bougé"). And the city, in "**Les Aveugles**," is a place of noise, whose din is the structural equivalent of the silence of eternity:

Ils traversent ainsi le noir illimité,
Ce frère du silence éternel. O cité!
Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris et beugles,
Vois! je me traîne aussi!

and where the futile gesturing of the blind, "Dardant on ne sait où leurs globes ténébreux," designates them as lost souls in the hell of the living.

Exile, then, is at bottom a matter of disconnectedness. The disconnectedness of spastic gesture reflects the disconnectedness of a world cut off from heaven, or from "le beau lac natal" of the past. Such gesticulation, "ridicule et sublime," figures also the disconnectedness of a world in which chance encounters and the chance associations they arouse pose the question of meaning ("tout pour moi devient allégorie") and leave the observer as much or more "hébété" than those whose exile he observes. For there is also the ultimate loneliness which, in these poems, is that of the poetic "I," the *flâneur* who, while emphathizing with the exiled beings he meets and sharing their pain, experiences in addition a kind of exile of the mind ("Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile . . .") which separates him from them. For it is he who, as poet, asks the question of meaning: "Je dis: Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles?"—a line which is an unmistakable *mise en abyme* of the poem itself, as communicational act.¹¹

Indeed, as an exile himself, the *flâneur*-poet experiences disconnectedness in a quite particular way, as a problem in communication. Or, like the other lonely and disconnected individuals he encounters, he must himself be logically a figure of death, stalking the streets; and we have seen his sense of affinity with them increase as their quality as exiles becomes more explicit. The two central poems, "**Les sept vieillards**" and "**Les petites vieilles**," confirm this affinity with figures of death, the old women by the sympathy (and empathy) they extract from him, the old men by the way their fantastic resemblance attacks the poet's own sense of identity and brings him up against a sense of absurdity expressed in the now familiar meteorological metaphor of the storm:

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!

But the poet, as exile and death-figure, has a special privilege or responsibility, which is to speak—to speak a language, we must now realize, which has the qualities of "bizarre" beauty: a beauty expressive of death. What can such a language be? To whom can it be addressed, in a disconnected world? How can the poet's speech (the *dire* of "**Les Aveugles**") be heard amid the din of the street-world, of the city? These are the questions we must now turn to.

Fellow-feeling, and hence communication, is possible for the poet only with his "congénères," the people of the street: beggars, widows, the blind, "petites vieilles," "fantôme(s) débile(s) / Traversant de Paris le fourmillant tableau," or "Débris d'humanité pour l'éternité mûrs." We may extrapolate that the readership his poems presuppose must also be a readership of exiles (but we know, from the enumerative passages of "**Le Cygne**," that that category subsumes a vast number of people, if not all people). However, if poetic communication is a negentropic activity opposing disorder and entropy, and seeks to counter disconnectedness by establishing contacts and community, it is itself a problematic and indeed dangerous activity, as the two central poems suggest, for what is at stake in poetic activity is individual identity itself.

It is true that, for the "I" subject, the "petites vieilles" are the occasion to move outside of himself in identification with the lives of others, an experience which the poem presents as near-euphoric (and it does dramatize a gift which is part of every city-dweller's survival equipment: the power to reconstruct the lives of others from the most immediately perceptible signs).

Je vois s'épanouir vos passions novices;
Sombres ou lumineux, je vis vos jours perdus;
Mon cœur multiplié jouit de tous vos vices!
Mon âme resplendit de toutes vos vertus!

But such power of identification, depending as it ultimately does on the similarity of self and others, is in the final analysis a function of the sameness of city people, of the city as ant-bed ("de Paris le fourmillant tableau")—and it is precisely the threat posed by the "fourmillante cité," the hostility to the individual soul of its similarity and repetition, which forms the subject of "**Les sept vieillards**," whose eerily multiplying old men pose the problem of indifferentiation and anonymity. In this poem, the "I" subject must finally retreat in self-defence from the street, and shut himself up in a room:

Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
Je rentrai, je fermai ma porte, épouvanté,
Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité!

—a reaction which confirms both the Baudelairean sense of the street as a place of metaphysical danger and the fragility of a conception of the self, as autono-

mous being, so threatened by the phenomenon of communication, whether it be as euphoric multiplication and enhancement of the soul, or dysphoric dissolution in the undifferentiated sea of sameness.¹²

For “*Les sept vieillards*” is readable, as I have suggested elsewhere,¹³ as a poem that allegorizes poetic language itself: the language of metaphor which, for example, causes a street to “simulate” a river, the repeated equivalences which, line by line and strophe by strophe, multiply like the old men and produce the sense of sameness we call poetic unity. If this is so, then poetic language thus becomes itself a manifestation of death, the exact equivalent for the reader of what the encounter with the fantastic old men signifies for the narrative “I” in the poem, that is, “le spectre en plein jour raccroch / ant / le passant” (note, incidentally, that here again death is figured as a prostitute). The reader is thus defined him or herself as a “passant”—a street-person passing on the way to death—the poem as a phantom, plucking at our sleeve with its proliferating discourse like the proliferating sameness of the old men. And, just as the old men are, in some sense, emanations of the street (fluid like a river, angular like urban landscape), so the poem in the final analysis shows itself to be, not just a poem of the street, but a poem that shares the characteristics of the street. In its fluidity, it recalls the street-river:

Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.

But in its threatening hostility as a place of repeated sounds connoting death, it is exactly like the place of its own setting: “Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombereaux”—that is, this text is producing an equivalence between street-noise and poetic sameness, as the language of death. For these “tombereaux”—metaphors, I take it, for the omnibuses whose “fracas roulant” startles the “petites vieilles”—have a name which speaks death doubly (suggesting both the tomb and revolutionary terror), and their shaking of the street is the image of an insistent, disruptive, repetitive force. If the poet’s speech has its place, then, and can be heard amid the din of the city, it can only be as a form of noise itself. And the speech which seems such a threat to the poetic subject is no less a threat to the reader. That is the price set, in the world of exile, on the achievement of communication.

Modern information theory, an outgrowth of thermodynamics, treats noise as an impediment to communication and permits us to see its kinship, as a form of entropy, with the disorder in Baudelaire’s streets (the “quais poudreux” of “*Le squelette laboureur*” or the “Palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs” of “*Le Cygne*”); its kinship, also, with the gestural clumsiness of certain exile-figures (“I” in “*A une passante*,” or the blind

men, or the swan); and finally, of course, with that of the poet in “*Le Soleil*,” whose stumbling gait in the street metaphorizes poetic creation itself as a matter of disorder, chance and accident. But Baudelaire, then, does not present noise as an impediment to communication so much as he sees noise-traversed communication as the only mode available to modern poetic speech; and the problem for him is not to exclude noise from poetic beauty but to find a means of producing poetry which incorporates noise into its texture, just as modern beauty incorporates death. The din of the city, with its songs, laughter and bellowing (“Pendant qu’autour de nous tu chantes, ris et beugles”), with its “fracas roulant,” and everything, in short, that constitutes the “rue assourdissante” (“*A une passante*”), is a dangerous rival to poetic speech, but also its model.

Not that the poem is to become sheer noise: the models of poetic speech the poems produce tend to be dual, incorporating the flow of the river and the hostile angularity of the street (“*Les sept vieillards*”), the entropy of change and the negentropy of thought (“*Le Cygne*”), the grace and control of equilibrium (“Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet”) but with a hurricane at its heart. Here, too, the double character of beauty is the ultimate reference. But, in seeking to incorporate noise into poetic beauty, Baudelaire is taking a step whose daring, in the contemporary context, becomes evident by contrast with the poetic mood of the period.

When he published *Emaux et Camées* in 1852—a short time after the *coup d’état*—Gautier took care, in a liminal poem, to emphasize the exclusion of noise from his poetics:

Sans prendre garde à l’ouragan
Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées,
Moi, j’ai fait *Emaux et Camées*.

The political motivation was evident: Gautier is asserting the apolitical character of verse, its autonomy with respect to the turbulent events of the recent past. The esthetic effect—if Michel Serres is correct in suggesting that codification is what drives out “noise” from discourse¹⁴—was to declare poetry a matter of purely formal beauty: thus, in Gautier’s poem, Goethe—the Goethe of the *Westöstlicher Diwan*, “pour Naisimi quittant Shakespeare”—exemplifies the choice of purely conventional expression, in the manner of Persian poetry, over the drama of life, represented by Shakespeare. Gautier’s lead, as we know, was in general followed by the poets of the Second Empire period, who took refuge in doctrines of esthetic autonomy (“l’art pour l’art”) and impassiveness (the Parnasse)—even though this poem itself demonstrates the futility of an enterprise which does not so much exclude noise as it dramatizes the gesture of excluding it.

However, in opting for a poetry of the street, for a poetic discourse which incorporates the “hurricane” in-