

Baudelaire's Responses to Death: (In)articulation, Mourning and Suicide

By

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Romance Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Although Charles Baudelaire's poetry was censored in part for his graphic representations of death, for Baudelaire himself, death was the ultimate censorship. He grappled with its limitations of the possibility of articulation in *Les Fleurs du mal*, *Le Spleen de Paris*, "Le Poème du hachisch," and other works. The first chapter of this dissertation, "Dead Silent," explores Baudelaire's use of apophasis as a rhetorical tactic to thwart the censoring force of death as what prevents the speaking subject from responding. Chapter two, "Voices Beyond the Grave," then investigates the opposite poetics of articulation and inarticulation, in the form of post-mortem voice from within the cemetery, and particularly as didactic speech that contradicts the living. "Baudelaire's Widows" argues that the widow is for Baudelaire a figure of modernity *par excellence*, auguring the anticipation of mourning and the problem of remembering the dead as a lifelong cognitive dilemma. Chapter four, "Lethal Illusions," combines analysis of suicide in "La Corde" and "Le Poème du hachisch" with interrogation of mimesis. If the intoxicant serves as suicide *and* mirror, the production of illusion is the possibility and the fatal pathology of art. Yet art simultaneously channels a truth understood as the revelation of illusions—not least the illusion of a life without death.

Dedication

To the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who makes possible these words, “O Death, where *is* your sting? / O Hades, where *is* your victory?” (1 Cor 15:55), and gave me the faith to begin and end this project.

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Introduction

Baudelaire: the Morbid Carrion Prince?

“Il m’est pénible de passer pour le Prince des Charognes. Tu n’as sans doute pas lu une foule de choses de moi, qui ne sont que musc et que roses,” Baudelaire wrote to Félix Nadar on May 14, 1859 (Corr I 573-4), responding to the reputation he had gained from his lyric poem, “Une Charogne,” published in the 1857 first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*.¹ This text, recounting the detailed putrefaction of a carcass rendered analogous to the narrator’s beloved, was shocking to the public for several reasons, not the least through the refocusing of the exalted lyric genre in microscopic detail on a subject as revolting as carrion. The comparison of the beloved to carrion ran counter to the convention exemplified by the 16th-century poet Ronsard, who, in “Mignonne, allons voir si la rose,” identified his beloved with fertile aesthetic of the rose. The messages of *momento mori* and *carpe diem* come up in both Baudelaire and Ronsard’s poems, but the tendency toward the grotesque in the former and the sublime in the latter can explain why Baudelaire would be dubbed “le Prince des Charognes,” whereas Ronsard would be heralded “Prince des poètes et poète des princes.” Can one have a poetry of decomposition? The era of Baudelaire would inaugurate this question.

¹ For the rest of the dissertation, I will be using the following abbreviations:
Corr I refers to the first volume of the Pléiade edition of Baudelaire’s correspondence.
Corr II refers to the second volume of the Pléiade edition of Baudelaire’s correspondence.
OC I refers to the first volume of Pléiade’s *Oeuvres complètes* by Baudelaire.
OC II refers to the second volume of Pléiade’s *Oeuvres complètes* by Baudelaire

The mockery that "Une Charogne" had attracted to Baudelaire took the form of caricature in an image produced by Nadar circa 1859 (Figure 1 on next page). The lyricist is depicted completely in black, with the exception of a white shirt peeking out at the cuffs and collar from under the black vest and frockcoat. With an exaggeratedly large head featuring an unmistakably receding hairline, skinny arms and skinnier legs, the caricature version of Baudelaire is also portrayed standing gingerly next to a carcass with its four "jambes en l'air," as described in the verse. The head of the dead animal, presumably a horse, is outside the frame of the picture, but a swarm of black insects is shown hovering over what remains of the torso, consistent with Baudelaire's poem. Though his eyes are turned away from the carrion, his gaze remains focused toward the ground as the poet inspects with fascination.



Figure 1: Caricature of Baudelaire by Nadar²

The nineteenth-century French association of Baudelaire with rotting carcasses may not be too far from perceptions of the poet in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Published in 2000, *Approaches to Teaching Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du mal* contains a chapter by Ross Chambers entitled "The Classroom versus Poetry." In that text, Chambers recalls his earliest experience of teaching the lyric collection and how his students came up to ask him why they had to study "this morbid stuff" (170).

² This image, submitted by Laure A. Katsaros, is accessible at this link:
<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/courses/0708S/FREN/FREN-43-0708S/caricature>

Does Baudelaire's poetry have to be "morbid"? Could this poet never shake off the reputation as the carrion prince, even two centuries after his death?

It is true that Baudelaire has penned his share of "morbid" poems. Take for example "Le Vampire," a lyrical text about the undead. While the poet does not make clear who the vampire is—the lyrical I or the interlocutor "toi"—this ambiguity reinforces the undeadness of a vampire, at the interstice of life and death.³ The gorily violent poem, "Une Martyre" turns "des yeux révoltés" (v. 20) away from a boudoir scene featuring an eroticized, decapitated corpse.

Turning the Scholarly Gaze on Baudelairean Death

If "morbid," "carcass" and "cadaver" are some of the words that are quickly used to label Baudelaire, especially if that reputation continues to this day, the amount of contemporary critical attention to the investigation of death is not proportional to the dominance of death in reception of Baudelaire's poetry. The handful of recent scholarly work on death and Baudelaire include Marc Eigeldinger's 1968 article entitled "Baudelaire et la conscience de la mort," Hélène Cassou-Yager's thesis, *La Polyvalence du thème de la mort dans les Fleurs du mal*, published in 1979, John E. Jackson's 1982 *La mort Baudelaire* and the second volume of *L'Année Baudelaire* published in 1996 under the title,

³ I actually interpret the vampire to be the lyrical I, capable of turning the interlocutor "Toi" into a vampire. Perhaps the resistance of the reader to immediately interpret the lyrical I as the vampire to instead assume the interlocutor you as the original undead is indicative of the alterity that humans assign to vampires, rejecting to adopt the position of monstrosity.

Baudelaire: Figures de la mort, Figures de l'éternité, edited by John E. Jackson and Claude Pichois.⁴

Eigeldinger's article provides a broad survey of Baudelaire's treatment of death through literary inscription. By including snippets of death-related quotes from the poet's corpus, Eigeldinger demonstrates the omnipresence of death in Baudelaire's work and states that "[l]'oeuvre de Baudelaire nous apparaît comme une sévère confrontation de l'homme et de la mort, comme une sorte de dialogue incessant que le poète entretient avec les signes de la mort, inscrits dans le corps de l'homme et du monde" (65).

While Eigeldinger's approach is a sweeping look at the Baudelairean conception of death, Cassou-Yager's focus is exclusive to *Les Fleurs du mal*, restricting her analysis to the lyric collection. Her work is a study deeply invested in thematics, intertextuality and formalism.

Jackson clarifies at the outset of his work on death in *Les Fleurs du mal, La mort Baudelaire*, that the essays in his book project "ne prétendent à aucun moment constituer une étude *d'ensemble* du recueil de Baudelaire" (9, original emphasis). With regard to death and Baudelaire's poetry, Jackson states:

La nouveauté radicale que Charles Baudelaire introduit dans la poésie française, et même dans la poésie européenne, tient en effet [...] à une assimilation, à une intériorisation, même, de la mort comme foyer de perception du réel. La

⁴ *L'Année Baudelaire* continues the journal series on Baudelaire, after *Etudes Baudelairiennes* ceased publication in 1991.

conscience poétique des *Fleurs du mal* trouve son unité en même temps que son point focal dans le fait qu'elle est une conscience de la mort. (14)

Jackson also contextualizes death as an episodic or background motif rather than a dominant construct in Baudelaire's work : "Baudelaire n'a ni voulu ni cherché à faire de la mort son motif poétique principal : c'est elle au contraire qui l'a accompagné dans les diverses directions dans lesquelles il a tenté de localiser la poésie, guidant son regard de sa lumière infallible" (14).

Fourteen years after *La mort Baudelaire*, Jackson again tackles the perennial problematic of death through Baudelaire's poetry, this time teaming up with Claude Pichois as co-editors of *Figures de la mort, Figures de l'éternité*. In this edited volume, Jackson and Pichois bring together the problems of death and eternity within a theological consideration of *Les Fleurs du mal* and also Baudelaire's posthumously published collection of prose poetry, *Le Spleen de Paris*. The theological dimension analyzed by Jackson and Pichois does not stipulate that the greater power be identified as God, but considers a secular redemption through poetry and imagination. They claim that Baudelaire's work is characterized by a metaphysical architecture in which death figures as a counterpoint to the eternal: "[e]ntre la mort et l'éternité, l'éternité de la mort et la mort de l'éternel, les oeuvres de Baudelaire dressent la scène d'une saisissante dramaturgie où se joue un destin qui est tout ensemble métaphysique et poétique" (9).

Interestingly then, the existing analyses of death in Baudelaire by Eigeldinger, Cassou-Yager, Jackson and Pichois, were all produced in the late 20th century. The scholarly silence on death in Baudelaire's work in the current century seems to suggest that the critical attention has moved onto something else, disinterested and no longer invested in the insoluble problem that frames every individual existence. Have we, as humans and humanists, already exhausted Baudelaire's contemplations on death? Have we already exhausted death?

My answer to both is a resounding no. Despite the existing work already done on Baudelairean death, my project addresses what I perceive to be a lacuna in the scholarly studies of this major figure of nineteenth-century French literature. My approach to Baudelaire's poetry and the subject of death differs most basically from Jackson's *La mort Baudelaire* and Cassou-Yager's thesis in that it is not confined to *Les Fleurs du mal*. I explore the problematic of death within Baudelaire's broader corpus, including, in addition to *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Poème du hachisch" and *Le Spleen de Paris*, all of which I analyze while referencing other works by Baudelaire, such as his writing on art criticism and his personal correspondence. I also include biographical accounts of the poet in the framework of my analysis. Thematically, I investigate the problematic of death in Baudelaire's poetry around the tropes of inarticulation, articulation, mourning and suicide.

The previous critical reception of Baudelaire's conception of death was also all produced in French. This raises the question of the lack of comprehensive studies on Baudelairean death in English: Is there less interest in death among Anglophone Baudelaire scholars? In light of this, my interrogation of Baudelaire's poetic treatment of death addresses not only the academic reticence on that issue in the 21st century, but also the seeming silence on the part of contemporary Anglophone critics.

A paratextual look at *Les Fleurs du mal* suggests Baudelaire's mapping of the categories of death: divided into sections, this lyric collection, first published in 1857, concludes with "La Mort," which comprises "La Mort des amants," "La Mort des pauvres," and "La Mort des artistes." In the second edition published in 1861, however, three other poems have been appended to "La Mort": "La Fin de la journée," "Le Rêve d'un curieux," and "Le Voyage."

Although the architecture of *Les Fleurs du mal* conveys the confinement of the treatment of death to the last six poems of the definitive edition of the lyric collection, I take cues from "La Mort des pauvres," a poem that points to the polysemy and protean quality of death, and the fact that "La Mort," under Baudelaire's pen, had undergone structural changes from 1857 to 1861, to assert that death within the Baudelairean conception is not fixed or neatly defined. My selection of poems conveys that death is a concern scattered throughout Baudelaire's poetry.

As mentioned earlier, I anchor my examination of Baudelairean death in terms of inarticulation, articulation, mourning and suicide. It is also based on these notions that I divide the dissertation into 4 chapters and argue that inarticulation and articulation are as responsive to death as mourning and suicide. While close reading plays a significant role in how I approach Baudelaire's poetry, I also make use of other methods and theories for exploring death. Philippe Ariès' widely acknowledged historical study on death, *L'Homme de vant la mort*, Vladimir Jankélévitch's philosophical tome entitled *La Mort*, together with Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes' theorizations of mourning have undergirded my analysis. I also incorporate a cultural component in the exploration of nineteenth-century Parisian cemeteries based on architectural studies. Additionally, I have branched out to include findings from neuroscience and cognitive psychology in my understanding of memory. The result of my dissertation is a literary studies enterprise that also departs from a strictly literary mode of analysis through inclusion of cultural and cognitive points of reference.

The opening chapter of this dissertation is "Dead Silent," which analyzes the threat of inarticulation expressed in the poems "Une Mort héroïque," "Le Rêve d'un curieux" and "Le Voyage." This chapter brings together the issue of censorship stemming from Baudelaire's 1857 trial, the philosophy of Vladimir Jankélévitch and Emmanuel Lévinas and the rhetorical use of the apostrophe as observed by Barbara Johnson. I read "Une Mort héroïque" as a response to Baudelaire's trial and resulting

ensorship. I situate Baudelaire's use of apophasis as a rhetorical tactic to thwart censorship, the ultimate form of which is death. Lévinas' conceptualization of death as "sans-réponse," i.e. no-response, has facilitated my consideration of expressivity, or lack thereof, in "Le Rêve d'un curieux." My interpretation of this poem and more specifically the discussion of subjectivity in relation to death is also based on Jankélévitch's observations on first-person death. Johnson's insight into the apostrophe as the destabilization of the binaries of presence-absence and I-Thou has helped me see the paradoxes contained in the death of "Le Voyage." The poems studied in this chapter, I argue, characterize death as silence and absence and illustrate how the instant of the first-person death, the moment that divides existence from non-existence, robs the mortal of the power to respond to mortally urgent questions.

Entitled "Voices Beyond the Grave," the second chapter is an investigation of the post-mortem voice situated within the cemetery through the poems "Le Tir et le cimetière" and "Laquelle est la vraie?" It may seem odd to examine the silence of death in the first chapter and follow up with a chapter on the voice of death, but this juxtaposition only serves to signal the contradictory nature of the human cognitive experience of death. I begin by contextualizing the cemetery within nineteenth-century Paris with the support of Maxime Du Camp's perspective in *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* and writings from architectural studies focusing on the cemetery. I also present the burial ground as a place (*lieu*) and

space (*espace*), as distinguished by Certeau, and clarify the rapport between the living and the dead within the relational space of the cemetery as informed by Adriana Cavarero's philosophical reflections on voice in her analysis of epic poetry and mythologies. I read "Le Tir et le cimetière" and "Laquelle est la vraie?" as depictions of the confrontation between living and the dead in the relational and interfacial space of the cemetery. The dead contradict the living to point out the distortion in idealization and the futility of life.

The susceptibility of memory to distortion is further explored in the context of mourning in the third chapter, "Baudelaire's Widows," which includes a rereading of the famous sonnet "A une passante," along with "Les petites vieilles," "Les Veuves" and "Le Cygne." Informed by Walter Benjamin's assertions regarding modernity, Baudelaire's Salon writing and Richard Stamelman's *Lost Beyond Telling*, I contend that the widow, often overlooked in analyses of Baudelaire's poetry, is the figure of modernity par excellence. The Baudelairean representation of the widow also elucidates Derrida and Barthes' observations on anticipatory and future mourning. Temporal dynamics of mourning in Baudelaire are in an intriguing intertextual relationship to the current understanding of memory based on cognition as studied by David C. Rubin, Daniel L. Schacter and Suzanne Nalbantian. The way that Baudelaire portrays a particular older bereaved woman in "Les petites vieilles" and "Les Veuves" contains enough similarities to suggest the recollection of the same woman, but also enough

differences to demonstrate the mutation of memory over time. I posit that such a depiction of the widow in “Les petites vieilles” and “Les Veuves” resonates with the cognitive memory theories of reconstruction and reconsolidation.

It should be noted that Baudelaire’s poetry demonstrates a handling of mourning that is very different from, say, that of Victor Hugo. Given that his life spanned almost the entire nineteenth century, Hugo wrote before Baudelaire, along with Baudelaire and after Baudelaire.⁵ Though they were contemporaries, Hugo and Baudelaire represent, according to Paul Bénichou’s *Romantismes français*, two distinct kinds of Romantic confrontations with death. Hugo grappled with grief through poetry. His poems “A Villequier” and “Demain dès l’aube” express his sorrow over the loss of his daughter Léopoldine. That sentimental struggle is largely absent from Baudelaire’s poetry. This is not to say that the poet of *Les Fleurs du mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris* was never exposed to the loss of loved ones; Baudelaire lost his father at the tender age of six and his poem, “La Servante au grand coeur,” is believed to be about his maternal nanny, Mariette. Compared to Hugo who processes his raw emotions through writing and situates mourning in nature, Baudelaire is a poet who deals with bereavement in a far more depersonalized way, preferring instead to consider from a distance the grief of anonymous widows seen through the city;⁶ from the intensive subjectivity of

⁵ Hugo was born in 1802 and died in 1885.

⁶ I surmise that the cult and culture of dandyism can at least in part explain such a sentimental rupture between Baudelaire and Hugo in the context of mourning. Baudelaire was once a dandy, a figure who was

Romanticism, Baudelaire formalizes death and maps it over experiences of the modern city.

Apart from mourning as a response to death, Baudelaire also contemplates the meanings and practices of suicide. The fourth and last chapter of this dissertation, “Lethal Illusions,” combines the analysis of the suicide trope in “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch” under the examination of mimesis. My approach to mimesis has been guided by Stephen Halliwell’s *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* and Christopher Prendergast’s *The Order of Mimesis*. Both Halliwell and Prendergast argue against the facile dichotomy between reality and representation to point out the reality of representation and the representation of reality. I read “La Corde” not so much in terms of the mother-son relationship, but in terms of the artist-model relationship to bring out the artist’s role in smothering the model’s subjectivity and his consequent relegation of the boy to the realm of not reality but representation. My interest in “Le Poème du hachisch” resides in Baudelaire’s manipulation of the mirror trope. This is crucial to understanding Baudelaire’s stance on hashish, given that the intoxicant is said to be both suicide *and* mirror. In my discussion of the detrimental effects of hashish on the mind of the eater, I also bring in the current understanding of mirror neurons as articulated by

supposed to be in complete control of his emotions, never to be taken by surprise, always covered in the veneer of nonchalance.

Deborah Jenson and Marco Iacoboni, especially how hashish is portrayed by Baudelaire as a hindrance to mind reading. The trope of suicide in “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachish” signals that the grasp of reality is a matter of life and death for Baudelaire, who clearly condemns hashish as an intellectually deadly medium of illusions and yet art, also a means of illusion, is ambiguously critiqued by the poet.

My dissertation frames inarticulation, articulation, mourning and suicide as responses to death, which also functions as resistance to the silence that death threatens. To remain silent on the subject of death would be like Orpheus, if he had never turned back to look at Eurydice. To borrow Maurice Blanchot’s reading of that myth, it is because Orpheus refuses to be content with the dead, silent and imperceptible Eurydice that he turns to look at her, even if it means the risk of losing her again.⁷ My critical demystification of death in Baudelaire parallels Baudelaire’s “pénible” poetic demystification of death in his role as “le Prince des Charognes.”

⁷ The direct quotation from Blanchot in *L’Espace littéraire* is the following :

Mais ne pas se tourner vers Eurydice, ce ne serait pas moins trahir, être infidèle à la force sans mesure et sans prudence de son mouvement, qui ne veut pas Eurydice dans sa vérité diurne et dans son agrément quotidien, qui la veut dans son obscurité nocturne, dans son éloignement, avec son corps fermé et son visage scellé, qui veut la voir, non quand elle est visible, mais quand elle est invisible, et non comme l’intimité d’une vie familière, mais comme l’étrangeté de ce qui exclut toute intimité, non pas la faire vivre, mais avoir vivante en elle la plénitude de sa mort. (180)

1. Dead Silent: “Une Mort héroïque,” “Le Rêve d’un curieux” and “Le Voyage”

A court jester delivers his last pantomime performance. Alone in the audience, a man eagerly awaits the show behind the curtain. An old captain is implored to set sail to a journey into the unknown. What these three scenarios have in common is that they are all from Baudelaire’s poems that deal with the silence of death. Charged with treason, Fanciouille is commanded to perform and subsequently executed on stage in “Une Mort héroïque,” the longest and arguably the most critically popular prose poem by Baudelaire. I read this text in the aftermath of the poet’s 1857 trial and argue that this poem is a response and even resistance to censorship—the suppression of a dissenting voice—whose ultimate form is execution. The silencing of voice in “Le Rêve d’un curieux” takes place at the rising of the curtain. Informed by Vladimir Jankélévitch and Emmanuel Lévinas, I read the moment of the first-person death as equated with a spectacle that the Self cannot witness or express. The absence and silence of death is even personified in the captain of “Le Voyage.” From Barbara Johnson’s analysis of the apostrophe, I investigate the apostrophization of death that destabilizes the binary of presence and absence. “Le Voyage,” “Le Rêve d’un curieux” and “Une Mort héroïque,” are texts that articulate the threat of the inarticulation of death.

1.1 *The Exposure and Erasure of Censorship*

According to Steve Murphy, “[a]ucun des poèmes du *Spleen de Paris* n’a connu une plus proliférante postériorité exégétique” (49). He is referring to “Une Mort

héroïque.” First published in the *Revue nationale et étrangère* on October 10, 1863, “Une Mort héroïque” is the longest text in Baudelaire’s collection of prose poetry, *Le Spleen de Paris*.¹ This poem recounts the mesmerizing performance before the court given by Fanciouille, a jester guilty of treason, who dies a peculiar death mid-performance by a whistle. The critical attention that this poem has attracted includes the various sources of inspiration. Debarati Sanyal points to Poe’s short story, “Hop Frog,” published in 1849, as an intertext, or even pre-text for Baudelaire’s poem, which also depicts a rebellious court jester. She also draws the connection between Baudelaire’s Fanciouille and the popular mime, Jean-Gaspard Debureau, known for his role as Pierrot. Debureau performed at the Théâtre des Funambules, a Parisian playhouse later demolished to make way for the reconstruction of the city under Haussmann.

On the other hand, Peter Schofer believes the Italian revolutionary, Felice Orsini, to be the social and political referent for Fanciouille. Orsini was remembered for his last words to the mob—“Vive l’Italie! Vive la France!”—before the public execution at Place de la Roquette in 1859, having attempted to assassinate Napoléon III (50). In light of these ways of considering the text, I propose another point of entry, which is to read “Une Mort héroïque” in the context of censorship, especially in the aftermath of the 1857

¹ Though some of Baudelaire’s prose poems were published during his lifetime, *Le Spleen de Paris*, or *Petits poèmes en prose* as it was sometimes known, that we know now is in fact a posthumous publication.

trial that resulted in the censoring of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. I argue that "Une Mort héroïque" is a prose poem that demonstrates the resistance to censorship.

Before contextualizing censorship within "Une Mort héroïque," it is worth contextualizing the prose poem within the famous 1857 trials. Flaubert was on trial for his novel, *Madame Bovary*, in January 1857 and seven months later, Baudelaire was on trial for his lyric poetry, *Les Fleurs du mal* in August 1857. Both took place during the Second Empire, under Napoléon III. While the novelist was acquitted, the poet, along with his publishers, was fined and six poems—"Les Bijoux," "Le Léthé," "A celle qui est trop gaie," "Lesbos," "Une Femme damnée" and "Les Métamorphoses du vampire"—were censored from the verse collection.² The different outcomes of the two trials can be seen as the acquittal of prose and the censorship of poetry.³ The poet was charged with "outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes mœurs."

There are several reasons that can explain why Flaubert was exonerated, whereas Baudelaire was condemned. First, it was believed that Flaubert's defense attorney was better than Baudelaire's. Second, Ernest Pinard, being the same prosecutor in both cases, was perhaps more determined to win Baudelaire's trial, having lost Flaubert's. In

² Baudelaire was originally fined 300 francs, which was reduced to 100 francs and finally 50 francs. His publishers, Poulet-Malassis and Debroise, were each fined 100 francs.

³ Elisabeth Ladenson remarks that an outcome of the censorship of *Les Fleurs du mal* was that Baudelaire came back with a bigger, better edition (69). In a letter dated December 30, 1857 to Poulet-Malassis, Baudelaire wrote that he intended to "refaire six poèmes nouveaux beaucoup plus beaux que ceux supprimés" (Corr I 441). The original, first published edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* contained 100 poems before the censorship. The second published edition that came out in 1861 contained, not 100, but 135 poems. Baudelaire not only replaced the 6 censored poems, but expanded the volume as well.

addition to these reasons, Elisabeth Ladenson adds the dimension of the gendered genres: “Lyric poetry was at the time a heavily masculine genre read almost exclusively, at least in principle, by educated men” (57), yet “much of contemporary fiction [including the novel] was generally regarded as both lower-class and feminine” (55). Lyric poetry was supposed to be an exalted literary form. This is to say that because of its genre, expectations of such a genre and readership, “Baudelaire [...] had no excuse for introducing base reality into his work, which by virtue of its genre had no business trafficking in unpleasantness” (Ladenson 55). *Les Fleurs du mal* was thus deemed licentious and immoral.

Moreover, in the tribunal judging of Flaubert’s case, it was brought up that “la mission de la littérature doit être d’orner et de recréer l’esprit en élevant l’intelligence et en épurant les mœurs plus encore que d’imprimer le dégoût du vice” (Ladenson 65). This way of understanding literature adheres to the Classical notion that it is to “plaire et instruire” and was also applied to the way Baudelaire’s work was read and judged. It would take almost a decade, 92 years to be exact, for Baudelaire’s censored poems to be rehabilitated in 1949.⁴

In the meantime, Baudelaire was also writing and publishing prose poems, which had their own brush with censorship. Steve Murphy remarks in “La Scène

⁴ Elisabeth Ladenson’s book chapter, “Charles Baudelaire: Florist of Evil,” provides further details on the rehabilitation.

parisienne: Lecture d'*Une mort héroïque* de Baudelaire" that "la première version d'*Une mort héroïque* fut publiée dans la *Revue nationale et étrangère*, qui venait de censurer deux poèmes en prose de Baudelaire quelques mois auparavant (voir la lettre de Baudelaire à Charpentier du 10 juin 1863) et allait par la suite renoncer à la publication d'un autre, *Mademoiselle Bistouri*" (57). He continues, "En 1863, à une époque où l'on parlait d'une libéralisation des théâtres, Baudelaire était lui-même douloureusement conscient de la liberté d'expression réduite de l'artiste, d'où en partie *Une mort héroïque*, dont l'un des fins mots serait précisément la censure" (57). The passage in Baudelaire's poem that Murphy had in mind is when the narrator portrays the Prince as monster, to which I now turn.

The first instance of censorship to be examined in "*Une Mort héroïque*" occurs in the description of the Prince:

Assez indifférent relativement aux hommes et à la morale, véritable artiste lui-même, il ne connaissait d'ennemi dangereux que l'Ennui, et les efforts bizarres qu'il faisait pour fuir ou pour vaincre ce tyran du monde lui auraient certainement attiré, de la part d'un historien sévère, l'épithète de « monstre », s'il avait été permis, dans ses domaines, d'écrire quoi que ce fût qui ne tendit pas uniquement au plaisir ou à l'étonnement, qui est une des formes les plus délicates du plaisir.

In this citation, the historian is permitted to record what "tendit [...] uniquement au plaisir" and therefore could not outright call the Prince "monstre." Nathaniel Wing reads the quotation as a "statement [that] suggests that we must interpret all the narratives of the poem, including not only the framed narrative of the buffoon's

performance, but also the principal narrator's entire tale, as euphemisms written or enacted within the discursive limits imposed by an absolute regime" (6).

There is validity in such an opinion, however I propose an alternative reading, by viewing the description of the Prince, which contains mention of censorship, as a subversion of the very same censorship. In saying what exactly is censored and what would not have been censored if the censorship were not in place, the narrator achieves through the rhetorical tactic of apophasis what the "historien" cannot, which is to assign to the Prince the designation of a monster.

There is a difference between saying one thing, while intending to communicate another. This is the case with, for example, sarcasm and irony. There is the surface level meaning coupled with a more nuanced connotation. The tension between these two types of communication came up in Baudelaire's trial, where the poet was accused of endangering society with the vice he had depicted in his poetry. In his client's defense, Baudelaire's attorney, Gustave Chaix d'Est-Ange, stated, "[P]eindre le vice, mais le peindre sous des couleurs violentes, —je dirai, si vous le voulez, sous des couleurs exagérées, —pour mieux faire ressortir ce qu'il renferme d'odieux et de repoussant, voilà le procédé" (OC I 1211). Ladenson asserts, "As in the case of Flaubert and almost all the defense arguments in subsequent literary censorship trials, the cornerstone of Baudelaire's defense was the idea that although his work represented immorality, it was only in order better to warn against it" (54).

Although the text of “Une Mort héroïque” maintains that the historian is forbidden from calling the Prince “monstre,” it was only in order better to express that the Prince is “monstre.” The narrator is able to get around the explicitly imposed censorship with the implicit meaning of the cited description of the Prince.

The second instance of censorship takes place in the description of Fanciouille’s performance, which is conveyed to deny and defy death, but as I demonstrate, it serves, in effect, more as a reminder of death. Rather than censor death, as it is claimed to do, Fanciouille’s performance recalls death.

This court jester holds the entire audience captive through his rendition of “le mystère de la vie.” He is, through his own pantomime, “perdu [...] dans un paradis excluant toute idée de tombe et de destruction.” As the narrator states :

Fanciouille me prouvait, d’une manière péremptoire, irréfutable, que l’ivresse de l’Art est plus apte que toute autre à voiler les terreurs du gouffre; que le génie peut jouer la comédie au bord de la tombe, avec une joie qui l’empêche de voir la tombe, perdu, comme il est, dans un paradis excluant toute idée de tombe et de destruction.

Fanciouille is shielded from the sight of death, as “l’ivresse de l’Art [...] voil[e] les terreurs du gouffre [et] une joie [...] l’empêche de voir la tombe.” The jester is also prevented from pondering death, as he is “perdu” in his performance and transported to “un paradis excluant toute *idée* de tombe” (my emphasis). This state wherein one neither perceives, nor conceives death is especially suggestive of a certain condition recorded in another text: the state before the Fall as presented in the Bible. The pre-Fall

Eden was a paradise devoid of death. Fanciouille's Art effects an Edenic return not only for himself, but also for his audience, as "[p]ersonne ne rêv[e] plus de mort, de deuil, ni de supplices [mais] s'abandonn[e], sans inquiétude, aux voluptés multipliées que donne la vue d'un chef-d'œuvre d'art vivant."

As rapturous as Fanciouille's performance may be, it does not completely censor death; the threat of death is still present. This is where the trope of the mask is used. "[L]'ivresse de l'art" may be able to "voiler les terreurs du gouffre," but veiling, as with masking, is only half hiding; it conceals, but reveals at the same time that it is concealing, revealing that something is concealed. "[V]oiler," "empêcher de voir" and "exclu[re]" are all efforts to conceal death and destruction, but as the text presents, "les terreurs du gouffre," "la tombe" and "toute idée de tombe et de destruction" are literally right next to what were supposed to prevent their revelation. Far from being hidden and excluded, death is very much exposed and included in this recounting of Fanciouille's performance.

The inseparability between art and death is again suggested when the narrator detects an "indestructible auréole" above Fanciouille's head, "où se mêlaient, dans un étrange amalgame, les rayons de l'Art et la gloire du Martyre."⁵ The strange amalgamation of "Art" and "Martyre" subtly takes place in the inscription of "art" in

⁵ Baudelaire's other prose poem, "Perte d'auréole," portrays a poet who loses his halo.

“Martyre.” It is in being the martyr that Fanciouille incarnates Art, which is what happens at the end of the text, which I will discuss more extensively later.

Death is not only brought back to sight and mind, but also to the ears. Steve Murphy notes “le martèlement du mot *tombe*” (original emphasis, 50). “Tombe” is repeated three times in the description of Fanciouille’s performance cited earlier. Ironically, despite what is “péremptoire, irréfutable,” the insistent avoidance of the tomb only conjures, as opposed to exorcizes, death.⁶ The resonance between “tombe” and “tomber,” though not etymologically linked, still serves as an omen that Fanciouille would “tomb[er] roide mort sur les planches.” Although already “vou[é] à une mort certaine” from the start, it is during his performance, while Fanciouille “représent[e] symboliquement les mystères de la vie” and “bouffonn[e] si bien la mort” that his own death is announced through the ominous reiterations of “tombe.”⁷

Steve Murphy observes that “[l]’implicite, dans *Une mort héroïque*, doit être mis à découvert par le lecteur ; la vérité donnée explicitement se révèle fallacieuse” (57). This is the case with the attempt to censor, or “voiler” death. The description of Fanciouille’s performance puts death on display, as opposed to ban(ish) it.

A death sentence is, according to Nathaniel Wing, “the ultimate censorship” (8).

I have discussed how the censorship of the general idea of death by Fanciouille’s

⁶ The reader is thus presented with a text whose content and form are in opposition. Rather than art eclipsing death, or vice versa, the two are held in tension in Fanciouille’s performance.

⁷ The pronouncement of punishment also takes place during Fanciouille’s performance, in whatever way the execution is articulated by the Prince in the page’s ear.

performance has failed. I now turn to the third occurrence of censorship in “Une Mort héroïque,” which is Fancioulle’s death sentence, the ultimate censorship of the treasonous jester.

What eventually causes his death is the “coup de sifflet aigu, prolongé,” an off-stage intrusion upon Fancioulle’s on-stage “parfaite idéalisation.” Whether the execution by whistle is a direct command by the Prince or not is left unclear, as the text leaves room for speculation by presenting the Prince whispering secretly into the ear of the page, who then is responsible for the blowing the whistle. What is clear, though, is that the whistle is a “désapprobation inattendue” and functions as the weapon of execution, because not only does it “déchir[e] à la fois les oreilles et les coeurs,” it is also “rapide comme un glaive.” It is reality that pierces through representation, transgressing the divide between the supposedly separate realms of the real and the ideal. Vivien Rubin suggests, “Total identification with art is inevitably the end of life. And when the real world, in the form of the whistle, interrupts and so destroys the creation with which [Fancioulle] has identified, which he himself incarnates, he is himself necessarily also destroyed, for he and his creation are one and the same” (58). Debarati Sanyal agrees, “It is hardly surprising, given Fancioulle’s existence *as* his role, that the rupture of mimesis should lead to death” (original emphasis, 71).

When the whistle sounded, ending the “parfaite idéalisation,” Fancioulle and his audience are once again cast out of Eden. Fancioulle, “réveillé dans son rêve,” is called

out of that pre-Fall, Edenic “paradis excluant toute idée de tombe et de destruction.”⁸

His audience, who earlier “ne rêva plus de mort, de deuil, ni de supplices,” is, through the spectacle of Fanciouille’s execution, confronted with death, mourning and torment.

Given that the death sentence is the ultimate censorship, the silencing that comes with censoring extends to the particular way in which Fanciouille dies. Compared to how the mime’s performance is previously summed up as “[c]e bouffon allait, venait, riait, pleurait, se convulsait,” the moment of the performer’s death is presented as a narrative close-up on Fanciouille’s facial expressions: “Fanciouille, secoué, réveillé dans son rêve, ferma d’abord les yeux, puis les rouvrit presque aussitôt, démesurément agrandis, ouvrit ensuite la bouche comme pour respirer convulsivement, chancela un peu en avant, un peu en arrière, et puis tomba roide mort sur les planches.” It is as if the narrator zeroes in on the artist’s face in search of signs to make sense of the whistle and its impact on Fanciouille.

The twentieth-century philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas, has contemplated death in terms of expressivity and more specifically, the concept of the face as a site of expression. Death for this thinker is the disappearance of expression, “le sans-réponse” (21). While Lévinas employs the metaphor of the face for expression, it is the literal face of the dying Fanciouille—the closing and opening of the eyes and the opening of the

⁸ The proposition normally used with “réveiller” is *de*. The “réveiller *dans* son rêve” in Baudelaire’s poem seems to suggest the waking from a dream within a dream.

mouth—that interpellates and seems to speak to the narrator. By his presence and witness, the narrator becomes the recipient of Fancioulle’s last expression and bears the responsibility to respond, according to Lévinas, from having been addressed in Fancioulle’s expression.

The narrator receives the dying responses of Fancioulle, but rather than comprehending to respond in turn, he leaves the facial articulations without interpretation, as he turns his attention away from the jester to speculate the intentions of the Prince: “Le sifflet, rapide comme un glaive, avait-il réellement frustré le bourreau? Le Prince avait-il lui-même deviné toute l’homicide efficacité de sa ruse? Il est permis d’en douter. Regretta-t-il son cher et inimitable Fancioulle? Il est doux et légitime de le croire.”

The suppression of Fancioulle’s speech is bound up with his role as a pantomimic artist, who “excellait surtout dans les rôles muets ou peu chargés de paroles, qui sont souvent les principaux dans ces drames féeriques dont l’objet est de représenter symboliquement le mystère de la vie.” In addition, Fancioulle’s very name is another reference to the lack, or at least the underdevelopment of speech, given its close resemblance to the Italian word for child: *fanciullo*. A child, compared to an adult, is one whose speech is limited in quality and quantity. Both the signifier and the signified—Fancioulle’s name and Fancioulle himself—are characterized by verbal inarticulation.

While the death sentence by whistle causes a severance between Fancioulle and his pantomimic role, the death on stage before an audience remains a performance and demonstrates the jester's artistic attachment. The narrative close-up of Fancioulle after the whistle—the stark silence from the jester's persistent lack of audible articulation, the exaggerated facial expressions, slight staggering and finally the definitive collapse on stage—shows a death carried out with such dramatic flair that it can be viewed as a kind of pantomime in itself. Unscripted and silent, Fancioulle's dramatic death is free from the written and spoken word, but still articulated in the pantomimic language of the body through facial expressions and gesticulations.

On the speechlessness of Fancioulle's death, Murphy contributes the following:

Cette mort sans paroles, mais exprimée par un langage gestuel, assume bien la forme, contingente, d'une mort théâtrale parfaite de mime, contournant l'un des plus épineux problèmes de l'acteur : comment simuler la mort sans tomber dans le pathétique, le cliché, ou l'invraisemblance comique. Par un mimétisme insolite, à la fois hyper-réaliste et pourvu de toute la *démésure* et de tout l'hyperbolisme de la caricature, Fancioulle ne représente pas la mort, il l'incarne.
(52)

The whistle that pierces through the stage, splitting Fancioulle from his role, renders the seemingly pantomimic death on stage into a reality. It is evident that "Une Mort

héroïque” presents the topos of *theatrum mundi*, but the poem takes it to the extreme by putting on stage even the reality of death: death takes place “sur les planches.”⁹

That the reality of death takes place on stage in midperformance actually complicates the divide between representation and reality, blurring the boundary that separates the two, because it is the reality of death “sur les planches,” i.e. still within the bounds of art. There is the performance of death in displaying and concluding the pantomime with it. The supposedly theatrically untimely death that truncates the performance becomes in effect the climax of his pantomime and it is in this sense that the artist’s death perfects his performance of “parfaite idéalisation,” rendering “inimitable” the artist who delivered such an “inoubliable soirée.” Fancioulle’s last act, which is also his death, cannot be repeated. The jester’s performance is impressed upon the memory of the audience, not only for his “merveilleux talents,” but also for his dramatic death that ends it.

As previously discussed, death had posed a threat to art, given that Fancioulle’s performance was shrouded by resonances with “tombe” and “art” was shown to be inscribed in “martyre,” such that art was contained in martyrdom. However, there is

⁹ In an email exchange with Professor Philip Stewart, he pointed out that in eighteenth-century France, actors were not allowed an ecclesiastical burial and since all cemeteries were controlled by the Church (there were no secular cemeteries), those who would not renounce their profession before their death would be “jetés à la voirie,” as was the famous example in 1730 of Adrienne Lecouvreur, an actress close to Voltaire, who was horrified he’d share the same fate in 1778.

also a reversal, so that art is not swallowed up by death, but swallows death. The realm of art, signified by “les planches,” claims the artist *and* his death.¹⁰

Contrasted with Fanciouille’s fall on stage is his rise in artistic transcendence: “Depuis lors, plusieurs mimes, justement appréciés dans différents pays, sont venus jouer devant la cour de ***; mais aucun d’eux n’a pu rappeler les merveilleux talents de Fanciouille, ni *s’élever* jusqu’à la même *faveur*” (*s’élever*, my emphasis; *faveur*, original emphasis). Transcendence can be thought of as transascendence *and* transdescendence.¹¹ This oppositional composition is seen through Fanciouille, who “tomb[e] roide mort” and yet is able to “*s’élever*.” Contrary to his fellow conspirators, who are simply “effacés de la vie,” Fanciouille exhibits what Maria Scott terms, the “resistance to erasure” (147), as he is preserved at the unrivaled pantomimic pinnacle.

In her discussion of Baudelaire’s “Une Charogne” and Renaissance poetry, Elisabeth Ladenson remarks the “eternal endurance of the work of art as contrasted with bodily decline and death” (62). This can also be seen in “La Mort des artistes” and “Une Mort héroïque.”¹² Nathaniel Wing posits that “Fanciouille, like all clowns in Baudelaire’s poetry, stands as a figure for the artist in general: condemned to death, they

¹⁰ Within the history of French theater, there is the precedent of Molière who, while he did not actually die on stage, did collapse during his performance as Argan in “Le Malade imaginaire” and passed away shortly afterward.

¹¹ I borrow this observation from Claire Lyu, who made that remark at the 2009 NCFs colloquium.

¹² “Une Mort héroïque” is similar to the verse “La Mort des artistes,” but differs as well in that the latter depicts the artist’s voluntary self-sacrifice for the sake of art, while Fanciouille’s death is a result of despotic execution.

defer their mortality through their art" (8). As the narrator of "Une Mort héroïque" recounts Fancioulle's performance *after* the mime's death, we can see that the jester's art still has a palpable effect on him: "Ma plume tremble, et des larmes d'une émotion toujours présente me montent aux yeux pendant que je cherche à vous décrire cette inoubliable soirée."

Death, supposedly the ultimate censorship, only renders Fancioulle "inimitable" and his performance "inoubliable," as opposed to merely "effacé de la vie" like the court jester's fellow conspirators. As with the other instances of censorship discussed—the Prince's control over what can and cannot be historically recorded and Art's purported power to cover up death—the death sentence too, though carried out, is subverted. Published in the aftermath of the 1857 trial that indisputably censored *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Une Mort héroïque" demonstrates itself to be a text that disputes censorship.

1.2 The One-Man Show of Death

In contrast to the significant amount of critical attention that "Une Mort héroïque" has attracted, there is relatively little written on "Le Rêve d'un curieux," first published on May 5, 1860 in *Revue contemporaine*. However, similar to "Une Mort héroïque," this poem also presents death within the context of a spectacle. The narrator awaits his own death as a spectator awaits a show. The moment of his death is represented by the rise of the curtain. When the much anticipated death turns out to be less than spectacular, the narrator is left unfulfilled. My reading of the sonnet will

demonstrate how it illustrates certain key philosophical notions of death, notably how the Self relates to death and the temporality involved.

“Le Rêve d’un curieux” recounts the death of the Self, a first-person death as first-hand experience recounted by the narrator’s first-person voice. As expressed in his 1966 tome entitled *La Mort*, the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch offers three ways of thinking about death: first-person death, second-person death and third-person death. Jankélévitch’s discussion begins with the third-person death, which is characterized by indifference, distance and anonymity (26). As the intermediary between the distant third-person death and the subjective first-person death, the second-person death occupies an in-between space, such that “[l]e Toi représente en effet le premier Autre, l’autre immédiatement autre et le non-moi en son point de tangence avec le moi, la limite prochaine de l’altérité” (26). In the case of the second-person death of the close Other, that is someone with whom the Self has a relationship (e.g. family and friends), death is “[p]resque comme la nôtre, presque aussi déchirante que la nôtre” (26). From the perspective of the Self, and this is the point from which Jankélévitch has been postulating these three views on death, it is the first-person death that is the most catastrophic among the three for the Self.¹³

¹³ This point of view that the self-death is most catastrophic for the Self is not necessarily a given, because there are situations in which some people might prefer their own death to the death of a beloved, such that the Other’s death would be more catastrophic than the Self’s death.

“Le Rêve d’un curieux” is concerned primarily with the first-person death of the nameless narrator. The only indication of the Other in the poem is located at the very beginning of the poem, when the narrator asks, “Connais-tu, comme moi, la douleur savoureuse / Et de toi fais-tu dire: « Oh! l’homme singulier! »” (vv.1-2).¹⁴ The opening question turns out, however, to be rhetorical, as the narrator proceeds with his own intimations of death in the absence of a response. After this initial rhetorical question, there are no more references to “tu” or “toi” in the poem. Through the use of the rhetorical question, the absence of a response and the disappearance of the interlocutor signify at least three things: it does not matter if the “tu” does not answer; it does not matter what the answer may be; it does not matter if the “tu” even exists. Any hint of the existence of the “tu” in this case would be the response, but that assurance of the Other is not given.

The attempt to reach out and establish fraternity in the rhetorical question reverts to the Self by returning to the subjectivity located in “comme moi” and “singulier.”¹⁵ The experience of the Self, “comme moi,” is the point from which the question was posed and the point to which the question returns when the response of the Other and

¹⁴ It should be noted that Baudelaire had dedicated this poem to the famous photographer of his time, Félix Nadar. In the first manuscript, the dedication was “À M. Félix Nadar,” which changed to “À Félix Nadar” and finally abbreviated to the initials in the first publication in 1869, the dedication that remains as “À F.N.” Claude Pichois, in the notes to the Pléiade edition of Baudelaire’s oeuvre, suggests that the “tu” and “toi” in this poem’s opening question refer to Nadar and uses “Connais-tu” as evidence of the *tutoiement*, the verbal address signifying a close relationship, between the photographer and poet (OC I 1095).

¹⁵ While “singulier” signals peculiarity, and Claude Pichois believes that “homme singulier” is also an allusion to what people said of Baudelaire himself (OC I 1095), that this was an adjective often associated with the poet.

even the Other prove to be irrelevant. The use of this adjective in the poem serves to emphasize the subjectivity of the narrator; it is his individuality that is conveyed. The lyrical I is "l'homme singulier" with his own unique experience of death. Though it is true that death is a universal experience that unites all mortals, as the rhetorical question gestures toward a commonality between the narrator and the Other with the words "Connais-tu, comme moi," what is presented and emphasized in this poem is the personal experience of death for the individual.

The subjectivity of the first-person death can be further explored through the narrator's attitude as he approaches his anticipated demise. When the Self is confronted with death, its very selfhood is threatened and subjectivity comes into full display:

En première personne, la mort est un mystère qui me concerne intimement et dans mon tout, c'est-à-dire dans mon néant (s'il est vrai que le néant est le rien de ce tout) : j'y adhère étroitement sans pouvoir garder mes distances à l'égard du problème. *Mea res agitur !* C'est de moi qu'il s'agit, moi que la mort appelle personnellement par mon nom, moi qu'on désigne du doigt et qu'on tire par la manche, sans me laisser le loisir de loucher vers le voisin ; les échappatoires me sont désormais refusées autant que les délais (Jankélévitch 24).

The first-person death is, according to Jankélévitch, "assurément source d'angoisse" (24).

The anxiety of the lyrical I upon death is expressed in mixed terms in Baudelaire's poem:

Angoisse et vif espoir, sans humeur factieuse.
Plus allait se vidant le fatal sablier,
Plus ma torture était âpre et délicateuse (vv.5-7)

The narrator's emotions toward death are conflicted even from the beginning: "douleur savoureuse" (v.1); "désir mêlé d'horreur" (v.4); "[a]ngoisse et vif espoir" (v.5); "torture [...] âpre et délicate" (v.7). Antagonistic terms ("douleur," "horreur," "angoisse," "torture âpre") are consistently paired with favorable terms ("savoureuse," "désir," "vif espoir," "délicate"). Despite these oppositional sentiments, they are still described as "sans humeur factieuse" (v.5). Death elicits an indisputably conflicted attitude on the part of the narrator, compelling and repelling him at the same time.

The narrator has been living for the show of his death, which coincides with his dying in the form of anticipation leading up to such a show: "J'étais comme l'enfant avide du spectacle, / Haïssant le rideau comme on hait un obstacle..." For the narrator, living is dying. That the living and dying man is likened to a child may be attributed to the aging process suggested through the emptying of the "fatal sablier." This is true in the sense that as a person ages and approaches death, he loses his physical strength and independence, which renders him more dependent like a child. However, in this poem, the progression of time is not aligned with the loss of physical strength, or the breakdown of the body. Rather, the temporal progression toward death heightens the narrator's anticipation for his spectacular death.

The progression of time indicated by the emptying of "le fatal sablier" corresponds to the intensification of the "torture [...] âpre et délicate." Time is dissociated from the physical process of gradual aging and eventual dying. In fact, the

only bodily reference in this sonnet recounting the life, death and afterlife of the narrator takes place in verse 8—“Tout mon coeur s’arrachait au monde familier”—and even that is the metaphorical, rather than biological, use of the heart.

There is both a temporal certainty and uncertainty for the narrator’s death. Awaiting his spectacular demise, the narrator is conscious of the inevitability of his death. It will happen, but when? Intending to be the spectator of his own death, the narrator “haïssa[i]t le rideau comme on hait un obstacle... / Enfin la vérité froide se révéla » (vv.10-11). Contained in « obstacle... / Enfin » is the predictable unpredictability of death. The narrative voice trails off in the ellipsis, waiting indefinitely for the inevitable death, until the moment arrives and is announced through “Enfin.” This “Enfin” is charged with the fulfillment of the anticipated death that takes place outside the of the narrator’s control.

In this discussion of temporality within “Le Rêve d’un curieux,” Baudelaire’s poem, recounted in the past, actually poses a challenge to the philosophical assertion that the death of the Self necessarily takes place in the future:

La première personne du singulier ne peut conjuguer « Mourir » qu’au futur ; et inversement l’indicatif présent et l’indicatif passé ne se conjuguent qu’à la deuxième et à la troisième personnes ; je ne puis dire autre chose que : je mourrai ; jamais : je meurs (sinon en clignant de l’œil et en se regardant mourir) ; ni a fortiori : je suis mort (sauf en jouant la comédie et en se dédoublant).
(Jankélévitch 29-30)

Narrated in the past and specifically mostly in the *imparfait*, Baudelaire's text is clearly violating the philosophical postulation, especially with the narrator's claims of "J'allais mourir" (v.3) and "J'étais mort" (v.12). Jankélévitch situates the first-person death in the future, because outside of fiction, it is not an experience that can be survived and narrated. Yet that is precisely what Baudelaire's poem is about: the narrator's recounted death and subsequent afterlife. What does it mean to contemplate death in the past?

Jankélévitch makes another point that can reconcile his philosophical positioning of death in the future and Baudelaire's poetic rendering of it in the past: "De toutes façons, la mort ne devient pensable que par la distance : soit la distance dans l'espace, soit la distance dans l'espace et le temps à la fois, qui rendent pensable la mort des autres" (30). Distance is key for the contemplation of death. The death of the Other is thinkable for the Self, because of its spatiotemporal distance from the Self. For the Self to think of his own death, the same distancing technique is required, which, in the case of this poem, is achieved by first establishing the temporal distance of setting death at a time other than the present. Recounting death in the past, claiming that it has taken place and depicting what it supposedly was, creates the illusion of a lived experience, as opposed to the hypothesized projection were death recounted in the future. It may appear that Baudelaire, by framing death in the past, contradicts Jankélévitch's assertion of it in the future, but the poet and philosopher both agree in fact on the mutual exclusivity of the first-person death and the present.

Fiction, poetry in this case, allows for the representation and contemplation of the first-person death, because art is the medium for the spatiotemporal distantiation of the Self's death from the here and now. The narrator articulates distantiation as he approaches death: "Tout mon coeur s'arrachait au monde familier" (v.8). Dying, as portrayed in "Le Rêve d'un curieux," is the gradual removal of the Self from the familiar world and death is the eventual situation of the first-person death in an otherworld, which in this particular text is framed within the theater. As discussed earlier, dying is the anticipation of the spectacle of death. By setting death on stage, the poem reiterates the spatial distantiation necessary for the contemplation of the first-person death rendered possible through the medium of art. The departure from the familiar world brings the narrator to the theatrical world, implying that the theater is the unfamiliar world. The dramatization of death brings about the distancing defamiliarization of death: death is not familiar.

In this spectacle of death, the narrator who awaits the show is also the spectator. Since it is his death that is concerned and put on stage, the spectator-narrator is also the actor. This first-person death is presented as a long-awaited one-man show, wherein the spectator and actor are one and the same. The narrator's waiting for the show enacts the Derridean usage of "s'attendre" in *Apories*:

Le "s'attendre" [...] implique l'imminence, certes, l'anticipation inquiète de quelque chose mais aussi cette double ou plutôt triple transitivité (non réflexive et réflexive) du « s'attendre » à quelque chose qui arrivera comme le tout autre

que soi mais du s'attendre en s'attendant du même coup soi-même qu'on est et qu'on ne connaît pas. (118)

Derrida points to how "s'attendre" can be understood in more than one sense: to anticipate, or to anticipate oneself. Baudelaire's spectator-narrator anticipates the spectacle, which is also a meeting with himself as the actor on the other side of the curtain. The (dead) actor-self that the (live) spectator-narrator-self anticipates is one that is unknown even to him, given that the first-person death is a spectacle shrouded in mystery.

However, the narrator's endeavor to capture the instant of his own death on stage fails, because as soon as the show/death starts, signaled by the rising of the curtain, it also ends. The rising of the curtain in "Le Rêve d'un curieux" is the unveiling of the "vérité froide" of death. Situating such a moment at the break between the two tercets conveys the nothingness of death:¹⁶

Enfin la vérité froide se révéla:

J'étais mort sans surprise (vv.11-12)

The blank space between "Enfin la vérité froide se révéla: " (v.11) and "J'étais mort sans surprise" (v.12) is where the narrator is silent and words are absent.¹⁷ If the presence of

¹⁶ In *Les gisants: sur La mort des amants, de Baudelaire*, Jacques Drillon pinpoints the space between the last tercets of "La Mort des amants" as the death of the lovers.

¹⁷ This Baudelairean use of the stanza break can be perceived to prefigure the Mallarmean manipulation of the blank space of the page.

the narrator is signaled by his voice through words, his absence, in this instance, is signaled by the lack of words. The “*vérité froide*” is the narrative absence signifying the moment of the first-person death of the lyrical “I.”

Given that the narrator is to perform the dual role of the spectator and the actor in the one-man show of his death, the demise of the narrator also means the demise of the spectator and actor. There is no one to attend the spectacle, nor is there anyone to perform in it. The absence of the sole actor also means the absence of the show itself. The very instant of the first-person death escapes observation and cannot be a spectacle, because the narrator is not there to act in it or to observe it and there is nothing to observe. As a result, the poem suggests the impossibility of witnessing, being present for and recounting in real-time one’s own death.

The narrator regains his voice and reasserts his presence in the post-mortem declaration, “*J’étais mort sans surprise*” (v.12). Death is presented as a momentary annihilation, a temporary break. The words of the narrator depict the before and after of his death, but not the very moment of it. Escaping real-time articulation, the instance of the first-person death is represented as blank, silence and absence. As “*l’enfant avide du spectacle*” (v.9), the narrator’s spectacle of death turns out to be less than spectacular and, in effect, “*vide*.” It is only through the narrator’s post-mortem exclamation—“*Eh quoi! n’est-ce donc que cela?*” (v.13)— from the other side of the curtain, of death, that he expresses his disillusionment.

Baudelaire's poem is about the first-person death, but makes no claim of capturing that moment of death, as it is demonstrated to be the absence of articulation on the part of the narrator. He can speak around it, but not in it. It is as though the first-person death were a hole in articulation, the instant that escapes narration and the narrative self. This mutual exclusivity between death and the Self has been contemplated by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, quoted in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*: "where death is I am not; where I am death is not" (178).

Adding to the mutual exclusivity with the self, death is, according to Lévinas, the absence of expression and response. He states death as "l'arrêt d'un comportement, l'arrêt de mouvements expressifs et de mouvements ou processus physiologiques qui sont enveloppés par les mouvements expressifs, dissimulés par eux – cela formant "quelque chose" qui se montre, ou plutôt *quelqu'un* qui se montre, fait mieux que se montrer: s'exprime" (original emphasis, 20). Lévinas' conception of death is deeply rooted in terms of expressivity and put more plainly, "[la mort] est le sans-réponse" (20). The moment of death in Baudelaire's poem is not recounted, because it is the moment of inarticulation, lack of expression and no-response.

Up until now I have sidestepped the dream setting of the poem, which deserves discussion. Following the narration of the poem, death removes the narrator from the "monde familier" to place him in the unstable space of the stage that is in fact within a dream. Apart from the unconscious state, the dream can also be taken to mean desire.

The curious man dreams/desires his death; he dreams/desires to die. One could quickly jump from desire to wish and then from death dream/desire to death wish, or death drive as first posited in the 1920 Freud essay, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." The Freudian *Todestrieb* (death drive) is a self-destruction that effects the return to the inorganic state. The Baudelairean death dream/desire, however, is not necessarily self-destructive, nor does it imperatively revert to the inorganic state. The poem deals with the narrator's psychological turmoil as he approaches death and challenges the psychoanalytic death drive by presenting the narrator as a survivor of his death: he is neither completely destructed, nor does he remain in an inorganically dead state. The lyrical "I" recuperates his voice after the moment of death and speaks in the afterlife: "Eh quoi! n'est-ce donc que cela? / La toile était levée et j'attendais encore" (vv.13-14). The post-mortem, spectral, first-person voice expresses how the much-anticipated, supposedly spectacular death turned out to be a letdown. The poem finishes with the narrator left waiting and leaves open the question of what he is waiting for.

What the dream setting does in "Le Rêve d'un curieux" is position the Baudelairean text within the literary tradition that aligns death closely with sleep. Greek mythology portrays sleep and death as the twin brothers, Hypnos and Thanatos. In the famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*, Shakespeare too draws the parallel between sleep and death:

[...] To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause (III.i.64-68)

Despite the absence of any indication of religious belief, “Le Rêve d’un curieux” does suggest an afterlife. It is a poem that recounts, from beginning to end, the life of the narrator as anticipation of his own death, the death itself, followed by the subsequent survival into the afterlife that is characterized by perpetual waiting: “La toile était levée et j’attendais encore” (v.14). As I have demonstrated, the first-person death is the pivotal moment that eludes articulation, dividing the inevitability of death in life and the unpredictability in the indefinite afterlife.

1.3 Death in (In)conclusion

Following “Le Rêve d’un curieux” that illustrates the moment of death as silence and absence, I investigate further such a treatment of death through “Le Voyage,” the last and longest poem (144 lines) in *Les Fleurs du mal*, the second and generally accepted as authoritative edition published in 1861, rather than the first edition published in 1857. This poem has also drawn a lot of critical attention for a variety of reasons: the dedication to Maxime Du Camp allows for the exploration of the relationship between the renowned traveler and Baudelaire; the narrators speak knowledgeably of travel, yet Baudelaire himself was far from well-traveled, given that his only trip outside of France was a failed sea voyage to Calcutta ordered by his stepfather General Aupick that ended

partway in Mauritius;¹⁸ the poem contains many mythological references that invite interpretation.¹⁹ My reading of the text differs from those perspectives by focusing particularly on the last portion, which is the eighth section of the poem dealing directly with death. The desire for death as the final journey is contrasted with the world-weariness of earthly travels conveyed in the first seven sections of the poem. Terrestrial trips, no matter how exotic or extraordinary, end up ultimately unfulfilling. My examination of death as depicted in the final portion of the poem will reveal the complexities produced through the apostrophization of death and demonstrate that Baudelaire's conception of death is a continuous process and constant movement, rather than the static state resulting from an abrupt annihilation.²⁰

Barbara Johnson, in her article titled "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," defines the apostrophe as the "direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first-person speaker" (29-30). She continues to explain:

Apostrophe is thus both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of *direct* address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and

¹⁸ It was during his time in Mauritius that Baudelaire began to pen "A une dame créole." More details of Baudelaire's unfinished sea voyage to Calcutta can be found in Jonathan Culler's book chapter, "'Trouver du nouveau?': Baudelaire's Voyages."

¹⁹ For example, refer to Nicholae Babuts' " 'Le Voyage': The Dimension of Myth."

²⁰ Ann Jefferson, in her book *Biography and the Question of Literature in France*, notes the biographic aspect of the entire *Les Fleurs du mal*, which begins with the birth of the poet in "Bénédiction" and ends with "La Mort." With regard to the specific poem, "Le Voyage," Walter Putnam situates its biographic aspect in the observation that it "retraces an itinerary that resembles the stages of life itself: from the evocations of childhood in the opening stanza through the approach of death at the end, Baudelaire takes the reader on one final journey" (198).

anthropomorphic. Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness. (30)

Given Johnson's postulation of this figure of speech, the question of what happens when death—itsself absence and inanimation—is apostrophized can be applied to Baudelaire's poem, specifically the last two stanzas of "Le Voyage":

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

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*!
(vv.137-144, original emphasis)

The invocation of death through the apostrophe not only gives form to what is supposedly amorphous, but also confers upon it human form and thereby serves as an anthropomorphism. The inanimate death is rendered the animate old captain implored by the narrators to pour out his poison. The "absent, dead [and] inanimate" becomes "present, animate and anthropomorphic": the "it" of death, becomes a "he" ("vieux capitaine" (v.137)) and even the "you" ("Verse-nous ton poison" (v.141)) that the narrators address. Death "apostrophized [...] is thereby automatically animated, anthropomorphized, "person-ified" (Johnson 34).

Johnson mentions the I/Thou structure within an apostrophe and in “Le Voyage,” that binary structure is complicated and destabilized, because death is not only the explicitly apostrophized “vieux capitaine,” but also the tacit final journey; it is *the* journey that ends all terrestrial travels and is presented as the movement toward new knowledge. I will discuss more fully the concept of death as the search for the new in the latter part of this analysis. For now, I am focusing on the complexity in representing death as both the explicit, personified captain and the implicit journey.

The binary structure of I/Thou (or in the case of “Le Voyage,” the We/You, since the narrative voice represents a collective of travelers) proposed by Johnson is destabilized, because death is addressed as the second-person “you” and yet it is also the journey in which “we” partake. That “we” partake in death as the ultimate journey suggests an internalization; “we” are internalized in the “you.” The earlier established binary structure is thus dissolved in death. The dissolution of binary structures in death is reinforced through the rhetorical question, “Enfer ou Ciel, qu’importe?” (v.143). Apart from the undoing of We/You, there is also the undoing of hell/heaven.

As death takes on the human shape and form as “vieux capitaine,” “we” are internalized in death and lose that human shape and form, which death takes over. The internalization suggests a certain degree of the effacement of the self and what remains is the desire for the “nouveau” within the depths of “l’Inconnu.”

Because the narrators wish to plunge “[a]u fond de l’Inconnu,” the language used for death couches it in the desire to *connaître*, to know. Throughout the poem, the desire for knowledge is conveyed by the fact that the text is propelled by the questions of the narrators’ anonymous, curious interlocutor(s): “Dites, qu’avez-vous vu?” (v.57) and “Et puis, et puis encore?” (v.84). The rest of the poem is the revelation of knowledge on the part of the narrators who remain equally anonymous, save the fact that the “nous” is deduced to be a collective of experienced world travelers.

The final departure to “l’Inconnu” in “Le Voyage” presents a flight from old, acquired knowledge to what is “nouveau.” There is no value judgment made on what is “nouveau,” given the rhetorical question, “Enfer ou Ciel, qu’importe?” This is the same device employed in “Hymne à la beauté” to take beauty out of the moral, religious framework. The search for the new—whatever unknown and different—is also placed outside the context of morality and religion.

Although the casting of death in terms of “plonger” may allude to the Fall, the death in this poem is amoral and irreligious, by no means a reenactment of the original Fall, or even to suggest a deeper fall than the Fall, with the implication of “plonger” to mean a deliberate, further plunge into the “gouffre” of “l’Inconnu.” Nor does the Baudelairean voyage of and to death imply a return to the Edenic paradise lost, given that it is the reaching for what has yet to be known, rather than the recuperation of

innocence, or ignorance. It is the quest for the new that can only be found in the unknown.

In Johnson's reading of Baudelaire's "Moesta et Errabunda," she states that "the object of the voyage is precisely to return—to return to a prior state" (30). That does not appear to be the case in "Le Voyage." The Baudelairean use of the voyage metaphor for death is the constant movement from the known, departing from the realm of knowledge, to the unknown. The rhyme set up between "nouveau" (v.144) and "cerveau" (v.142) suggests the quest for a new kind of knowledge. Earlier in the poem, the narrators exclaim, as if in exasperation, "Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage!" (v.109). Considering the typical use of the Greek prefix "a," "amer" could be broken down into "a-mer," in the absence, or being outside of "mer."²¹ While the knowledge gained "des mers" (v.9) or "sur la mer" (v.61) is "amer," that which is gained "a-mer," outside or in the absence of the sea, i.e. from the voyage of death, is "nouveau." (I will expound on the "nouveau" and "eau" later in this chapter.) The object of the ultimate voyage is not to return to a prior state, but to proceed elsewhere, because as soon as what is "l'Inconnu" and "nouveau" is attained, it ceases to be "l'Inconnu" and "nouveau." Death as the ultimate voyage is the going beyond of limits, the undoing of boundaries.

²¹ The actual etymology for "amer" is given by *Le Grand Robert* as *amarus*, derived from Latin. Even though "amer" is not etymologically broken down into "a-mer," this way of considering "amer" opens up different ways of reading the text.

The desire for more and what is beyond is expressed more than once within Baudelaire's poetic corpus. An example of which is "Enivrez-vous," whose narrator advises the reader, "[E]nivrez-vous sans cesse [d]e vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise !" The degree of intoxication is to be intensified should it be the case with "l'ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue." The desire for the beyond resonates in a different way in "Any where out of the world," wherein the narrator's soul, when offered multiple terrestrial destinations, finally explodes, shouting, "N'importe où! n'importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!"

Even though the Baudelairean voyage of death is one that strives for what is beyond, never ending but always proceeding, does it necessarily follow that it never returns? It does, after all, depend on the trajectory: linear, or circular, for example. By having "nouveau" as the last word on which "Le Voyage" ends, the text leaves open the possibility for a return: within "nouveau" is "eau," which recalls the "Ô" in the apostrophe of death: "Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps!" (v.137) and again, "Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort!" (v.138). This is the "'O' of the pure vocative, Jakobson's conative function, or the pure presencing of the second person" (Johnson 31). The rhyme between "eau" and "Ô" is echoed in "nouveau," which suggests that although the final journey is the perpetual movement toward "nouveau," it is also the return to itself as death.

In *Les Paradis artificiels*, Baudelaire writes, “Conclure, c’est fermer un cercle” (OC I 440). The “Ô,” which the reader and listener of poem will notice through “nouveau” by linking it with “eau” and then to “Ô,” is the very grapheme and graphic depiction of that conclusive circle. In addition to conjuring the “Ô” through and as a result in “nouveau,” the rhyme between “nouveau” and “Ô” in effect circles back to “Ô,” closing a circle and thereby, according to that quotation from Baudelaire, concludes. “Nouveau” concludes not only “Le Voyage,” but also the entire collection of *Les Fleurs du mal*, since that is the last word of the last poem.

Such a conclusion is by no means simple, for the very word “nouveau” contains the tension of completion and incompleteness. Echoing “Ô,” “nouveau” concludes in the Baudelairean sense of closing a circle. Nevertheless, taken for its meaning, what is new requires the constant searching and therefore does not and cannot conclude. The implications from the sound and sense of “nouveau” point to two separate and opposite directions, such that the conclusion is in fact inconclusive. The Pléiade’s *Anthologie de la poésie française du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, which selectively contains the last two sections of the eight-part “Le Voyage,” offers a reading of “nouveau” as the last word of the poem “pour désigner le but du dernier voyage [ce qui] suggère tout ensemble l’espoir en quelque au-delà salutaire et l’idée d’une mort poétique, du passage du poète vers un renouvellement de sa poésie” (1421). The renewal of poetry consists in the paradoxically inconclusive conclusion of “Le Voyage,” a poem that depicts death as the poetic

experience described by Claire Lyu in *A Sun Within a Sun*: “To pass not from unknown to known, but the reverse, from known to unknown, from the ease and comfort of safety lines and flat solid ground to dangerous depth—that is poetry’s way” (119).

Perhaps rather than a circle, this conclusion can be imagined as an on-going spiral. Baudelairean death is the conclusion of terrestrial journey and the constant pursuit of the unknown by “notre infini” (v.8). As Henning Goldbaek asserts, “le poème, strictement parlant, ne traite *pas* de l’impossibilité du voyage à tous égards, mais de son impossibilité dans le fini. Ce fini est le monde existant, mais aussi la nature, la matière, par opposition à l’esprit” (81).

Although “Le Voyage” takes death outside of the context of religion, as suggested by the rhetorical question, “Enfer ou Ciel, qu’importe” (v.143), it still bespeaks a perpetuation of existence after death and suggests the belief in the afterlife and transcendence. Death is not the end. The indefinite waiting that the narrator of “Le Rêve d’un curieux” finds himself in *after* his death also points to that idea of life after death. As does “Une Mort héroïque,” but the continuation after death is nuanced somewhat differently. Though Fanciouille the artist is ultimately censored (to borrow Nathaniel Wing’s idea that death is “ultimate censorship”) through the odd death sentence by whistle, his art is not. Fanciouille is survived by his spectacular pantomime performance. In other words, he is continued in the immortality of his transcendent art. “Le Voyage,” “Le Rêve d’un curieux” and “Une Mort héroïque” are three poems that

convey death as silence and absence, but it also doesn't just stop there. Transcendence follows closely after.

2. Voices Beyond the Grave: “Le Tir et le cimetière” and “Laquelle est la vraie?”

On a certain slab of marble in the Montparnasse Cemetery are inscribed these words: “SON BEAU FILS, DÉCÉDÉ À PARIS À L’ÂGE DE 46 ANS, LE 31 AOÛT 1867” (Figure 2 on next page.) Buried in the family grave along with his stepfather, Jacques Aupick, who had passed away earlier in 1857, Baudelaire, the sensational poet of *Les Fleurs du mal*, is abstracted in the epitaph to his relation to Aupick as his stepson, his age and the date of his death.¹ His date of birth is not even mentioned. Interestingly enough, the practice of omitting the date of birth was also applied to Aupick and Baudelaire’s mother, Caroline Archenbaut Defayes, buried later in 1871 in the same grave. It is as if the date of death is what leaves a mark, rather than the date of birth.

Another peculiarity, or irony, about this grave is the sheer fact that Baudelaire was buried with Aupick. Anyone with some knowledge of Baudelaire’s relationship with his stepfather would agree that it can be at best described as strained. It is generally understood that the poet’s animosity toward Aupick stems from the competition for his mother’s affection, since her second marriage to the General when Baudelaire was seven years old. Moreover, Baudelaire’s own political engagement is remembered to be motivated by the sentiment contained in his proclamation from the

¹ Not to say that all epitaphs were worded the same, but as Maxime du Camp makes clear in his study of Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were regulated: “L’ordonnance de 1843 est péremptoire : toute inscription est soumise au visa de l’autorité municipale” (208).

barracks, with the refrain that “il fallait fusiller le général Aupick” (Pichois and Ziegler 257).



Figure 2: Baudelaire's gravestone²

It appeared that Baudelaire did not have much say in what was inscribed of him on the tombstone and with whom he was buried. Struck by aphasia, the poet's health

² This image by sarutora was obtained under a Creative Commons license at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/7691363@N04/448582770/sizes/m/in/photostream/>.

declined in the latter years of his life to the point where his speech was reduced to the enigmatic utterance of “Crénom” (Pichois and Ziegler 579).

With regard to natural deaths, the thing that one has arguably the least control over is the timing. It would be reasonable to say that most deaths, if not all, are considered untimely. After all, from the point of the living, death is presumably undesired and undesirable, something to be postponed, by whatever means, for as long as possible.

The untimeliness of Baudelaire’s death, among other misfortunes surrounding the demise, was mentioned by Asselineau, as he relayed the account of the poet’s funeral to Malassis. Here is Asselineau’s recollection, dated about just a week after the ceremony had taken place, from Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler’s authoritative biography on the poet, entitled *Baudelaire*:

Baudelaire aura eu pour ses funérailles le même guignon qu’Alfred de Musset et Henri Heine. Nous avons eu contre nous la saison d’abord, qui absentait beaucoup de personnes de Paris, et le jour qui nous a obligés à distribuer les billets dans la journée du dimanche, de sorte que nombre de gens ne les ont eus que le lendemain, en revenant de la campagne. Il y avait environ cent personnes à l’église et moins au cimetière. La chaleur a empêché beaucoup de gens de suivre jusqu’au bout. Un coup de tonnerre, qui a éclaté comme on entrait au cimetière, a failli faire sauver le reste. La Société des gens de lettres a fait défaut, quoique j’eusse écrit dès le samedi, à Paul Féval, président, pour lui dire que je comptais sur lui et sur son comité. Personne non plus du ministère, ni Doucet, ni Dumesnil. Les discours ont été lus devant soixante personnes. La lecture s’est ressentie de ce désappointement. Théodore était très ému, moi encore plus et en colère. Nous nous sommes précipités en gens pressés de finir. J’ai remarqué comme présents : Houssaye et son fils, Nadar, Champfleury, Monselet, Wallon, Vitu, Manet, Alfred Stevens, Bracquemond, Fantin, Pothey, Verlaine, Calmann Lévy, Alph. Lemerre, éditeur, Ducassois, imprimeur, Silvestre, Veuillot, etc. (595-596)

Because Baudelaire breathed his last on a Saturday, the untimeliness of it being over a weekend in summer, when most people would have left Paris for the countryside, precluded many loved ones from being notified in time of the funeral. Asselineau is implying that had the demise taken place on a weekday in a season other than summer, the formality of notification would have been less interfered, the weather would've proven to be less of a deterrent and the funerary ceremony would have been better attended.

This scene of the funeral procession composed of a modest crowd under the omen of thunder is believed to have been captured in Manet's unfinished work, "L'Enterrement," dated circa 1867, the year of Baudelaire's death, now housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this somber painting, Manet, whose attendance at Baudelaire's funeral was noted by Asselineau in the passage cited earlier, depicts a thickly-clouded gray sky that coincides with Asselineau's observation of the weather.



Figure 3: "L'Enterrement" by Manet³

In discussing Baudelaire's death, I have so far pointed out the various components that are grounded in the cemetery. There is first the tomb and with it the epitaph, which brings up the issue of reading and writing, wherein the dead are written about, albeit in the abstraction of very simple facts, and the living are to read to identify the grave and know about the dead. There is also the consideration of the cemetery as a location and physical place, where the body of the deceased is to rest. The cemetery is also a space from which the relationship between the living and the dead emerges. The friendship that Asselineau and Manet had with Baudelaire was manifested in their

³ This image is available from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website, accessible at this link: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001397>.

presence at the poet's funeral. There is also memory that ties Asselineau and Manet to Baudelaire.

To further explore the idea of the cemetery as a physical place and a relational space, I turn to Baudelaire's cemetery poems: "Le Tir et le cimetière" and "Laquelle est la vraie?" The cemetery was by no means a predominant preoccupation in this poet's work, but these two texts offer a remarkable demonstration of the cemetery as an unstable site, in which the relationship between the living and the dead is negotiated.

Bringing together Michel de Certeau's distinction between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*) and Adriana Cavarero's focus on voice, my chapter, "Voices Beyond the Grave," analyzes the locality and vocality of death. As the interface between the living and the dead, the cemetery in "Le Tir et le cimetière" and "Laquelle est la vraie?" provides the frame to understand death in terms of voice, speech and language.

2.1 Death, Language and Space

The conjunction of death, language and space may be more common and pervasive than realized. In fact, users of everyday language may even be making and perpetuating these connections without being acutely aware of them. After all, the conception of death in terms of space is embedded in the common practice of language. The deceased is often described as "the departed." Those who have died are "no longer with us." They have "passed away" or have "gone on." In these idioms and euphemisms, death's relation to space is conveyed as being *there*, as opposed to *here*.

The dead have moved/passed from the domain of the living to another. In the dichotomy between here and there, the living are here, but the dead are there.

This space-related use of language for death is far from being exclusive to English⁴ and exists in French as well. Perhaps the most obvious examples are “trépasser,” “le trépas,” and “les trépassés,” the respective equivalents of “to pass away,” “the passing away” and “those who have passed away.” “Disparaître” also carries the connotation of not being here, not being present. “Les disparus” are those who are there and absent. Implicating the opposition between life here and death there, other French idioms and euphemisms for death include “quitter la vie,” “passer de vie à trépas” and “faire le grand voyage.”⁵ These three expressions articulate the movement of going somewhere, an anywhere that is not here, to the destination of a there that is death.

Life and death are thus set in positional and oppositional terms. At the same time, the cemetery can be considered the curious combination of here *and* there. It is the here, where the living gather to participate in the funerary ceremony, witness the burial and from time to time visit the grave of the beloved who’s passed away. It is also the there, where the dead go and are buried.

⁴ I can think of one example in Chinese and specifically in Cantonese, my native dialect—去世—which is the combination of “to leave”(去) and “world,” or “life” (世), i.e. to leave the world/life; to die is to leave the world/life. This makes me suspect that space-related idioms and euphemisms for death may be common across other languages as well.

⁵ Baudelaire concluded *Les Fleurs du mal* with “Le Voyage,” a poem referring to death, which I analyzed in greater detail in my chapter entitled “Dead Silent.”

2.2 Cemeteries in Nineteenth-Century Paris

Be it indifference or repulsion to any degree, our attitude toward cemeteries did not remain static throughout the centuries, nor were cemeteries themselves always the way we might imagine them now: tranquil, landscaped areas punctuated by gravestones.

It is the phenomenon of the nineteenth-century cemetery in Paris, the cemetery as understood in Baudelaire's time, to which I focus my attention, but to give it proper context, it would first require taking a few steps back to the late eighteenth century, when a momentous incident took place in the history of Parisian cemeteries, a death of a cemetery, so to speak. This is the shutdown of the Cimetière des Innocents in 1780. Maxime du Camp, in the sixth volume of *Paris: Ses organs, ses foctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle*, published in 1875, records in great detail how this unfolded as a result of the growing population in Paris, which corresponded with the growing demand for cemetery space. It reached the point, to which the Cimetière des Innocents, *the* cemetery to be buried in Paris, became so overcrowded that the ground and the natural process of decomposition could no longer keep up with the rate of burial. It was the severe shortage of space and the consequent alarming health hazard from burials too frequent in a ground that was failing to absorb and contain the putrefaction that finally led to the removal of the remains to be subsequently transferred to the catacombs.

The shutdown of the Cimetière des Innocents was by no means a step that was taken as soon as the problem was recognized. While the overpopulation at the cemetery was clearly an outrageous predicament with regard to the appropriately respectful treatment of burials and the maintenance of a sanitarily acceptable environment, the general public possessed a certain attachment to this cemetery that enabled the Parisians to tolerate it in such a state for so long. Maxime du Camp writes:

Il faut dire pour expliquer, sinon excuser de tels ménagements envers ce lieu de putridité, que le peuple de Paris aimait son cimetière : on lui donnait là le spectacle de belles processions, avec encens et psalmodies, à certains jours de fêtes carillonnées ; il y venait volontiers, non pour évoquer les âmes des aïeux, mais pour faire sa prière en l'église des Saints-Innocents, populaire entre toutes, pour admirer les monuments funéraires, les chapelles d'Orgemont, de Villeroy, de Pommereux, la tombe Morin, le squelette d'albâtre, qu'il attribuait faussement à Germain Pilon, l'ancien prêchoir, où pendant la ligue on débita de si belles harangues, la croix des Bureaux, la croix Glatine, la statue du Christ, que l'on nommait le Dieu de la Cité, et la tour de Notre-Dame des Bois, où chaque soir on allumait une veilleuse qui servait de fanal à ce champ des morts. (167)

The general attitude toward the cemetery was one of piety linked to a particular religious fervor, which sustained the existence and overuse of the Cimetière des Innocents beyond its capacity. Moreover, it took the consent on the part of the archbishop for the cemetery to be finally closed.

The closing of the Cimetière des Innocents was in a way the beginning of the city's attempt to rid itself of cemeteries, pushing them out of Paris proper to the periphery. On Prairial 23, year XII (June 12, 1804), there was an imperial decree that

reinforced the prohibition of burials in churches, hospices and hospitals. It also dictated that all future cemeteries would be situated outside the city.

The ambition to banish the cemetery from the city can be observed from Haussmann's proposed project of closing existing cemeteries in Paris and opening a new necropolis at Méry-sur-Oise. Known as the figure who had rebuilt Paris, Haussmann envisioned a new burial ground about 30 kilometers away from Paris, so as not to interfere with urban development, and accessible only by rail. It was not long before this train would be known as "le train des morts" (Ariès 248).

However, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was public opposition, this enterprise was finally abandoned in 1881. In his historical book, *L'Homme devant la mort*, Philippe Ariès collected the following objections to the Méry-sur-Oise necropolis:

Dès 1869 [...], le Dr Robinet, répondait à Haussmann dans un livre au titre significatif : *Paris sans cimetière*. Alors « Paris ne serait plus une ville et la France serait décapitée ». « Il n'y a pas de cité sans cimetière. » En 1874, Pierre Laffitte, « directeur du positivisme », publiait ses *Considérations générales à propos des cimetières de Paris*, où il affirmait que le cimetière « constitue l'une des institutions fondamentales de toute société quelconque ». « Toute société résultant de l'évolution continue d'une suite de générations liées entre elles, suppose un passé, un présent et un avenir. » (250-251)

Based on these opinions, one has the impression that Parisians could not imagine their city without its cemeteries, the city and the cemetery being intimately linked, the former deriving its identity from the latter.

While the nineteenth century could be characterized as an expulsion of the cemetery from Paris, it also marked the return of the cemetery to the city. The three big

cemeteries at the time were Père-Lachaise, the Cimetière de Montmartre and the Cimetière de Montparnasse, which remained “excentrés par rapport au Paris 1800,” but were incorporated into the capital as of 1840 due to urban expansion (Vovelle 631).

The city held onto its cemeteries, as the city-dwellers continued the practice of visiting the graves of their loved ones, a loyalty that persisted through to the end of the century, given the following statistical evidence:

[La population parisienne] aime ses morts et va les voir ; si elle ne trouve pas toute facilité à cet égard, elle sera mécontente, et aura raison de l'être. On a fait des relevés très-instructifs. Du 1^{er} au 7 décembre 1873, on a compté le nombre des convois et des individus qui sont entrés dans les cimetières parisiens : 752 convois escortés par 21, 418 personnes en ont franchi les portes, et 46, 617 visiteurs isolés sont venus près de la tombe de ceux qu'ils ont perdus. Les cinq premiers jours ont été brumeux ; le lundi cependant accuse 6,837 visiteurs ; le temps se met au beau le samedi, se maintient le dimanche, et ce dernier jour donne un total de 24,320. Il faut compter qu'en moyenne le nombre des visiteurs quotidiens est de 8,964 en hiver et de 11,245 en été ; mais cette moyenne est dépassée dans d'énormes proportions à certaines époques solennelles : à la fête de la Toussaint, par exemple, et au jour des Trépassés, qui la suit. Dans la même année 1873, il plut pendant ces deux journées, et le chiffre des personnes qui visitèrent les morts de nos cimetières a dépassé 370,000. (Du Camp 224-225)

The numbers cited communicate the remarkable veneration that Parisians have for the dead and how much visits to the cemetery were an integral part of the city life.

2.3 The Place and Space of the Cemetery

Thus far, in my exploration of the cemetery as a here for the living, who go to visit graves, and a there for the dead, who remain interred, there are already traces of

Michel de Certeau's differentiation between *lieu* (place) and *espace* (space), but I will now address more directly this issue of the cemetery as place and a space.⁶

To undertake this task, it would be necessary to first recall Certeau's definition of *lieu* contained in his famous text, *L'Invention du quotidien*:

Est un *lieu* l'ordre (quel qu'il soit) selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence. S'y trouve donc exclue la possibilité, pour deux choses, d'être à la même place. La loi du « propre » y règne : les éléments considérés sont les uns à côté des autres, chacun situé en un endroit « propre » et distinct qu'il définit. Un lieu est donc une configuration instantanée de positions. Il implique une indication de stabilité. (208)

The cemetery can thus be conceived of a place with regard to where and how it is situated in relation to other physical objects and sites.⁷

As Baudelaire's "Le Tir et le cimetière" published just six weeks after the poet's death, exemplifies, the cemetery is presented in the opening line as a place relative to another: "*A la vue du cimetière, Estaminet*" (original emphasis). Side by side, occupying their proper and distinct places, the cemetery and the "cabaret" are separate entities; the former can be seen from the latter and vice versa. There is also the suggestion of a third place, given that "la crépitation des coups de feu d'un tir voisin" is said to be heard from the cemetery, as the gunshots "éclataient comme l'explosion des bouchons de

⁶ The connections among death, construction and the concept of place have existed as long as the pyramids. As Michel Ragon reminds us, the first known architect and the only to be deified was Imhotep, whose construction of stepped pyramids during the third Egyptian dynasty for King Zoser was also the construction of tombs (21).

⁷ Current technology has complicated the notion of the tangibility of the place of the cemetery, given that virtual cemeteries now exist. In Hong Kong, the virtual cemetery can be accessed at this link: www.memorial.gov.hk. With the involvement of the Internet, the memorial site becomes the memorial website.

champagne dans le bourdonnement d'une symphonie en sourdine." The cemetery, estaminet and the shooting range are consequently configured in a triangulation of position.

With these indications, it would be quite tempting to situate an actual cemetery on which "Le Tir et le cimetière" was based. However, Patrick Labarthe asserts, "Que cabaret et cimetière soient dans une sorte de *no man's land* insituable ne peut donc que renforcer le sens allégorique de la péripétie racontée" (212-213). Not to discredit Labarthe's insistence on the allegorical aspect of Baudelaire's poem, or to necessarily dispute Baudelaire's fictionalization of the places in this prose poem that render them "insituable(s)," but there is a noticeable resemblance between the cemetery of Baudelaire's poem and the Cimetière de Montmartre.

Located in the north of Paris, Cimetière de Montmartre was widely and alternatively known in the nineteenth century as le Champ du repos (Du Camp 197). In the cemetery penned by Baudelaire, the voice given to death in "Le Tir et le cimetière," calls particular attention to death being the eternal rest:

Maudites soient vos cibles et vos carabines, turbulents vivants, qui vous souciez si peu des défunts et de leur divin repos! [...] Si vous saviez comme le prix est facile à gagner, comme le but est facile à toucher, et combien tout est néant, excepté la Mort, vous ne vous fatigueriez pas tant, laborieux vivants, et vous troubleriez moins souvent le sommeil de ceux qui depuis longtemps ont mis dans le But, dans le seul vrai but de la détestable vie!"

I will analyze in greater detail this condemnation directed at the living pronounced by death, but for now, I highlight the specific emphasis given to death as "repos" and

“sommeil,” which are the opposite of toil. Moreover, the connection between the cemetery and a place of rest can be traced back to the etymology of the former, which is derived from the Greek *koimêtêrion*, meaning the place where one sleeps.⁸

Apart from the designation of death as rest, the other thing that Baudelaire’s cemetery and the Cimetière de Montmartre have in common is their proximity to a “cabaret,” not in the sense of a Moulin Rouge, but something closer to an inn that serves food and beverages, such as coffee and alcohol. Playing on the double meaning of *bière* as both beer and casket, Baudelaire depicts a man who walks into an estaminet, orders a *bière* (beer), and casually walks over to the cemetery, a field that serves as a site for *bières* (caskets). A look into the etymology of *bière* in *Le Grand Robert* indicates that the use to denote coffin dates back to the twelfth century and was derived from the Frankish “*bëra civière*.” It was in the fifteenth century that *bière*, from the German “*bier*” gained its meaning for the alcoholic beverage. Though with separate signifieds, the common signifier *bière* functions as the link between the estaminet and the cemetery.

In addition to the semantic play on *bière*, the unmistakable rhyme between *bière* and *cimetière* in Baudelaire’s poem produces a resonant network among beer/coffin, the cemetery and an *hier*, which is heard in *bière* and *cimetière*. The association with a yesterday, an irretrievable past, thus ties together the burial ground and the container for the body of the deceased.

⁸ In Greek mythology, Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) are twin brothers.

In his study of the Cimetière de Montmartre, Du Camp recalls the nearby cabaret:

Jadis, au temps où bruissaient les Porcherons, il y avait là une sorte de ferme doublée d'un cabaret ; les ouvriers venaient s'y amuser le dimanche ; on n'était pas difficile alors sur les constructions de plaisance : on buvait du lait dans une masure, on buvait du vin dans une autre. Ces deux baraques existent encore : l'une sert de loge au concierge, l'autre est le bureau du conservateur. (198)

This historical precedent of a cemetery next to an establishment serving alcoholic drinks, beer included, together with the Cimetière de Montmartre's reputation as le Champ du repos, is quite suggestive of this Parisian cemetery as the model for Baudelaire's fictionalized burial ground.

I have considered the cemetery as a place, according to Certeau's definition, but this place can also be rendered a space, which is "*un lieu pratiqué*" (208, original emphasis). A fuller definition of *espace* is given by Certeau to be the following:

Il y a *espace* dès qu'on prend en considération les vecteurs de direction, des quantités de vitesse et la variable de temps. L'espace est un croisement de mobiles. Il est en quelque sorte animé par l'ensemble des mouvements qui s'y déploient. Est espace l'effet produit par les opérations qui l'orientent, le circonstancient, le temporalisent et l'amènent à fonctionner en unité polyvalente de programmes conflictuels ou de proximités contractuelles. L'espace serait au lieu ce que devient le mot quand il est parlé, c'est-à-dire quand il est saisi dans l'ambiguïté d'une effectuation, mué en un terme relevant de multiples conventions, posé comme l'acte d'un présent (ou d'un temps), et modifié par les transformations dues à des voisinages successifs. A la différence du lieu, il n'a donc ni l'univocité ni la stabilité d'un « propre ». (208)

While a place is characterized by fixity and tangibility, space gives rise to destabilization and polyvalence. A place is transformed into a space because of what happens in that place and how it is used.

Returning to “Le Tir et le cimetière,” the cemetery, in addition to being a site for the burial of the dead, can also be a recreational space. The protagonist saunters to this open area and leisurely takes a seat on a tomb, “sous le soleil qui lui chauffait le cerveau et dans l’atmosphère des ardents parfums de la Mort.”

The social and recreational aspect of the cemetery is demonstrated through Père-Lachaise, which became and remains to this day a tourist attraction. Not only were there guidebooks for the city of Paris, but there were also guidebooks for its most famous cemetery. Père-Lachaise, organized around the formal esplanade leading up to the chapel, the focal point, at the crown of the hill (Etlin 366), showcases the combination of architectural design, elaborate funerary art and contemplative landscaping. In his chapter, telling entitled “A New Eden,” Richard A. Etlin gestures toward the spiritual aspect in the cemetery’s imitation of a garden; it is a return to a paradise lost, the Garden of Eden from which mankind had been banished.

Across the Atlantic, the popularity of landscaped cemeteries resembling gardens was even used in the United States as an argument for parks in. A. J. Downing is quoted to say: “Judging from the crowds of people in carriages, and on foot, which I find

constantly thronging Greenwood and Mount Auburn, I think it plain enough how much our citizens, of all classes, would enjoy public parks on a similar scale" (Etlin 367).

There is also a pedagogical dimension to the space of the cemetery, since it functions as a "biographical dictionary," a sort of who's who among the dead (Etlin 357). This identification by the tombstone, the concrete marker of death, can lend itself to a quasi-celebrity sighting, in the sense of coming into contact with the grave of a famous person. The treatment of the cemetery as a kind of museum and tourist attraction emerged in the late eighteenth century and continues to the present twenty-first century. A Franco-American cinematic collaboration, the 2006 "Paris, je t'aime," dedicates one segment to Père-Lachaise, in which an engaged couple speaking British English is shown to weave through the cemetery while on holiday/early honeymoon. With a cemetery guide in hand, the woman locates Oscar Wilde's grave and plants a kiss, among the many, on the tombstone of the writer whom she admires.

As that short film depicts, the cemetery provides the relational space between the living and the dead. In the case of that admirer of Oscar Wilde, it is a relation of veneration that spans even about a century after the writer's death in 1900. The rapport between the living and the dead that takes place at the cemetery is, barring the supernatural, one-sided with the focus on the living: it is the living who gather around the grave to be present for and witness the burial of the deceased; the living from time to time visit the grave out of respect and reminiscence; they also maintain and even

decorate the site. For the living who never personally knew the deceased, like the woman from “Paris, je t’aime,” they might be drawn by the lingering fame of the dead celebrities, or they might stumble into the cemetery out of sheer curiosity, as Baudelaire illustrates in “Le Tir et le cimetière.”

And yet Baudelaire conceptualizes the relational space of the cemetery as something that is not restricted to unidirectionality; this poet’s cemetery in “Le Tir et le cimetière” and “Laquelle est la vraie?” is the relational interface between the living and the dead that involves voice, speech and language. Through the incorporation of voice for the living *and* the dead, the exchanges that do and do not take place elucidate certain aspects of death that would otherwise be overlooked were the dead and even death itself to remain mute.

2.4 Relating Through Voice

My analysis of “Le Tir et le cimetière” and “Laquelle est la vraie?,” especially the attention I give to voice in these texts, has benefitted from Adriana Cavarero’s 2005 book, *For More Than One Voice*. What Cavarero seeks to do is relocate the emphasis placed on logocentrism that has been traditional in Western philosophy to concentrate on voice, as she has done in analyzing epic poetry and Greek mythology. Her understanding of voice is distinct from speech, which is still rooted in language and semantics. Cavarero coins the term, “vocal ontology of uniqueness,” to refer to the corporal sounding and the vocal quality that distinguish one existent from another. The

voice is what enables humans to recognize one another even in the absence of sight. It is also what makes us unique and in that sense identifies us as separate from others. Furthermore, voice, according to this philosopher, is necessarily linked to the body, which consists, among other parts, of the mouth and throat to produce that particular voice and the ear to receive it.

If the voice is tied to the body, what are we to make of the voice and consequently the body of *Bénédicte*, the beloved who returns from the dead, in “*Laquelle est la vraie?*” Or what about the voice of the collective dead in “*Le Tir et le cimetière*,” which is simply a disembodied emanation from the grave?

Cavarero’s considerations have brought up the issue of the (corpo)reality, i.e. the link between the body and truth, of voice in Baudelaire’s poems, which I will address in the following examination of these texts, by teasing out the implications of *Bénédicte*’s return in body and voice to contest the narrator and the physical absence of Death in “*Le Tir et le cimetière*.” While Cavarero focuses exclusively on voice as separate from speech and language, I bring the latter two components back into the discussion with voice, because in the exploration of death through these two poems by Baudelaire, how something is said is as important as what is said. Moreover, the kinds of vocal exchanges that occur in the texts—a dialogue in “*Laquelle est la vraie?*” and a monologue in “*Le Tir et le cimetière*”—reveal particular aspects of the relationship between the living and the dead.

2.5 The Dead Woman Talks Back

In a paper delivered to commemorate the centenary of Baudelaire's death on August 31, 1867, Henri Peyre points out the the poet's lack of attention "to the reactions, feelings, inner turmoils of the feminine partner in the liaison" (36). Peyre elaborates in "Baudelaire as a love poet" that "[i]t is easier either to idealize and to patronize the loved one (37) as an angel or a weak creature in need of protection, or else to declaim against her wiles and her vampire's greed: to imagine her as an equal, talking back to the man, spurning his idealization and preferring to be known and loved for what she is may be a more arduous enterprise" (Peyre 36-37). Curiously enough, Peyre's observations focus solely on Baudelaire's lyrical poetry, ignoring entirely the prose poetic corpus. Had he considered Baudelaire's prose poems, Peyre would have realized that "Laquelle est la vraie?" is exactly the "more arduous enterprise" that Baudelaire undertakes to present Bénédicte as the "equal, talking back to the man, spurning his idealization and preferring to be known and loved for what she is."

Nevertheless, Baudelaire's "Laquelle est la vraie?" is not just about the beloved talking back to the man; it is about the *dead* beloved talking back to the man. The voice of Bénédicte, the beloved who returns from the dead, and with that her ability to contradict the narrator is what renders "Laquelle est la vraie?" such a jarring poem.

First published in the 1863 edition of *Le Boulevard*,⁹ this prose poem deals with “the most poetical topic in the world.” That is the opinion of Edgar Allan Poe, who asserts in his 1846 text, “The Philosophy of Composition,” that the “death [...] of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.” Poe came to that conclusion having first established that “[b]eauty [“as the essence of the poem”] of whatever kind in its supreme development invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears [and that] [m]elancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.” From there, Poe¹⁰ continues to state that “[o]f all melancholy topics [...] according to the universal understanding of mankind, [...] the most melancholy” was death, which is the “most poetical” when “it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.”¹¹

Baudelaire was very much aware of this particular piece by Poe that explained the composition of “The Raven.” As a matter of fact, it was a text that Baudelaire later

⁹ This text was published again in September 1867, a week after Baudelaire’s death, in *Revue nationale et étrangère*. This posthumous publication featured a different title: “L’Idéal et le Réel.”

¹⁰ For thematic resonances between Baudelaire’s “Laquelle est la vraie?” and Poe’s prose fiction, refer to Edward Strickland’s “The Coalescence of Characteristic Poe Motifs in Baudelaire’s ‘Laquelle est la vraie?’”

¹¹ Virginia Swain hypothesizes an origin for “Laquelle est la vraie?” that reaches back, even further than Poe, to Rousseau. She cites a passage written by Sainte-Beuve in *Causerie* 2:83, of which Baudelaire was probably aware, on Rousseau’s preference for the fictional ideal to the real:

[L]’amour de Rousseau n’était pour aucune femme vivante ni pour une de ces beautés d’autrefois, que ressuscitent les rêves du poète. Son amour était celui de l’idéale beauté, du fantôme auquel lui-même prêtait vie et flamme: c’était ce fantôme seul, tiré de son sein, et formé d’un ardent nuage, qu’il aimait, qu’il embrassait sans cesse, à qui il donnait chaque matin ses baisers de feu...et quand il se présenta une femme réelle qui eut l’orgueil de lui montrer l’objet terrestre de son idéal et de lui dire: *Je suis Julie*, il ne daigna point la reconnaître; il lui en voulut presque d’avoir espéré se substituer à l’objet du divin songe. (Swain 110).

translated as "Méthode de composition," published in 1859.¹² The French poet adopts the most poetical topic in "Laquelle est la vraie," which is recounted through the lips of the bereaved lover, as he stands in the cemetery, remembering Bénédicte, "qui remplissait l'atmosphère d'idéal, et dont les yeux répandaient le désir de la grandeur, de la beauté, de la gloire et de tout ce qui fait croire à l'immortalité." The beauty of Bénédicte is emphasized in its excess that, in the opinion of the narrator in mourning, contributed to her early demise: "cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps."

Poe's conception of the most poetical topic is based on the exclusive narration by the male lover. Baudelaire's poem too is told from the perspective of the masculine narrator, though with the exception of Bénédicte's interjection, the significance of which I will expound on later in this chapter. To better comprehend the relational space depicted in "Laquelle est la vraie?" it is necessary to consider not only the voice of Bénédicte, but also that of the narrator, who asserts, "[C]'est moi-même qui l'ai enterrée." The fact that he was the one responsible for burying Bénédicte is repeated in "C'est moi qui l'ai enterrée, bien close dans une bière d'un bois parfumé et incorruptible comme les coffres de l'Inde." It appears odd that there is such an insistence on the part of the narrator in his burial of Bénédicte, but I read this as his confinement of the

¹² Baudelaire's "Méthode de composition" was published along with "Le Corbeau," translated from Poe's "The Raven." Both of Baudelaire's translations were published under "La Genèse d'un poème."

beloved, whom he puts in a box, physically in the coffin and figuratively locked in his idealization of her.

2.6 Resisting Idealization

In the narrator's earlier portrayal of *Bénédicte*, she is described as the transcendental embodiment of grandeur, beauty, glory and immortality. Given that it took place on a day when "le printemps agitait son encensoir jusque dans les cimetières," even her burial is spiritualized, as the religiously charged "encensoir" alludes to the Catholic practice whereby a censer is used during benedictions, important masses and processions to represent prayers being offered up to Heaven. That *Bénédicte* is contained in a casket "comme les coffres de l'Inde" exoticizes the heroine, even after her death, by bringing her in connection with the Orient, which, in the nineteenth century, was a source of curiosity for France.¹³

The narrator's body language is also quite telling with regard to his consideration of *Bénédicte*, as his "yeux restaient fichés sur le lieu où était enfoui [s]on trésor." While appearing to be a gesture of grief, the lowered eyes also carry connotation of yet another attempt to contain the beloved. While it is true that "fichés" refers to how the narrator's gaze is fixed on the ground, the verb "ficher" can also mean "to drive," as in to drive a stake to the ground, or perhaps a nail to a coffin. While

¹³ Writers such as Flaubert and Maxime du Camp traveled to the East. Although not one to travel outside of France, Baudelaire did have one failed trip to India when he was twenty years old. Sent off by his mother and stepfather for his prodigal ways, the then aspiring poet never reached India, but did stop at Mauritius, which inspired him to write the poem, "A une dame créole."

opting to translate “ficher” as “to fasten,” Maria Scott still reads the narrator’s gaze as an endeavor to trap the heroine: “his eyes remained ‘fichés sur’ (fastened onto) the burial site, as if the very eyes that had idealized Bénédicte’s physical beauty were now physically pinning her body onto an ‘incorruptible’ coffin, a container as immortal in its materiality as the woman in the eyes of her admirer” (164).

In the mind of the narrator, the idealization of Bénédicte is fixed and needs to be preserved. A shocking moment in the poem occurs when the beloved returns from the dead and not only is she different from the narrator’s previously undisputed depiction of her, she is the diametrical opposite. Appearing in the cemetery, where the narrator stands, she is “une petite personne [...] piétinant sur la terre fraîche avec une violence hystérique et bizarre” and proclaims while bursting out laughing, “C’est moi, la vraie Bénédicte! C’est moi, une fameuse canaille!” The return of the beloved is a physical manifestation coupled with her speech, such that she confronts the narrator with both body and voice.

To answer the question posed in the title of the poem, “Laquelle est la vraie?” it is worth noting that the narrator does not refute the apparition’s claim that she is the real Bénédicte. Furthermore, neither her physique, nor her voice is disputed. As Cavarero’s *For More Than One Voice* posits, the voice serves as a singular marker of identity, because everyone possesses a unique voice with its identifiable timbre. The personalized voice is the “revelation [that] proceeds, precisely, from inside to outside,

pushing itself in the air, with concentric circles, toward another's ear" (Cavarero 4). Appearing in person and doubly self-indentifying, "C'est moi," (which counters the narrator's earlier twice declared claim to have buried and by extension sealed her off in his glorification), *Bénédicta* responds in defiance to the lover's idealization with the (corpo)reality, the embodied uniqueness, of her voice.

The heroine is not only recognized by her personalized voice, she is also identified by name, as opposed to the narrator who remains anonymous throughout the text. The feminine form of the Latin "Benedictus," "*Bénédicta*" means "la Bien Dite" (Johnson 76, *Défiguration*), one who is blessed, as well as "fine words" or "true expression" (Evans 28). Supposedly the blessed one who incarnates the true expression, Baudelaire's *Bénédicta* seems more like *Maledicta* based on what she says to the narrator: "Et pour la punition de ta folie et de ton aveuglement, tu m'aimeras telle que je suis!" She is pronouncing punishment for the narrator's foolish blindness, in other words his glorified imagination of her, and commands that he love her, not foolishly and blindly, but truly, as she is, on her terms and not his. That the lover possesses little knowledge of the real *Bénédicta* is conveyed in his confession that "elle [est] morte quelques jours après qu[il eut] fait sa connaissance"

Because *Bénédicta* confronts the narrator in voice and speech, which subjectivizes him as an interlocutor, there arises the possibility for a dialogue, the interplay of voices. The etymology of the English *voice* and the French *voix* traces back to

the Latin *voce*m and *vox*, which in turn are related to *vocare*, meaning to call or invoke. Thus, the voice is an invocation designated for the other, who is entrusted as a recipient of it. Because a dialogue is a spontaneous vocal interaction that involves an other, it comes with an unpredictability from the dependence on the other's reaction to direct the course of the conversation. This gives rise to the potential for refusal, as is the case with the narrator's response to Bénédicte's demand that he forgo the idealization of her. Infuriated, he shouts back in protest: "Non! non! non!"

Just as Bénédicte speaks in objection to the lover's glorification, the narrator vocalizes in the form of a triple rejection his unwillingness to love the beloved as she is. Baudelaire demonstrates in this prose poem that the lover's denial of reality in favor of idealization has grave consequences for the narrator: "Et pour mieux accentuer mon refus, j'ai frappé si violemment la terre du pied que ma jambe s'est enfoncée jusqu'au genou dans la sépulture récente, et que, comme un loup pris au piège, je reste attaché, pour toujours peut-être, à la fosse de l'idéal." Coupled with his voiced speech is the narrator's body language, signaling a refusal so adamant and violent that has him anchored in the grave, stuck in idealization. The lover who had buried his idealized beloved, as he had twice asserted, is now himself knee-deep in dirt, more buried than she is. The idealization that the narrator forged to contain Bénédicte has resulted in his own trap that even animalizes him, transforming him into a caught beastly wolf, in the failed endeavor to box in the beloved, in the coffin and in his imagination. As the trap

that he had set out for Bénédicte now becomes his own trap, the narrator is stuck in body and in his refusal to accept her. Rejecting the punishment pronounced by Bénédicte to love her for who she is, not what he fabricates of her, the lover ends up delivering his own self-punishment, fixed physically and in the fantasy of his beloved.

Contrary to Henri Peyre's observation that Baudelaire's poetry excludes the feminine voice and unlike Poe's postulation of the most poetical topic on the basis that the bereaved lover has the exclusive right to voice, both of which I had mentioned at the beginning of my analysis of "Laquelle est la vraie?" this particular prose poem by Baudelaire does not present the heroine as a mute object of desire, but as a speaking subject with the capacity to contradict the lover and even undermine his narratorial authority. She is endowed with her own voice. Up until now, I have yet to fully address the issue that this voice is not just a feminine voice, but a *postmortem* feminine voice. What then are the ramifications of a dead, rather than a live, woman who speaks?

First of all, Bénédicte is the wholly other to the narrator. Not only is the beloved feminine while the lover is masculine, but she is also dead while he is alive. It seems as though Baudelaire is empowering the figure of the feminine by incorporating her voice, but that empowerment is conditional: she is only allowed to speak when she is dead, not while she is alive. Empowering and disempowering, this postmortem voice signals how Baudelaire renders ambiguous the status of the woman in his poetry.

With the cemetery as “la fosse de l’idéal,” death, in “Laquelle est la vraie?” is employed as a trope for the ultimate trap of idealization. Often deprived of a voice, the beloved is exalted by the lover in her corpse-like silence. Yet Baudelaire’s *Bénédicte*, immortal in her return from the dead, defies the inanimate and mute state of the cadaver and resists, in body and through voiced speech, death and idealization

What is at stake in Baudelaire’s text is not so much the issue of identity in terms of who the real *Bénédicte* is, but that of relation. Though dealing specifically with the relationship between lovers, this poem can be read for the general rapport between the living and the dead, the two connected through memory. The dead, no longer in possession of a voice, cannot dispute how they are remembered by the living. In effect, “Laquelle est la vraie?” presents the extreme case of the living’s recollection blending into imagination, to the degree that reality no longer matters, as *Bénédicte* is cherished and reminisced as the opposite of who she really is.

As the relational space between the living and the dead, the cemetery is the interface for the narrator and *Bénédicte*. Their voices contribute to that relational space, as the exchange of their speech addresses the problematic that is the remembrance of the dead by the living and how susceptible that memory is to distortion, as it mutates over time and/or by selective recall, which could highlight or embellish certain aspects, while effacing others. Left undisputed, the memory of the dead could resemble fiction more than it asserts truth. The voice of the dead woman in “Laquelle est la vraie?” then serves

as a confrontation to the living narrator, and to memory's deviation from reality, regarding how the dead are remembered, that is embodied by the living.

2.7 The Dead Whisper their Loud Curses

Similar to "Laquelle est la vraie?" the cemetery is again presented as an interface in "Le Tir et le cimetière," except in this prose poem, we are not dealing with the living and a dead individual, but the living with a dead collective. The cemetery in this text is the space in which the relationship between the living and the general dead plays out. It is also the voice of an indiscriminate dead, rather than that of the particular dead, which is heard in this text.

Unlike the lover in "Laquelle est la vraie?" who is at the cemetery with the purposes of burying his beloved and remembering her, the narrator in "Le Tir et le cimetière" had no intention of being at the burial ground. It is only "la fantaisie," which prompts him to "descendre dans ce cimetière, dont l'herbe était si haute et si invitante, et où régnait un si riche soleil," after he "but un verre de bière en face des tombes, et fuma lentement un cigare" at the tavern facing the cemetery. This unidentified "promeneur" was not intentionally looking to have any dealings with death, but a voice comes to him, saying:

Maudites soient vos cibles et vos carabines, turbulents vivants, qui vous souciez si peu des défunts et de leur divin repos! Maudites soient vos ambitions, maudits soient vos calculs, mortels impatients, qui venez étudier l'art de tuer auprès du sanctuaire de la Mort! Si vous saviez comme le prix est facile à gagner, comme le but est facile à toucher, et combien tout est néant, excepté la Mort, vous ne vous fatigueriez pas tant, laborieux vivants, et vous troubleriez moins souvent le

sommeil de ceux qui depuis longtemps ont mis dans le But, dans le seul vrai but
de la détestable vie!

Just as no name is attached to the man in the poem, no name is given to this voice that
he “entendit [...] chuchoter” all these curses.

Even though the text does not explicitly assign this voice to death, the fact that it
comes from “sous la tombe où [le promeneur] s’était assis” and speaks accusingly
against the living and on behalf of the dead substantiates the interpretation that it is a
voice representative of the dead that is talking. Put differently, it is the voice of the
collective dead. Disembodied, this subterranean voice that projects itself in a whisper
contrasts with *Bénédicta*’s, which is linked to a physical being, signaling an embodied
singularity. This poses a challenge to Cavarero’s stipulation that voice traces back to a
body and thus personalizes the source of articulation, because this voice in “Le Tir et le
cimetière” is a depersonalized voice speaking for a group, rather than a unique
individual.

Nullifying singularity, this voice not only speaks collectively as the dead, but
also directs its speech at the narrator not as a specific living individual, but as
“turbulents vivants,” “mortels impatientes” and “laborieux vivants.” The voice that
carries beyond the grave sets up the living and the dead in a dialectical rapport. Not
only are the living and the dead on opposite sides—the restless living above ground and
the dead resting in peace below ground—but, unlike the dialogue that takes place
between *Bénédicta* and the lover in “Laquelle est la vraie?” there is no vocal interaction

between the two parties. The voice of the dead delivers a monologue that is a diatribe against the living and received by the passerby, who does not talk back. There is no negotiation, no possibility to rebut on the part of the living. As a matter of fact, the voice of the dead silences that of the man, rhetorically canceling him out and leaving him voiceless.

“Le Tir et le cimetière” is a poem that appeals especially to our sense of hearing, because along with the voice of the dead, there are other sounds in the cemetery, where “[u]n immense bruissement de vie remplissait l'air, - la vie des infiniment petits, - coupé à intervalles réguliers par la crépitation des coups de feu d'un tir voisin, qui éclataient comme l'explosion des bouchons de champagne dans le bourdonnement d'une symphonie en sourdine.” Despite the faintness of this postmortem whisper, it is an uncontested voice that takes over that of the living and even makes itself heard over the competing noise of gunshots being fired from a neighboring shooting range. The message of the dead sends any competing sounds into the background and in so doing, the deathly whisper becomes paradoxically louder and more powerful than an embodied human voice or explosive gunshots. The light quality of this voice is coupled contradictorily with a weighty message laden with curses. It continues uninterrupted, until it gets its point across, refusing to be punctuated by any distracting noise.

Uttered under breath, the airy voice of the dead declares a message so somber in its content that leaves the living, as represented by the stroller, with no choice but to

heed it. Just as Bénédicte comes across more like Maledicta to the narrator in “Laquelle est la vraie?,” especially with her announcement of the punishment to love her as she is, the voice of dead in this text is also one of malediction. It performs the speech act of cursing, by pronouncing three times “[m]audit(e)s.” The curses of the voice of dead fall upon the “cibles,” “carabines,” “ambitions” and “calculs” of the living. Basically, the activities and pursuits of the living are condemned by the dead.

That includes the “art de tuer” that the living are said to “étudier [...] auprès du sanctuaire de la Mort. The reference to the art of killing may seem puzzling, but an intertextual reading with Baudelaire’s other prose poem, “Le galant tireur,” posthumously published in 1869, would provide insight into this matter. Scholars, such as Cheryl Krueger in *The Art of Procrastination*, have been reading “Le Tir et le cimetière” and “Le galant tireur” as “neighboring” texts,¹⁴ in the sense that the gunshots fired by “le galant tireur” in the shooting range of the latter poem are those heard in “Le Tir et le cimetière.” I add that the other connection between these two texts is the killing of time and this is the “art de tuer” that is mentioned in “Le Tir et le cimetière.” In “Le galant tireur,” the marksman decides that “il lui serait agréable de tirer quelques balles pour tuer le Temps. Tuer ce monstre-là, n'est-ce pas l'occupation la plus ordinaire et la plus légitime de chacun?” Firing a few shoots at the shooting range in “Le galant tireur” and

¹⁴ That one text can be next to another brings up the notion of the place of the poem, or the poem as a place, a *lieu*, as understood by Certeau.

the casual strolling over to the cemetery in “Le Tir et le cimetière” are both activities that fall under the killing of time.

2.8 A Discourse of Nihilism

All the hustle and bustle that make up life are even negated, when the voice of the dead in “Le Tir et le cimetière” announces that “tout est néant, excepté la Mort.” This alarming moment of death being proclaimed as the non-void, contrary to everything else, effects the reversal of the common understanding of death as void and life as plenitude, or at least the potential thereof. Such a bold statement can be made, because in the words of the dead, death is “le But,” “le seul vrai but de la détestable vie.”¹⁵ That explains why the poem is entitled, “Le Tir et le cimetière”; the voice beyond the grave equates the dead with “ceux qui depuis longtemps ont mis dans le But,” and corresponds death to the objective of hitting the target in shooting. The language for shooting has been appropriated by the postmortem voice to refer to the dead, death and the cemetery, as, similar to the shooting range, it is the ground for hitting the target, the ultimate goal that is death.¹⁶

¹⁵ Baudelaire’s sonnet in *Les Fleurs du mal*, “La Mort des pauvres,” reiterates the assertion of death as the goal of life, “le but de la vie.” There is a link between drinking and death within Baudelaire’s poetry, given the poet’s play on the polysemy of “but” for goal and the *passé simple* of *boire*, to drink, in addition to “bière,” as analyzed earlier, to refer to both the coffin and beer.

¹⁶ Even though there is no vocal exchange between the living and the dead in this poem, the cemetery is presented as there, where “la lumière et la chaleur [...] faisaient rage, et l’on eût dit que le soleil ivre se vautrait tout de son long sur un tapis de fleurs magnifiques engraisées par la destruction.” In addition to being likened to a shooting range, the cemetery is a field in which creation and destruction intermingle in the cyclical fashion of nature: flowers die and decompose, but from that destruction, other flowers grow,

Spoken by the voice of the dead, this perspective offered in the text teaches the reader that all of life leads to death. Negating life and affirming death, this damning voice also conveys a certain kind of hubris by pointing out the futility of human toil that makes up “la détestable vie.” It is as though the antagonism toward life were spoken from some knowledge that the dead possesses to be able to see through all the strivings of the living with such cynicism.

It behooves us as readers to remember that the discourse of the dead was not delivered in a vacuum, but was contingent on the presence of the man who just happened to walk into the cemetery. In other words, the deathly diatribe requires an audience, the living as the recipient. If the communication of the dead is necessarily directed at the living, what is the latter to make of such a message? Does the man in the poem, and the living that he represents, simply receive the malediction with no protest or rebuttal? Is there something to be learned from the message that the purpose of life is death and all ends in death? What purpose does this discourse of the dead serve?

repeating the cycle of life and death. This interconnectedness of life and death is reminiscent of “Une Charogne,” which depicts it in a much more graphic and gruesome way through these verses:

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague
Ou s'élançait en pétillant;
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,
Vivait en se multipliant. (vv.17-24)

As I'd pointed out earlier, the monologic nature of the dead's harangue does not permit the living to question or even contradict, but to merely receive. There is no indication that the living could refuse to receive. Yet amidst all the disillusionment, accusations and curses, there is still a pedagogical trace in what the dead has to say to the living: "vous ne vous fatigueriez pas tant [et] vous troubleriez moins souvent le sommeil de ceux qui depuis longtemps ont mis dans le But." Had the living possessed the hindsight knowledge of the dead, they would be less fretful and leave the deceased alone, in the sense that the noise from the shooting range would cease and so would random strolls to the cemetery, both of which, as I'd suggested previously, signify the activities of life. Stripped of distractions, life is, in the words of the dead, a "néant."

The dead do not teach the living how to live per se, but present instead a nihilistic take on life. The perspective that all of life leads to death and is purposed for death is to consider living from the side of death, as opposed to living for life itself, or even by some higher power, as religions assert.¹⁷ The dead voice a tirade so stark and bleak in contrast to the passerby's jovial tone prior to entering the cemetery, as he notes the peculiarity of an estaminet facing a cemetery, indicated by the "[s]ingulière enseigne [...] bien faite pour donner soif": "*A la vue du cimetière, Estaminet*" (original emphasis). The stroller hypothesizes, "A coup sûr, le maître de ce cabaret sait apprécier Horace et

¹⁷ Although Baudelaire denies religion over the course of his life and in his work (apart from "outrage à la morale publique," blasphemy was one of the original charges against *Les Fleurs du mal* in the 1857 trial, but was later dropped), he was nonetheless "administré," i.e. given the sacraments, at his deathbed.

les poètes élèves d'Epicure. Peut-être même connaît-il le raffinement profond des anciens Egyptiens, pour qui il n'y avait pas de bon festin sans squelette, ou sans un emblème quelconque de la brièveté de la vie."

The brevity of life provides the impetus to celebrate while one still can, i.e. while one is still alive, and in the case of Egyptian banquets, the visible sign of the skeleton serves as a reminder of the transient life, which intensifies that celebration. The philosophy of life to "[e]at, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you may die" (Merlan 449) is summed up by the expression, "carpe diem," which concludes Ode 1.11 by the Roman poet, Horace. This message to seize the day is also the climax of the poem, in which Horace counsels Leuconoe to not be concerned about the future, but to focus on the present and ture, but, as R. E. Grimm expounds on this directive, Leuconoe is to "'snatch away' from time each day as it is presented to her, [so] she can, in a sense, assert her own individuality in the face of a grim universe whose elements are frequently engaged in a struggle of mutual annihilation [...]. She can, finally, 'snatch away' something from time, which snatches away all things eventually" (317).

Horace is often recognized as a Epicurean poet. While Epicureanism is commonly understood to mean hedonism and be in the same vein as "carpe diem," it needs to be remembered that Epicurus's insistence on happiness is in the absence of pain, mental and physical. So something like the pursuit of sensual pleasure no matter what the cost would not be in line with Epicurean thought. Baudelaire's poem evokes

the notion of “carpe diem” for which Horace stands and the pursuit of happiness as incarnated by Epicurus only to have both made void by the voice of the dead. The nihilism pronounced by the hostile whisper empties the meaning of even Horace’s poetry and Epicurus’ philosophy.¹⁸

This nihilistic aspect of the discourse of the dead is what allows the postmortem articulation to overpower the voice of the stroller, the voice of the living. Since life has been hollowed out, anything the living has to say and *if* the living could even say anything no longer matters. The nihilistic stance from the dead thus contributes to the monologic nature of the whisper beyond the grave that is emanated within the cemetery. The passerby first enters the burial ground as a recreational space, somewhere to spend the day leisurely, but the cemetery also becomes the relational space that provides the encounter between the living and the dead, the latter confronting the former through speech. It is out of these multiple spatial dimensions of the cemetery—recreational, relational and confrontational—that the dead make

¹⁸ Concerning death, Epicurus sees it as a nonissue, such that “[i]t does not matter at all if and when you die” (449), as Philip Merlan paraphrases in “Epicureanism and Horace.” To substantiate how Epicurus could consider death a nonissue, Stephen E. Rosenbaum, in “How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus,” quotes an excerpt from “Letter to Menoeceus”:

Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience;...Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer. (218)

According to Epicurus’ logic, for something to be good or bad, it needs to be experienced and because death cannot be experienced, it can neither be good nor bad. A death that is not bad (or good) should not induce fear, therefore, death ought not be feared.

themselves heard, speaking out against any significance of life and living. Yet this nihilistic voice is not all-annihilating; death is the only exception to nothingness. It is out of that non-void that a lecture of nihilism against the living can be produced.

According to Baudelaire, death—the point at which a person ceases to exist and the state afterward of being dead—is not nonexistence. This is evidenced by the speech of the dead.

Through “Le Tir et le cimetière” and “Laquelle est la vraie?,” Baudelaire presents an antagonistic postmortem voice that opposes the living. The discourse of the beloved in the latter poem dictates that the lover must love her as she is, even if reality proves to be more grotesque than idealization. The singular dead, *Bénédicta*, voices herself to defy idealization and call attention to faulty remembrance. In the former text, the depersonalized voice of the indeterminate dead lectures nihilism at the living in a way that does not leave room for discussion. The collective deceased whisper anonymously to denounce life and deny the nonexistence of death. It is at the intersection of voice, speech and language that the dead contradict the living.

3. Baudelaire's Widows: "A une passante," "Les petites vieilles," "Les Veuves" and "Le Cygne"

Within Baudelaire's poetic corpus, the widow, a woman defined by the severance of her relationship to a man and more specifically by the death of her husband, is a recurrent figure. In the 1860 poem, "Le Cygne," she is Andromaque, evoked as "[v]euve d'Hector, hélas! et femme d'Hélénus!" and appropriated by Baudelaire from Virgile and Racine to elaborate on the nostalgia for the pre-Haussmannized Paris. She is also the fleeting woman whom the flâneur spots from the café terrace, catching his eye and heart with her electrifying gaze as recounted in the 1860 "A une passante."¹ The 1861 prose poem "Les Veuves" illustrates two other widows: an elderly one who wanders alone through the city and a mother of a young child whose radiance sets her apart from the rest of the concert crowd. The widow, weaving through the streets of mid-nineteenth-century Paris, is a familiar figure of the capital and in the urban poetry of Baudelaire. It should be noted that "Le Cygne" and "A une passante" are verse from the "Tableaux parisiens" of *Les Fleurs du mal* and "Les Veuves" in prose is from "Le Spleen de Paris," which, according to Baudelaire's famous 1862 dedicatory letter to Arsène Houssaye, was one of the texts inspired from "la

¹ Although this sonnet does not explicitly identify the *passante* as a widow, but simply as a woman "en grand deuil," the fact that she is described as "[l]ongue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse" (v.2) invites the consideration of her as a sort of double of the younger widow in "Les Veuves," if not actually the same widow. The grieving woman in "Les Veuves" is "une femme grande, majestueuse, et si noble dans tout son air." She also possesses a "visage, triste et amaigri, [qui] était en parfaite accordance avec le grand deuil dont elle était revêtue." Based on the commonalities that the *passante* and the younger widow are both "majestueuse" and are united in "grand deuil," I propose the reading of the *passante* as a widow.

fréquentation des villes énormes” and “[le] croisement de leurs innombrables rapports.”

There seems to be something distinctly urban with regard to widows, given the classification of Baudelaire’s widow poems in “Tableaux parisiens” and “Le Spleen de Paris.”²

Based on my reading of “A une passante,” “Le Cygne,” “Les Veuves” and “Les petites vieilles,” I argue that the figure of the widow in Baudelaire’s poetry is the figure par excellence of modernity and that Baudelaire’s specific depiction of the bereaved woman reveals the nature of mourning as theorized by Jacques Derrida and the working of memory as posited by scholars such as Daniel L. Schacter, David C. Rubin and Suzanne Nalbantian.

3.1 Modernity in Black

It is well known that the transformation of Paris in the nineteenth century has been attributed to Baron Haussmann, so much so that even the process of urban reconfiguration is referred to as Haussmannization. The restructuring of the public space, with the emergence of wider boulevards (to prevent the construction of barricades), arcades, department stores, etc., brought about a change in the culture of the

² Besides the observable presence of widows on the cityscape, the attention to these bereaved women in Baudelaire’s poetry could be traced to the poet’s complicated relationship with his briefly widowed mother. The poet’s biological father passed away when he was 6. His mother, Caroline Archimbaut-Dufays, remarried after less than a year to General Aupick. It is believed that Baudelaire’s resentment toward that remarriage, sustained throughout his life and articulated in the rumored proclamation from the barricades that “il fallait fusiller le général Aupick” (Pichois and Ziegler 257) could be traced to an Oedipal complex.

city, such that mid-nineteenth-century Paris became characterized by visuality. The rise of the panoramas, panoramic writing and guidebooks at that time attest to the focus on the visual details of the city. The emphasis on seeing also brought about a shift in how city dwellers related to one another. The public transportation, which Walter Benjamin mentions in *Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, is an illustration of this. Providing convenience but also a certain kind of confinement, public transportation brought together passengers who could scrutinize each other, engaging in a mutual seeing without speaking.

The change in culture brought about by the reorganization of the urban space also gave rise to the modification of the phenomenon and practice of mourning. Previously a private observance, mourning, as exemplified by Baudelaire's represented widows, became more visible and public, such that bereavement was tied to visibility and visuality.

Clad in black, the widow leaves the private space of the home to participate in the public space. Her mourning is rendered a display as she traverses the cityscape. She is first identified by her appearance and more specifically, by her black mourning attire. This is how the figure of the widow is described in Baudelaire's poetry. Amidst the noisy Haussmanization that tore down certain parts of Paris while building up others, a certain widow catches the attention of the lyrical "I" in "A une passante": "Longue,

mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse / Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse /
Soulevant, balançant le festoon et l'ourlet" (vv.2-4).

In addition to that very famous sonnet, Baudelaire's prose poem, "Les Veuves" also depicts two widows, one of whom stands out from the crowd with "[s]on visage, triste et amaigri [qui] était en parfaite accordance avec le grand deuil dont elle était revêtue." The vestimentary practice of mourning is again articulated, when the narrator approaches the widow and notices that "[l]a grande veuve tenait par la main un enfant comme elle vêtu de noir." Earlier in this prose poem, the narrator poses this rhetorical question: "Avez-vous quelquefois aperçu des veuves sur ces bancs solitaires, des veuves pauvres? Qu'elles soient en deuil ou non, il est facile de les reconnaître." It is easy to tell if the widows are in mourning or not, because their black clothes give away the answer.³

The black that one puts on for mourning is a physical, visible sign of grief. In French, there is the expression, *porter le deuil*, which refers to both the wearing and the bearing of grief. The black garb of bereavement signals in the absence of verbal communication the death of someone. This silent and wordless form of communication brings to mind the maxim contained in Baudelaire's other prose poem, "La Corde," based on Manet's model who hanged himself and recast into a disillusioning narrative on maternal love: "Les douleurs les plus terribles sont les douleurs muettes." While the

³ Apart from the somber shade of black that is worn, mourning is a codified ritual with particular requirements when it came to the kind of black clothing that a widow ought to wear. For more details on the mourning practice and details in dress, refer to Philippe Ariès and Geroges Duby's fourth volume of *Histoire de la vie privée*.

pain of the loss may be so great that it silences the widow in mourning, her black dress speaks for her; it speaks of the death of her husband, the death that she survives and now must mourn. Color, or lack thereof, takes the place of verbal expression, communicating what words cannot.

The simple donning of the black mourning garb is in effect quite complex in terms of how the person in grief communicates and deals with bereavement. As Richard Stamelman observes in *Lost Beyond Telling*, “In varying degrees, people who have experienced a loss through death come to identify with their loss, to embody and incorporate it, and to drape themselves in its excessively, sometimes sumptuously, dark color; mourning is an attire that ‘becomes’ them only because they long to become it” (51). The widow makes the (self-)conscious and deliberate decision to attire herself in black, “cloth[ing] herself in her sorrow, wearing her grief like a sign; she is the very incarnation of the reality and power of loss” (Stamelman 57). She incarnates in black the death of her husband.

The black vestimentary sign of the widow is both other- and self-directed. It points outward to the deceased husband and self-referentially inward to the widow as the wearer and bearer of grief, that *she* is in mourning. The black garb also points to two different times: the widow mourning in the present and the husband dead in the past. Stamelman notes that “[t]he lives of these [widows] are turned invariably toward the same catastrophe—a death in the past—which they represent and embody to the fullest

within the present" (57). In other words, the grief worn in the present by the living harkens to the death in the past and this reminder of the past lends presence to the absent past. The dead is not simply dead and gone, nor is death simply a thing of the past. The dead is survived by the living, who bears that death, and death is very much felt in the present by those still alive.

While "A une passante" is one of the most well-known poems by Baudelaire, as Walter Benjamin cites it in full in his analysis, the fact that the woman in the sonnet is a widow is often overlooked and if not, that detail has not been discussed as much as it deserves. Embodying the past and the present, permanence and transience, the widow incarnates Baudelaire's own definition of modernity given in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*: "c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable" (OC II 695). Identified as a "[f]ugitive beauté," the woman in "A une passante" is someone who is fleeting, has already fled and yet, in the eyes of the narrator, possesses a "[j]ambe de statue," which concretizes her ephemerality, as if to capture her in her flight. The sonnet itself also recounts the momentary urban experience in the classical form of the sonnet, which, again, reiterates the fusion of something that is evanescent with something that is established. Never to be seen again, as the narrator contemplates, "Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité? / Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! *jamais* peut-être! / Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais" (original emphasis, vv.11-14), the vanished widow produces in him the electrifying

sensation of falling in love with a complete stranger at first and last sight, a powerful impression from a passing encounter.

In “A une passante,” the flâneur and the widow shared an intimate moment of connection, but more generally, Baudelaire and women in grief are united by the prevalence of black in modern fashion. As Mary Gluck points out, the flâneur is “invariably [re]presented [...] in black frock coat and top hat, with a cigar and a walking cane or umbrella in hand” (Gluck 55). This way of dressing functioned as the flâneur’s “self-conscious costume” (Gluck 61). Furthermore, Baudelaire himself, in his essay, “De l’héroïsme de la vie moderne” that concludes “Salon de 1846,” conveys unmistakably his advocacy for the wearing of black for modernity:

N’est-il pas l’habit nécessaire de notre époque, souffrante et portant jusque sur ses épaules noires et maigres le symbole d’un deuil perpétuel ? Remarquez bien que l’habit noir et la redingote ont non seulement leur beauté politique, qui est l’expression de l’égalité universelle, mais encore leur beauté poétique, qui est l’expression de l’âme publique; – une immense défilade de croque-morts, croque-morts politiques, croque-morts amoureux, croque-morts bourgeois. Nous célébrons tous quelque enterrement. (OC II 494)

Baudelaire associates modernity with loss and clads himself in black, the non-color that is in fact the absence of color. For this poet-flâneur, death is not something to be banished from the urban space. Rather, he endorses the wearing of black that serves as a constant reminder of loss, bearing a visual presence on the cityscape.

The shared black garb donned by the widow and the flâneur creates solidarity between these two figures and a mirroring effect for the flâneur upon the sight of the

widow sharing in the somber shade of mourning. This also functions as a moment of recognition and identification. The common black garb creates a sense of community based on vestimentary visuality and the sensibility anchored in loss.

3.2 *The (Senti)mentality of Mourning*

The widow is a figure of Baudelairean modernity and a figure of grief. Before delving deeper into how specifically Baudelaire's representation of the widow illustrates the phenomenology of grief, it is worth asking this very foundational question: What is mourning?

In his influential 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud defines mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). While he acknowledges the significant similarities between mourning and melancholia—"a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love [and] inhibition of all activity" (244)—he also differentiates the former from the latter, which has the additional feature of the "lowering of the of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (244). This difference renders melancholia a pathological response to loss, while mourning is considered normal.

In Freudian terms, mourning is the painful libidinal withdrawal from a lost object that can be easily identified. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross outlines the five stages of grief in her book, *On Death and Dying*, published in 1969, beginning with denial, followed by anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. During this process of bereavement, an internalization of the lost object also takes place : “Dans le deuil, nous devons admettre que l’ami est maintenant à la fois « en nous » et déjà au-delà de nous, en nous mais tout autre, si bien que rien de ce que nous lui disons ou disons de lui ne peut le toucher dans son altérité infinie » (Derrida 29). These are the words from *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, in which Derrida reflects on mourning, as he survives the deaths of cherished friends, such as Barthes, Lévinas and Blanchot.

With the passing away of another friend, Gadamer, Derrida voices in *Béliers* how the singularity of each death hits so hard that it effects an apocalypse:

Car chaque fois, et chaque fois singulièrement, chaque fois irremplaçablement, chaque fois infiniment, la mort n’est rien de moins qu’une fin *du monde*. Non pas *seulement une fin* parmi d’autres, la fin de quelqu’un ou de quelque chose *dans le monde*, la fin d’une vie ou d’un vivant. La mort ne met pas un terme à quelqu’un dans le monde, ni à *un monde* parmi d’autres, elle marque chaque fois, chaque fois au défi de l’arithmétique l’absolue fin du seul et même monde, de ce que chacun ouvre comme un seul et même monde, la fin de l’unique monde, la fin de la totalité de ce qui est ou peut se présenter comme l’origine du monde pour tel et unique vivant, qu’il soit humain ou non. (23)

The world is no longer the same without that loved one. Each death brings about an apocalypse by shattering the existence of the world that the cherished once inhabited.

3.3 Mourning Before Death

Mourning is generally taken to be an emotional process that occurs after the death of someone in response to that loss. Derrida suggests, however, an understanding of the temporality of mourning that reverses that common notion by situating mourning *before* the actual death. He states in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* that “le deuil [...] suit la mort mais aussi le deuil [...] se prépare et s’attend, depuis toujours, à suivre la mort de ceux qu’on aime. L’amour ou l’amitié ne seraient que la passion, l’endurance et la patience de ce travail [...] Le deuil commence avant la mort, déjà dans l’amitié, et, dans certains cas, avant « l’amitié proprement dite » ” (31). Because we are mortal and because we are aware of that mortality, in any friendship between two people, barring simultaneous death, there is the given that one of them will die before the other and that the survivor will be left to mourn the death of that friend. This knowledge is what renders possible the mourning before the death; Derrida conceives of mourning to include the anticipation of the death of the friend.

The knowledge of the inevitability of death, as explained in *Béliers*, necessitates an anticipation with the following implications friendship:

Dès cette première rencontre, l’interruption va au-devant de la mort, elle la précède, elle endeuille chacun d’un implacable futur antérieur. L’un de nous deux *aura* dû rester seul, nous le savions tous deux d’avance. Et depuis toujours. L’un des deux *aura* été voué, dès le commencement, à porter à lui seul, en lui-même, et le dialogue qu’il lui faut poursuivre au-delà de l’interruption, et la mémoire de la première interruption. (22)

The ineluctability of the death of a friend frames the discussion not just in the *futur simple*, but in the *futur antérieur*: in the presence of a friend, we know that s/he will die and this certainty changes the discourse and understanding to s/he will have died.

While Derrida discusses the consideration of the Other's death in the *futur antérieur* within the framework of friendship, the already and not yet sense of demise can also be applied to any interpersonal relationship. In *La Chambre claire*, it was in Barthes' discussion of his mother's death in conjunction with photography that the future perfect tense was evoked: the sight of his mother as a young girl in the *Jardin d'Hiver* photograph announces that she will have died.

The concept that mourning precedes death can be detected in Baudelaire's "A une passante." The *passante* appears in the sonnet "en grand deuil" (v.2). Dressed as a widow, the *passante* signals through her clothes the death of her husband, but as the narrator's beloved, she also announces with the same black dress that the flâneur who holds her in his gaze will have died. I situate the narrator's eventual death in the ellipsis of line 9: "Un éclair... puis la nuit!" The narrator, at that elliptic moment, has lost his words and thus voice. The narrator whose presence is manifested by words is effectively absent at that moment, or rather "killed" by the *passante*. Her femme fatale quality is reiterated throughout the sonnet by the rhymes of "majestueuse" (v.2), "fastueuse" (v.3), "statue" (v.5) and "tue" (v.8). Moreover, the first two adjectives even contain "tueuse," which comes into play when the *passante* "kills" the narrator with her

gaze. The narrator's death resulting from the shockingly powerful encounter with the *passante* is the surrender of words effecting absence.⁴

At the opening of "A une passante," the widow mourns the death of her husband that had already taken place *and* the death of the narrator that will have taken place. This exemplifies a metonymic chain of mourning observed by Derrida in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*:

À cause de la possibilité de la répétition, voire de son caractère inéluctable, nous ne pouvons peut-être pas identifier avec une certitude absolue l'objet de notre deuil. Car il se peut que nous croyions faire le deuil d'un ami, alors qu'il s'agit d'un autre, que nous pensions faire le deuil d'un collègue alors qu'en fait, ou qu'en plus, nous faisons le deuil d'un enfant, ou, comme nous le voyons dans l'essai sur Barthes, d'une mère. Ou peut-être tous nos deuils ne sont-ils que les itérations d'une seule mort à jamais non identifiable – la première mort, la mort totale, « indialectique » -- si bien que ce dont nous faisons le deuil est toujours une singularité qui dépasse tout nom propre, faisant de l'infidélité posthume le travail même du deuil. (37)

This is the notion that while on the surface we may be mourning one singular death, each death mourned is really somehow reminiscent of and thereby chained to the previous death(s) survived, such that no death is really mourned completely individually. One death could conjure another and one death could be part of a series of other previous deaths mourned, all of which trace back to our first brush with death, if

⁴ It is also the erotic experience of the implied "petite mort."

that could even be precisely and accurately located. Derrida opines that our first and original lost object, (re)iterated by each subsequent death, is in fact untraceable.⁵

3.4 Mourning on Repeat

Anticipating Derrida's insight into the metonymic and reiterative quality of mourning, Baudelaire's poetry depicts mourning, notably through its personification in the figure of the widow, as repetition. This is especially true in the intertextual reading of the 1859 *tableau parisien* "Les petites vieilles" and the 1861 prose poem "Les Veuves." I propose to read these two texts as representations of recall and argue that the woman singled out in the entire third section of "Les petites vieilles" is remembered and depicted as the older widow in "Les Veuves."

The flâneur in "Les petites vieilles" describes the singular widow who catches his eye with the following:

Ah! que j'en ai suivi de ces petites *vieilles*!
Une, entre autres, à l'heure où le soleil tombant
Ensablante le ciel de blessures vermeilles,
Pensive, s'asseyait à l'écart sur un banc,

Pour entendre un de ces concerts, riches de cuivre,
Dont les soldats parfois inondent nos jardins,
Et qui, dans ces soirs d'or où l'on se sent revivre,
Versent quelque héroïsme au cœur des citadins.

Celle-là, droite encor, fière et sentant la règle,
Humait avidement ce chant vif et guerrier;

⁵ This suggests of mourning as a an activity of simulacrum and at the same time complicates Freud's assertion that mourning, as opposed to melancholia, is associated with a clearly identified demise.

Son oeil parfois s'ouvrait comme *l'oeil d'un vieil aigle*;
Son front de marbre avait l'air fait pour le laurier! (vv.49-60, my italics)

Two years after the publication of those stanzas, the narrator of "Les Veuves" recounts in these paragraphs the sight of a widow strikingly similar to and highly reminiscent of *petite vieille* cited above:

Il m'est arrivé une fois de suivre pendant de longues heures une *vieille* affligée de cette espèce; celle-là roide, *droite*, sous un petit châte usé, portait dans tout son être une *fierté* de stoïcienne.

Elle était évidemment condamnée, par une absolue solitude, à des habitudes de vieux célibataire, et le caractère masculin de ses moeurs ajoutait un piquant mystérieux à leur austérité. Je ne sais dans quel misérable café et de quelle façon elle déjeuna. Je la suivis au cabinet de lecture; et je l'épiai longtemps pendant qu'elle cherchait dans les gazettes, avec *des yeux actifs*, jadis brûlés par les larmes, des nouvelles d'un intérêt puissant et personnel.

Enfin, dans l'après-midi, sous un ciel d'automne charmant, un de ces ciels d'où descendent en foule les regrets et les souvenirs, elle s'assit à *l'écart* dans un jardin, pour entendre, loin de la foule, un de ces concerts dont la musique des régiments gratifie le peuple parisien.

C'était sans doute là la petite débauche de cette vieille innocente (ou de cette vieille purifiée), la consolation bien gagnée d'une de ces lourdes journées sans ami, sans causerie, sans joie, sans confident, que Dieu laissait tomber sur elle, depuis bien des ans peut-être! trois cent soixante-cinq fois par an. (my italics)

The common characteristics between the two women are highly suggestive of not an Other but a double.⁶ The object of the flâneur-narrator's gaze and the target of his trace is, in the verse, a "droite" and "fière" woman among "ces petites vieilles [qui] s'asseyait à l'écart [...] [p]our entendre un de ces concerts, riches de cuivre, / [d]ont les soldats

⁶ In *Défiguration du langage poétique*, Barbara Johnson analyzed the doublets of "L'Invitation au voyage" in the verse and prose and "La Chevelure" in the verse with "Un Hémisphère dans une chevelure" in the prose. Johnson maintains that prose is not poetry's Other, but its double.

parfois inondent [les] jardins.” She is doubled in the prose as « une vieille affligée [et] droite [...] porta[n]t dans tout son être une fierté de stoïcienne [qui] s’assit à l’écart dans un jardin, pour entendre, loin de la foule, un de ces concerts dont la musique des régiments gratifie le peuple parisien. » The resonance between the verse and the prose is undeniable; the “vieille” in both accounts is a proud, upright, self-estranged attendee seated at a park concert.

Even though the shared details are compelling, the dissimilarities in the two portrayals are also unmistakable. The verse *vieille* is spotted “à l’heure où le soleil tombant / [e]nsanglante le ciel de blessures vermeilles,” conveying a raw violence, as opposed to the mellow nostalgia conveyed through the prosaic “ciel d’automne charmant, un de ces ciels d’où descendent en foule les regrets et les souvenirs.” In addition to the difference in emotional backdrop, the object of the *vieille*’s gaze also differs between the two texts. The lyric *vieille*’s “oeil parfois s’ouvrait comme l’oeil d’un vieil aigle.” It is the scene of the concert that her vision takes in, but the focus of her prose double, whose “yeux actifs, jadis brûlés par les larmes,” is directed at “les gazettes,” consuming “des nouvelles d’un intérêt puissant et personnel.”

The prose poem also demonstrates itself to invest in details surrounding the widow that are missing from the verse. Not only does the narrator take note of her “petit châte usé,” he also highlights the weight of her loneliness, as she continues living

“ces lourdes journées sans ami, sans causerie, sans joie, sans confident.”⁷ The void/*vide* in the widow “*évidemment condamnée, par une absolue solitude*” is emphasized by the reiterations of “sans.” The widow is someone who, in her loneliness, lacks.

Despite the challenge posed by the discrepancies, I venture to push the idea of the double further in positing that the prose widow is the recollected verse *vieille*. I do not deny the use of literary, artistic liberties on the part of Baudelaire in his portrayal of widows, but I suggest the consideration of an alternative approach according to current memory studies, especially based on the reconstructionist and reconsolidationist theories, which help to reconcile the dissonances in representation, illustrating how our memory is by no means immutable, but mutates over time.

3.5 The Cognition of Remembrance

Mourning is a work of memory. In dealing with loss and grief, we inevitably conjure our memories of the loved one who has passed away. We remember how s/he looked, the things that s/he did, what s/he meant to us, etc. Plato and Aristotle believed that the site of memory was akin to the *tabula rasa* and that the creation of new memories was the inscription on that wax tablet. A more contemporary version from the Greek understanding of memory is the updated analogy of the filing cabinet. But even this input-output system, like the Greek notion of inscription on a wax tablet, has been

⁷ In the verse and prose citations on the *vieille*, it is true that the prose masculinizes more clearly the widow, but as I have suggested in the section, “Androgynous Grief,” a more subtle masculinization of the *vieille* is also at work in the verse, which requires the extra step of contextualizing her portrait in the opening section of the poem, wherein the *vieille* is discussed amidst a group of masculinized monsters.

proven to be a false analogy. The actual storage and retrieval of memory, as supported by recent behavioral and brain studies, are far less direct.

David C. Rubin, a psychologist, explains that autobiographical memories, i.e. personal memories from the events of one's own life that are linked with images and can be "relived," "are not encoded, stored, and retrieved as wholes but rather are created at retrieval using components like the narrative, imagery, emotion division" (4). Included in autobiographical memory is *episodic memory*, a term, coined in 1972 by the neuropsychologist Endel Tulving, which refers to the long-term memory of personal experiences accompanied by specific temporal and spatial references and are consolidated in the hippocampus. This is distinct from semantic memory, which is associated with the recall of facts.⁸

Recollection involves the (re)construction of memories. The extreme difficulty of a pristine preservation of memory is in part explained by the motivation for recollection: "[T]o the extent that the construction is guided by the person's goals at the time of retrieval, as well as by the goals at the time of encoding, changes in what is remembered should be expected" (Rubin 4).

In addition to the influence of motivation as mentioned by Rubin, mood as explained by Daniel L. Schacter also plays a role in shaping our memories: "We often

⁸ Both episodic and semantic memory are explicit and declarative, ie conscious, as opposed to implicit, nondeclarative, unconscious memory that gives rise to phenomena such as priming and associative learning.

edit or entirely rewrite our previous experiences – unknowingly and unconsciously – in light of what we now know or believe. The result can be a skewed rendering of a specific incident, or even of an extended period in our lives, which says more about how we feel *now* than about what happened *then*” (5). This is the case of bias,⁹ wherein recall in the present modifies the past, to the point of even fictionalizing it. Fictionalization here refers to the act of forming, shaping, molding, fashioning and inventing (Eakin 290). With each recall, memories of past impressions and feelings are recreated by and filtered through the lens of present impressions and feelings. This is in line with the theory of reconsolidation, which “qualif[ies] the notion of permanent long-term memory by showing that previously consolidated memory can be modified when it returns to a labile, dstabilized state upon retrieval” (Nalbantian 266). In conjuring the past, the present interprets and reconstructs it.¹⁰

Baudelaire’s “Les petites vieilles” and “Les Veuves,” read here as memory poems and depictions of recall, demonstrate the transience of memory and its susceptibility to change. The variations between the verse *vieille* and the prose *veuve* can be understood as memory’s tendency to mutate over time as supported by the current understanding

⁹ Schacter highlights in his book, *The Seven Sins of Memory*, the ways in which our memory through its malleable, unstable and sometimes involuntary nature, demonstrates itself to be fallible, working even sometimes against our interest. According to Schacter, our memory fails us by transience; absent-mindedness; blocking; misattribution; suggestibility; bias; and persistence.

¹⁰ While psychological studies reveal that the constructivist work of memory is a result of subjectivity, neuroscience explains that the mutations of memory are due to the plasticity of the brain. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain’s capacity for structural and functional changes and the process by which the neuronal structure of memory is transformed upon each remembrance is known as reconsolidation.

of cognition. The persisting details shared by the two representations of the widow convey, however, the permanence of memory. The *vieille* strikes the narrator as someone whose “front de marbre avait l’air fait pour le laurier » (v.60). She is, in the eyes of the narrator, a modern heroine. This admiration adds an emotional component to the moment the memory is encoded, which results in a better recollection of it, because emotional memories consolidated in the amygdala are, as Schacter asserts, better remembered, unlike nonemotional events (163).¹¹ Also, the details that are periodically recalled, i.e. rehearsed, are reinforced and less likely to be forgotten.

The paradoxical nature of memory that is both lasting and fleeting is captured through Baudelaire’s poetic declaration in “Le Cygne” that his “chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs” (v.32). The poet is giving shape, form and even weight to his memory of Paris, claiming to concretize what is supposed to be amorphous and weightless. Read closely, however, Baudelaire’s assertion is not that his memories are rock-heavy, but heavier than rocks. The lyricist evokes the materiality and weightiness of rocks only to refer to something else that is not specified. It is a move through a graspable endurance to a vagueness that escapes us. In that sense, Baudelaire’s statement on memory still has the quality of being both enduring and ephemeral.

¹¹ In addition to emotions, the senses involved with a particular memory also influence the recall. In *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, Jonah Lehrer provides a neuroscientific reading of Proust’s madeleine passage and asserts that memories connected to taste and smell, as opposed to the other senses of sight, hearing and touch, are better remembered, because they are stored in the hippocampus, the region of the brain associated with long-term memory.

3.6 Modernity (Re)created Through Memory

Baudelaire penned a more extensive account of recall that illustrates the malleability and (re)constructive work of memory. This is in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” first published in 1863 in the *Figaro*, which describes the artistic process of Constantin Guys:

Maintenant, à l’heure où les autres dormant, celui-ci est penché sur sa table, dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu’il attachait tout à l’heure sur les choses, s’escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l’eau du verre au plafond, essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s’il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul, et se bousculant lui-même. Et les choses renaissent sur le papier, naturelles et plus que naturelles, belles et plus que belles, singulières et douées d’une vie enthousiaste comme l’âme de l’auteur. La fantasmagorie a été extraite de la nature. Tous les matériaux dont la mémoire s’est encombrée se classent, se rangent, s’harmonisent et subissent cette idéalisation forcée qui est le résultat d’une perception aiguë, magique à force d’ingénuité ! (OC II 693-694)

Rather than sketching on the spot to translate perceived reality onto paper as unembellished drawing, Guys works from memory and demonstrates an admirable “originalité si puissante et si décidée” (687). Baudelaire articulates the transformation that Guy’s recollected impressions undergo during the frenzied (re)creative process: the natural becomes more natural and the beautiful becomes more beautiful. In other words, it is less about what Guys saw earlier in the day that were “naturelles” and “belles” and more about his interpretation of what he remembers seeing previously, conjured later in the night when he is drawing furiously at the table, rendering images that are “plus que naturelles” and “plus que belles.” Nalbantian asserts that “the work

of art requires the voluntary and conscious retrieval of long-term memories with emotional resonances often unconscious and registered as fragmentary traces in the limbic system" (258). This embellishing effect produced by Guys is consistent with how subjectivity at the moment of remembrance impacts the memory itself, as discussed in the previous section that acknowledged factors such as mood and motivation.

It is as if Baudelaire understood that memories do not operate in the false analogy of direct input-output, but in a more dynamic, autonomous and even unpredictable way, when he describes in vibrant terms what happens in the mind to the stuff of recall: they "se classent, se rangent, s'harmonisent." Guys' sketches are not reproduced from a fixed impression akin to photography. They are the (re)creation from memories constantly in flux, transforming over time, which, depending on the details summoned or forgotten, intensifies certain aspects, while dulling others. Guys' (re)creative work from memory is, in effect, an "idéalisation."

Given the mediation of memory and subsequent interpretation, Guys infuses subjectivity into his artwork from recollection becomes inevitable. Guys does not have the practice of signing his sketches, but according to Baudelaire, despite this anonymity, all his works are "signées de son âme éclatante" (OC II 688).

The essay in which Baudelaire heralds Constantin Guys as the painter par excellence of modern life can also be read as a text that heralds its writer as the poet par excellence of modern life. What Baudelaire wrote of Guys—"Pour le parfait flâneur,

pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini" (OC II 691)—can just as well be applied to the poet himself. Moreover, the painter and the poet are both flâneurs possessing an acute observation coupled with a practically insatiable visual appetite.

Their fascination with and attention to the city life around them allow Guys to create his tableaux and Baudelaire his poems. In fact, Baudelaire has on occasion used the terms "tableaux" and "poème" interchangeably, notably in designating a section of *Les Fleurs du mal* as "Tableaux parisiens" and in describing Guys' artwork as a poem:

Un régiment passe, qui va peut-être au bout du monde, jetant dans l'air des boulevards ses fanfares entraînantes et légères comme l'espérance ; et voilà que l'œil de M. G. a déjà vu, inspecté, analysé les armes, l'allure et la physionomie de cette troupe. Harnachements, scintillements, musique, regards décidés, moustaches lourdes et sérieuses, tout cela entre pêle-mêle en lui ; et dans quelques minutes, le poème qui en résulte sera virtuellement composé. Et voilà que son âme vit avec l'âme de ce régiment qui marche comme un seul animal, fière image de la joie dans l'obéissance ! (OC II 693)

This depiction of the music performance by the Paris garrison that inspires the "poème" of Guys has also inspired the poetry of Baudelaire, notably "Les petites vieilles" and "Les Veuves."

Baudelaire's critical writing on Guys loops effectively back to his own (re)creative poetry, signaling his own recollective process. The same concert setting is depicted in both genres—art criticism on Guys and Baudelaire's own poetry—but is

composed of details that diverge significantly, which can be explained by the difference in impetus for recall. “Le Peintre de la vie” captures the vivacity of the Parisian concert scene centering on the regiment, while “Les petites vieilles” and “Les Veuves” single out the marginal(ized) participants of such a scene, specifically the widows. As an outsider of society, the flâneur-narrator is attentive to other outsiders as himself, noting their shared sense of the “[m]ultitude, solitude” mentioned in “Les Foules.”

3.7 The Androgyny of Grief

The widow is a figure of solitude, but it also needs to be noted that this figure of solitude is a woman. In an analysis of widows and widowhood, the issue of gender is practically unavoidable. Baudelaire’s widow poetry, exemplified through “A une passante,” “Les petites vieilles” and “Les Veuves,” is articulated through a gendered discourse: the widow is the female object of the flâneur’s male gaze. At the same time, these poems also collectively suggest a certain androgynization that stems from grief, which in turn destabilizes the female-male binary, such that the widow is masculinized, while the flâneur is feminized.

The older widow in “Les Veuves” is depicted as “évidemment condamnée, par une absolue solitude, à des habitudes de vieux célibataire, et le caractère masculin de ses moeurs ajoutait un piquant mystérieux à leur austérité.” Rather than the feminine “habitudes de *vieille* célibataire,” it is the masculine “habitudes de *vieux* célibataire” that

now characterize the solitary woman bereft of a husband. Widowhood has also bestowed upon her a “caractère *masculin*.”

The masculinization of the widow is again illustrated in stanzas 2 through 5 of

“Les petites vieilles”:

Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes,
Éponyme ou Laïs ! Monstres brisés, bossus
Ou tordus, aimons-les ! Ce sont encor des âmes.
Sous des jupons troués et sous de froids tissus

Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques,
Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus,
Et serrant sur leur flanc, ainsi que des reliques,
Un petit sac brodé de fleurs ou de rébus ;

Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes ;
Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés,
Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnettes
Où se pend un Démon sans pitié ! Tout cassés

Qu'ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille,
Luisants comme ces trous où l'eau dort dans la nuit ;
Ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille
Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit. (vv.5-20)

The four cited stanzas from “Les petites vieilles” provide the general description of the elderly women that the flâneur encounters in the city, including “[c]elle-là, droite encor, fière” (v.57). As I have argued in the earlier sections “Mourning on Repeat” and “The Cognition of Remembrance,” the *petite vieille* singled out in the entire third section of “Les petites vieilles” is the double of the widow in “Les Veuves,” “celle-là roide, droite, [qui,] sous un petit châle usé, portait dans tout son être une fierté de stoïcienne.” This

intertextual reading means that the “droite encor, fière” woman from “Les petites vieilles” is read as a widow found among “[c]es monsters disloqués [qui] furent jadis des femmes” (v.5).

The masculinization of the widow in “Les petites vieilles” is less direct and perhaps more harsh than that in “Les Veuves.” Instead of representing her as a “vieux célibataire” with a “caractère masculin,” the widow is a dislocated monster that used to be a woman. She is first dehumanized and then defeminized. Moreover, the insistent use of the masculine subject pronoun, “ils,” throughout the stanzas cited above serves as a constant reference to and reminder of the designation of the widow as a “monstre.” The widow, as depicted in “Les petites vieilles,” is masculinized through dehumanization and defeminization.

“A une passante” even invites the reading of the widow as the Gorgon, Medusa, who possesses the fatal power to turn into stone anyone in direct gaze with her. The *passante* “en grand deuil” (v.2) is easily likened to the Gorgon: her gaze, which produces “[l]a douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue” (v.8) renders the flâneur “crispé” (v.6), stonelike. Referring to the *passante*, Beryl Schlossman states that “[t]he sight of her transforms Baudelaire’s desiring subject into a stone” (1018). This Medusa-widow also in a way kills the narrator, as signaled by his loss of speech and thus loss of presence through the ellipsis in “[u]n éclair... puis la nuit!” (v.9) That the flâneur loses his

narratorial presence and thus undergoes death in the sense of absence is deduced from the mention of his rebirth: "le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître" (v.10).¹²

There is something about grief that is transformative and transgressive. The gender reversal in "A une passante" can be detected in how the masculine and feminine rhymes alternate, as Beryl Schlossman has astutely perceived:

The negation of line 11 ("Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?") shifts the encounter outside mortal life and into eternity. "Eternity" is the rhyme word, with beauty ("beauté"). These words are the masculine rhyme within an alternating rhyme form: the feminine rhyme words of "renaître" and "peut-être" signal the rebirth of desire and the Narrator's fearful anticipation. The masculine and feminine rhymes alternate, according to the classical rule (confirmed by Ronsard and rendered absolute by Malherbe) that Baudelaire generally follows. A gender reversal is an unexpected poetic effect that results from this alternate rhyme: beauty becomes masculine, and reborn virility takes on a feminine appearance. (1028)

Both form and content in "A une passante" articulate a gender reversal in mourning.¹³

¹²The reciprocated gaze that silences and annihilates the narrator is the same gaze that brings him back to life.

¹³ If grief stems as a reaction to profound loss and irretrievable absence, Barthes's observation in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* would be pertinent to the present discussion on gender and androgyny. Barthes notes:

Historiquement, le discours de l'absence est tenu par la Femme: la femme est sédentaire, l'Homme est chasseur, voyageur; la Femme est fidèle (elle attend), l'homme est coureur (il navigue, il drague). C'est la Femme qui donne forme à l'absence, en élabore la fiction, car elle en a le temps; elle tisse et elle chante; les Fileuses, les Chansons de toile dissent à la fois l'immobilité (par le ronron du Rouet) et l'absence (au loin, des rythmes de voyage, houles marines, chevauchées). Il s'ensuit que dans tout homme qui parle l'absence de l'autre, *du féminin* se déclare: cet homme qui attend et qui en souffre, est miraculeusement féminisé. Un homme n'est pas féminisé parce qu'il est inverti, mais parce qu'il est amoureux. (20)

The flâneur in "A une passante" is "féminisé" according to Barthes, because he is "amoureux"; his love for the widowed *passante* is proclaimed in these words: "Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais" (v.14). The fleeting urban encounter "is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight" (Benjamin 45 *Lyric*). The flâneur's amorous utterance will never reach the woman who has forever disappeared, irrevocably lost,

That sonnet, together with “Les Veuves” and “Les petites vieilles,” deal with grief as an emotional response to intense loss that is not confined to any one gender. Edward Kaplan even draws the parallel between the poet and the widow, who, stripped of “the outward aura of her femininity,” becomes a “‘bachelor-widow,’ a figure of the writer’s own solitude, sterility, and desire” (239). Baudelaire’s poetry on mourning conveys how the sense of sorrow over loss is so profound and pervasive that it penetrates even the gender divide.

3.8 Mourning in Motion

Although I have demonstrated the masculinization of the widow, the general alignment of the woman in grief with femininity cannot be denied, just as the flâneur is more often than not associated with masculinity. With the exception of one slight remark, “Le flâneur est comme toute les belles choses, comme les jolies femmes, il n’a pas d’âge... Il existe depuis vingt-cinq ans jusqu’à soixante, aussi longtemps que l’homme jouit pleinement de ses facultés intellectuelles et locomotives” (27), Auguste de Lacroix’s “Le Flâneur,” from volume 3 of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* published

while leaving him “sédentaire,” sustaining the discourse of absence historically attributed to the woman. What Barthes describes, the woman who is left behind and left longing for her departed lover, is reversed in Baudelaire’s sonnet voiced through the man who is left behind and left longing for his departed beloved. In Barthesian terms, the flâneur is feminized, while the widowed *passante* is masculinized.

between 1876 and 1878, depicts the urban stroller as insistently and unproblematically masculine.¹⁴

In Benjamin's seminal writing on modernity, he mentions the flâneur's oddly fashionable practice of taking turtles out for walks in the arcades around 1840 and how he is known for his ease and comfort in the public space:

The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done" (Benjamin 37 *Lyric*).

Nowhere in Benjamin's reflection on flânerie¹⁵ is the flâneuse discussed. The

Benjaminian figure of flânerie, just like Lacroix's, is unmistakably male.

¹⁴ The flâneur, according to Lacroix, is also distinctly French and necessarily a product of Paris. He opens his study by asking his reader, "Connaissez-vous un signe plus approprié à son idée, un mot plus exclusivement français pour exprimer une personnification toute française ?", and offers the immediate answer, "Le flâneur !" Lacroix also insists, "Nous n'admettons pas même l'existence du flâneur autre part qu'à Paris. Qu'est-ce, en effet, qu'un flâneur en province, sinon un pitoyable rêveur dont les yeux fatigués et l'esprit émoussé par la contemplation des mêmes objets finissent par ne plus s'arrêter sur aucun ?" (26) Personifying France and hailing from Paris, the flâneur is an astute observer who descends into the street crowds and partakes in people-watching.

¹⁵ Benjamin's description of the flâneur emphasizes his role as a writer and reader: the flâneur carries around a notebook, reads at newsstands and relaxes at the café terrace only after work. It should be noted that the flâneur reads not only what is offered at newsstands, but also Paris with all its details that unfold before his eyes and his ability to "read the city as text was inseparable from [his] ability to create texts about the city" (Gluck 70). Following Benjamin's observation of the flâneur's writer-reader role, Mary Gluck asserts that "[t]he flâneur, in fact, was the only figure in Parisian popular culture, who could render the labyrinthine urban landscape legible and meaningful to contemporaries" (69). This is especially true of Baudelaire, who, being the bard of modernity, has captured the sentiments and peculiarities of the city in "Les Tableaux parisiens" and *Le Spleen de Paris*, the latter of which was explicitly inspired from the "fréquentation" and "croisement" (OC I 276), as mentioned in the famous prefatory letter to Arsène Houssaye, that took place within the urban space.

What about the flâneuse ? Could a feminine urban stroller be possible?

It was only in the last 20 years or so that the question of the flâneuse was given a more prominent part of the discussion on modernity. Among the scholars who conceptualize a feminized flânerie is Anne Friedberg. Her 1991 article, "Les Flâneurs du Mal(l)," equates the flâneuse with the female shopper and movie-goer. Given that the respectability of a woman is questioned if she is seen wandering freely on the streets, the freedom of the flâneuse to circulate among the urban landscape on her own, without being regarded as a loose woman, is, according to Friedberg, necessarily contingent on her role as a consumer. In other words, feminized flânerie is the mobilized gaze through consumption.

Two years before Friedberg's argument for the flâneuse, Janet Wolff insisted in 1989 on the contrary in "The Invisible Flâneuse." She writes very plainly that "[t]here is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" (154). The public domain of work, politics and urban life was exclusively male. Moreover, modernity, composed of "the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling" (153), is captured in literature as "the experience of men" (141) and even if women were included, it was through "their relationships with men in the public sphere, and via their illegitimate or eccentric route into this male area – that is, in the role of whore, widow or murder victim" (152). Wolff continues to uphold her argument against the

flâneuse in her 2005 article, “Gender and the haunting of cities,” through which she responds to Friedberg’s earlier claim by stating that aimlessness, as opposed to shopping and movie-watching, is a defining component of flânerie, coupled with the reflectiveness of the gaze (21).

Baudelaire’s poetry does indeed recount the experience of a man, but his depictions of the widows suggest, if not support, the notion of the widow as flâneuse. The widow, defined by her detachment from a man, is shown to be a wandering urban type, whose strolling is not necessarily contingent on consumerism, contrary to what Anne Friedberg had specified. In addition to her mobility, the widow’s remarkable gaze is often mentioned in Baudelaire’s poems, which Wolff had ignored.

The widow in “A une passante” is the already vanished beloved, whose gaze— “ciel livide où germe l’ouragan” (v.7)— engenders for the narrator the shocking experience of love at first and last sight. It was also from the *passante*’s knowing look that the flâneur-narrator had confidence in her awareness of his love. The woman, whom the flâneur follows in “Les petites vieilles,” is discerned to possess an intermittent sharpness to her gaze, as “[s]on oeil parfois s’ouvrait comme l’oeil d’un vieil aigle.” Her prose double in “Les Veuves” leads the flâneur to the *cabinet de lecture*, where, under his “oeil expérimenté,” “elle cherch[e] dans les gazettes, avec des yeux actifs, jadis brûlés

par les larmes, des nouvelles d'un intérêt puissant et personnel."¹⁶ Also portrayed in this poem is the another widow found among the concert crowd, who "regard[e] le monde lumineux avec un oeil profond, et elle écout[e] en hochant doucement la tête."

The widow, though on the margins of society, is featured rather prominently in Baudelaire's poetry as the woman who takes hold of the flâneur's attention, imagination and at times even affection, as the narrator becomes the pining lover for the woman forever gone in the celebrated "A une passante." By no means confined to the private domestic sphere, the widow is encountered in the public spaces of the café terrace, *cabinet de lecture* and *jardin public*, traversing the urban landscape, strolling much like the flâneur. If flânerie is the unhurried meandering through the city, the widows are certainly fleeting figures who take part in that urban phenomenon. In that sense, the widow and the flâneur of mid-nineteenth-century Paris are united not only in mourning, but also in mobility, to which the modernized capital gave rise. The particular access to the city that a woman has through widowhood renders her, at least to a certain extent, a flâneuse.¹⁷

¹⁶ The understanding of the flâneur as an observing reader-writer is located in this moment of mise en abyme: the flâneur is reading the widow reading the *gazettes*. Reading the city-text consisting of the reading widow, Baudelaire produces his own text of the city that captures the widow as a fellow reader. Although the widow is not depicted to produce her own textual rendition of the city, her movement across the city clad in black can be likened to the writing of an author in black ink across a page. The widow's tracing through the city-text, her mobile inscription, produces for the flâneur the striking impressions of a "[s]ingulière vision!" in "Les Veuves" and "[u]n éclair... puis la nuit! (v.9) in "A une passante."

¹⁷ For details on the legal status of widows in urban nineteenth-century France, refer to Jean-Paul Barrière's article, "Les veuves dans la ville en France au XIXe siècle: images, rôles, types sociaux."

The woman in mourning is the urban figure who leaves the private space of the home for the public space of the Haussmannized Paris. Her visible and mobile presence in the city destabilizes the separation between the supposedly feminine domestic sphere and the masculine public sphere. Furthermore, as I have argued, the figure of the widow is doubled through the verse of “*Les petites vieilles*” and the prose of “*Les Veuves*.” Just as she crosses the gendered divide between the public and the private in the city, she also passes through the genre boundary between the poetic and the prosaic in the texts about that city. The widow’s relation to the modern city and poetry is one marked by mobility, the consequence of which is the renegotiation of the male/female, public/private and poetry/prose antitheses.

The widow’s movement also reflects the work of mourning in which she is engaged: mourning is the process of moving on.¹⁸ It demands the perpetual navigation between the past and the present, remembering and forgetting, cherishing and letting go.

¹⁸ The title of Michel Deguy’s work, *A ce qui n’en finit pas*, refers to the continuity and even interminability of mourning. Published in 1995, this journal records his grappling with grief following the death of his wife.

4. Lethal Illusions: “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch”

The notion of mimesis reaches back to as far as Plato’s parable of the cave, or even earlier, as Stephen Halliwell has suggested in *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, and continues as a perennial problematic to the present day. By no means a static notion that can be summed up by a few buzzwords, the mention of mimesis activates a whole constellation of concepts such as original, copy, reflection, nature, artificiality, truth, double, replica, duplicate, (in)authenticity, simulacra, cloning, recognition, and even learning is based on mimesis as Aristotle pointed out that humans learn through imitation. The all-encompassing nature of mimesis is noted by Deborah Jenson in *Trauma and Its Representation*:

One can deduce that education, competition, peer pressure, gossip, fashion, and identity politics would all fall into the category of *interpersonal* mimetic modalities. Mechanical reproduction, genetic coding, commercial advertising, industrial monopolization, fashion trends, and so forth could all be united in the category of *material* mimetic modalities. Mimetic practices could include everything from speech systems to the performance of gender norms to religious or philosophical proselytizing to currency exchange. (7, original emphasis)

As the Latinized form from the Greek *mimesis*, *imitatio* has given rise to what is known as imitation in our everyday language. Yet, this is by no means a neutral term, as the original, the imitated, is often sided with authenticity, whereas the copy, the imitation, is aligned with inauthenticity. Art and hashish can both be thought of as imitative media. The former represents nature—the natural landscape and human

nature—while the latter engenders an intoxicated perception that takes its roots from reality, but deviates from it. As such, the replicating and distortive effects of both art and hashish can render them opposites of reality, akin to illusion.

It is through “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch” that I demonstrate Baudelaire’s poetry to be deeply invested in the investigation of reality and illusion. By way of art, and especially the relationship between the artist and his model, “La Corde” tackles the reality-illusion dialectic. The same dialectic is also examined in “Le Poème du hachisch,” but through hashish intoxication and in particular my tracing of the mirror trope, which has so far escaped scholarly attention in this text, to equate the indulgence in the intoxicant with losing one’s mind, a surrender of critical faculty so serious that is even, according to Baudelaire, suicide. Through the subject of suicide in “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch,” I argue that reality is a matter of life and death for Baudelaire, so much so that to reject it for illusion entails the deadly consequence of death and more specifically suicide. At the same time, not all illusions are the same. Baudelaire’s poetry, as a form of mimetic art, is demonstrated to be a source of truth.

4.1 The Artist-Cum-Illusionist

To avoid repeating ad nauseam the same details surrounding the suicide of Alexandre, Manet’s model in “Enfant aux cerises,” on which “La Corde” is based, I defer to Jared Stark’s article, “The Price of Authenticity: Modernism and Suicide in Baudelaire’s ‘La Corde,’” which contains an elaborate footnote on those specifics. Stark

and Debarati Sanyal are scholars who have provided rich, contemporary readings of “La Corde.” The former considered the poem through the writings of Walter Benjamin, focusing on modernism and commodification. The latter offered a historico-political analysis that concentrates on the problematic of violence. The angle at which I approach the text differs from theirs by emphasizing the seeming reality-illusion binary located in the issue of art presented in the poem. I am also more interested in the subject-object relationship between the artist and the model. My interpretation of “La Corde” is very much undergirded by the concept of mimesis, which Stephen Halliwell has argued in *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* is far from a fixed idea of imitation, but has “always been marked by the contrast between world-reflecting and world-creating principles of representation” (377). Based “La Corde,” I illustrate that negotiation between “world-reflection” and “world-creation.”

At the outset, “La Corde” declares itself to be a text concerned with the understanding of illusion. The painter-narrator recounts in the opening paragraph:

Les illusions, -- me disait mon ami, -- sont aussi innombrables peut-être que les rapports des hommes entre eux, ou des hommes avec les choses. Et quand l'illusion disparaît, c'est-à-dire quand nous voyons l'être ou le fait tel qu'il existe en dehors de nous, nous éprouvons un bizarre sentiment, compliqué moitié de regret pour le fantôme disparu, moitié de surprise agréable devant la nouveauté, devant le fait réel. S'il existe un phénomène évident, trivial, toujours semblable, et d'une nature à laquelle il soit impossible de se tromper, c'est l'amour maternel. Il est aussi difficile de supposer une mère sans amour maternel qu'une lumière sans chaleur; n'est-il donc pas parfaitement légitime d'attribuer à l'amour maternel toutes les actions et les paroles d'une mère, relatives à son enfant? Et cependant écoutez cette petite histoire, où j'ai été singulièrement mystifié par l'illusion la plus naturelle.

This is a poem engaged in debunking the “givenness,” to borrow the term from Sanyal, of maternal love and that operation succeeds, as the narrator states at the conclusion of the text, “Et alors, soudainement, une lueur se fit dans mon cerveau, et je compris pourquoi la mère tenait tant à m'arracher la ficelle et par quel commerce elle entendait se consoler.” He is referring to the epiphany he had of why the mother of his model appeared impassible at the suicide of her son, who had hanged himself, and how she had asked for the noose not so much to keep as a memento of her child, albeit morbid, but to make money off of selling the rope, because it was considered a good luck charm and was in high demand.

It is plain that the illusion in “La Corde” is that mothers would necessarily, naturally love their children, but to stop there, to think that is the only illusion in the poem to unveil would itself be illusory. As the poem had warned at the beginning, illusions abound; they are “aussi innombrables peut-être que les rapports des hommes entre eux, ou des hommes avec les choses.” The relationship between the painter-narrator and his unnamed model is the interpersonal relationship *and* the relationship between a person and an object that I want to elucidate. I contend that to the painter-narrator, the model is both a subject and an object, though mostly an object. What is underneath the illusion of the painter-model relationship is the bad faith of the artist as a producer of images and imitations.

The narrator prizes his extraordinary perception, claiming, “Ma profession de peintre me pousse à regarder attentivement les visages, les physionomies, qui s'offrent dans ma route, et vous savez quelle jouissance nous tirons de cette faculté qui rend à nos yeux la vie plus vivante et plus significative que pour les autres hommes.” While it may be extraordinary, this painterly perception is also one that is confined to the surface, limited to the face and physiognomy. In other words, any insight that the artist has remains only skin-deep, as opposed to penetrating to the person behind the face and the physiognomy. It was also the superficial appearance of the boy which drew the narrator: “j'observai souvent un enfant dont la physionomie ardente et espiègle, plus que toutes les autres, me séduisit tout d'abord.”

The relationship that the painter has with the boy is one characterized by superficiality. Yet the artist does not simply relate to his model superficially, that is being only concerned with the exterior of the boy, but treats him as an object of dissimulation. It needs to be noted that the boy is employed as a model for the artist. He is not painted as himself, but is “transformé tantôt en petit bohémien, tantôt en ange, tantôt en Amour mythologique” and is made by the painter to “porter le violon du vagabond, la Couronne d'Épines et les Clous de la Passion, et la Torche d'Éros.” While Sanyal views this as the “evacuation of the model's intrinsic properties [...] in his successive metamorphoses under the painter's brush” (84), I consider this not so much an act of being emptied out, but rather an act of being covered up. The boy's body on

which the artist layers various cultural, mythological and religious costumes is like the blank canvas over which the painter applies his splashes of different colors, eventually hiding any exposed, white space under multiple and mixed hues. As opposed to the mere erasure, a simple cancelation of the boy's identity, it involves the multi-layered suppression of who he is, to the extent that his identity becomes buried under the many imposed disguises.

Under the manipulation of the artist, the model is engaged in role-play and dress-up, which consist of the concealment of the subjectivity and personhood of the boy. As a matter of fact, concealment is the first in a series of promises that the painter makes to the boy's parents in his request for the child's guardianship: "Je pris enfin à toute la drôlerie de ce gamin un plaisir si vif, que je priai un jour ses parents, de pauvres gens, de vouloir bien me le céder, promettant de bien l'habiller, de lui donner quelque argent et de ne pas lui imposer d'autre peine que de nettoyer mes pinceaux et de faire mes commissions." The artist's commitment to clothing the boy, to dress him well, reiterates the painter's role in veiling the child.

4.2 The Model Object

The fact that the boy serves as the artist's model requires a closer look, because he is not simply objectified by the narrator, but also occupies that intermediary space between the painter and the painting, which carries implications in how close representation is to truth, or how far it is from truth. Based on Plato's parable of the

cave, the boy outfitted as the cultural figure of the bohemian or historical Jesus is embodying a representation that is two degrees removed from truth: there is first the metaphysical Form of Truth, then the actual bohemian or Jesus and finally the represented bohemian or Jesus. With this understanding, a painting based on the model dressed as a bohemian or Jesus would be, not two, but three degrees removed from the Form, a representation of truth that's even farther from the truth than a disguised model. Another step away from the truth would be the poem itself, as "La Corde" recounts these paintings, representing the portraits textually. I will be examining more carefully the poem's four-degree removal from truth later in this chapter.¹

As the model for paintings, the boy is the mediation for the painter's artistic production. Never painted as he is, but always painted as some other figure, the boy, in the hands of the artist, is the vehicle for and the passive, silent accomplice in the perpetuation of images and artifice. The devaluation of the boy's subjectivity in the eyes of the painter can be detected in how the artist handles and does not handle the emotions and desires of his model:

Seulement je dois dire que ce petit bonhomme m'étonna quelquefois par des crises singulières de tristesse précoce, et qu'il manifesta bientôt un goût immodéré pour le sucre et les liqueurs; si bien qu'un jour où je constatai que, malgré mes nombreux avertissements, il avait encore commis un nouveau larcin de ce genre, je le menaçai de le renvoyer à ses parents.

¹ The issue of representation's the proximity to and distance from truth becomes more complicated when one considers the supernatural angel or the mythological Cupid that the model is supposed to replicate. Neither of which belongs to the everyday, material world graspable by human sensorial perception.

The singular outbursts of precocious sadness and immoderate taste for sugar and liqueur are the glimmers of the boy beyond his appearance offered in this text. From the perspective of the painter, these traits revelatory of emotions and desires, components of subjectivity, are couched in excessiveness and inappropriateness and even linked to criminality. The boy's desire is so inordinate that he steals (for) the sugar and liqueur. (It is not clear from the text if he is stealing these items directly, or stealing money to purchase them.) The subjectivity of the model is incriminating, yet this is also the "fait réel" about the boy, the person whom the painter tries over and over to cover up, and in so doing, relegates him repeatedly to an illusion.

4.3 When Subjectivity Kills Himself

The painter's rejection of the boy as the incarnation of reality even takes the form of an ultimatum, as he threatens to send the model back to his parents and thereby issues the warning about severing ties with him. What follows afterward is the boy's suicide; he hangs himself in the studio sometime within the few hours the artist steps away. The poem does not provide any explanation for the model's self-willed death, but leaves it open for speculation: maybe it had to do with his "crises singulières de tristesse précoce"; maybe it was his adamant refusal to return to his parents; maybe it was the ultimate assertion of the boy's will; maybe it was a combination of all of those factors. I assert that the fact that the poem does not pinpoint any specific reason behind the boy's suicide suggests the inexplicability of suicides. Given that the self-willed death is so

contrary to the basic and even instinctual human desire for survival, people on the outside, those who do not possess the suicidal mindset, but retain at least some trace of a life-loving attitude, would not be able to comprehend the justification for suicide.²

Not only is the reason for the suicide not offered by the text, but even the very moment of the boy's self-hanging is not captured in representation. Because the poem is told from the point of view of the painter, who was absent during the boy's suicide, the artist-narrator cannot claim to have witnessed that instant, nor can he provide the reader with access to that depiction. This effects the void in representation of the instant of suicide *and*, as I'd explained earlier, the reasons for suicide. Thus, the moment of the self-hanging and the particular motivation behind it are unrepresentable, escaping representation, and remain opaque to the painter-narrator, as well as to the reader of the poem.³ What the reader does know, based on the words of the artist himself, is that the

² Maurice Blanchot, in *L'Espace littéraire*, asserts that suicide is really a "double mort":

Se tuer, c'est prendre une mort pour l'autre, c'est une sorte de bizarre jeu de mots. Je vais à cette mort qui est dans le monde à ma disposition, et je crois par là atteindre l'autre mort, sur laquelle je suis sans pouvoir, qui n'en a pas davantage sur moi, car elle n'a rien à voir avec moi, et si je l'ignore, elle ne m'ignore pas moins, elle est l'intimité vide de cette ignorance. C'est pourquoi, le suicide reste essentiellement un pari, quelque chose de hasardeux, non pas parce que je me laisserais une chance de vivre, comme il arrive quelquefois, mais parce que c'est un saut, le passage de la certitude d'un acte projeté, consciemment décidé et virilement exécuté à ce qui désoriente tout projet, demeure étranger à toute décision, l'indécis, l'incertain, l'effritement de l'inagissant et l'obscurité du non-vrai. (104)

³ Also in *L'Espace littéraire*, Blanchot draws the interesting parallel between suicide and art:

Tous deux [l'art et le suicide] projettent ce qui se dérobe à tout projet, et s'ils ont un chemin, ils n'ont pas de but, ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils font. Tous deux veulent fermement, mais, à ce qu'ils veulent, ils sont unis par une exigence qui ignore leur volonté. Tous deux tendent vers un point dont il leur faut se rapprocher par l'habileté, le savoir-faire, le travail, les certitudes du monde, et pourtant ce point n'a rien à voir avec de tels moyens, ne connaît pas le monde, reste étranger à tout accomplissement, ruine constamment toute action délibérée. Comment aller d'un pas ferme vers

suicide took place after his confrontation with the boy, after that ultimatum, which gestures at least the painter's indirect role in his model's suicide.

The fact that the boy hanged himself contains significant ramifications on the semantic and rhetorical level. The French verb for "to hang" is "pendre," whose present participle is "pendant." "Cependant," used twice in "La Corde," means "however," or "meanwhile," i.e. during this time. Both senses of "cependant" take place in the text. The first occurrence happens at the beginning of the poem, when the narrator talks about the masking and unmasking of illusions:

Il est aussi difficile de supposer une mère sans amour maternel qu'une lumière sans chaleur; n'est-il donc pas parfaitement légitime d'attribuer à l'amour maternel toutes les actions et les paroles d'une mère, relatives à son enfant? Et *cependant* écoutez cette petite histoire, où j'ai été singulièrement mystifié par l'illusion la plus naturelle. (my italics)

In the citation above, both the however and meanwhile senses of "cependant" can be applied, as the painter cautions against illusions, saying, "And meanwhile/however listen to this story." The second occurrence is located after the boy's suicide: "*Cependant* le corps était étendu sur mon divan, et, assisté d'une servante, je m'occupais des derniers préparatifs, quand la mère entra dans mon atelier" (my italics). The meaning of

ce qui ne se laisse pas assigner de direction ? Il semble que tous deux ne réussissent à faire quelque chose qu'en se trompant sur ce qu'ils font, ils regardent au plus près : celui-ci prend une mort pour l'autre, celui-là prend un livre pour l'œuvre, malentendu auquel ils se confient en aveugle, mais dont la sourde conscience fait de leur tâche un pari orgueilleux, comme s'ils s'ébauchaient une sorte d'action qui ne pourrait qu'à l'infini attendre le terme. (106)

“cependant” in this case is that of meanwhile. In addition to the conventional meanings of “cependant,” I propose the consideration of “ce-pendant,” in light of the present participle of “pendre,” such that “cependant” can also be read as “this hanging,” i.e. this act of hanging,⁴ or this hanging thing. It is the connection between the meanings of “cependant” as “however” and “this hanging object” that I find intriguing.

The hanging body enacts the “opposition,” according to the *Grand Robert* definition of “cependant,” to mean however. There is a contradicting and demystifying effect that “cependant”/“however” contains. Returning to the first use of “cependant” in the poem, the narrator is telling the reader about his assumption of maternal love and suggests that his tale will however debunk that. In that instance, “cependant”/however is employed to unveil and contradict an illusion, which in turn signals the reality-revealing power of that adverb. Likewise, the revelation of the reality that maternal love is not a given is achieved through “ce-pendant,” the boy’s hanging body. It is from the model’s suicide and consequent hanging body that the truth of the mother’s lack of love for her son comes out, such that truth resides in the hanging corpse. While the boy’s suicide gives rise to the disclosure of that reality, it was also the suppression of the reality of the boy’s subjectivity on the part of the painter that, as I’d mentioned earlier, (indirectly) caused that death. The seeming paradox of the suppression of truth leading to the revelation of truth is something that I will address later in this chapter.

⁴ The actual French vocabulary for the act of hanging is “pendaison.”

4.4 Unveiling, Unhanging, Dispelling

Prior to the boy's suicide, the painter related to his model through veiling; the artists clothes, disguises and essentially covers up the boy. After the suicide, however, the painter relates to the body of the boy through *unveiling*: "Quand, plus tard, nous eûmes à le déshabiller pour l'ensevelissement, la rigidité cadavérique était telle, que, désespérant de fléchir les membres, nous dûmes lacérer et couper les vêtements pour les lui enlever." The undressing and the cutting through the clothes are the undoing of the prior dissimulation imposed on the boy by the artist and the destruction of disguise. Nevertheless, the disrobing of a corpse has nothing to reveal apart from the bodily shell of the boy, which is now an empty referent. The reality of the subjectivity of the boy previously buried under all the various costumes is irrecoverable, since the lifeless model is now pure object. This is stated very plainly by the narrator, who confesses, "Quels ne furent pas mon horreur et mon étonnement quand, rentrant à la maison, le premier *objet* qui frappa mes regards fut mon petit bonhomme, l'espiègle compagnon de ma vie, pendu au panneau de cette armoire!" (my italics). The boy who had been insistently objectified by the artist is now totally an object as a cadaver and the undressing that the painter undertakes is just an empty gesture with regard to revelation.⁵ The illusion of the boy is over. He is plain dead.

⁵ Something to consider: the pure objectness of the boy does not yield to the artist; the *rigor mortis* renders the corpse unmalleable, as opposed to the previously pliable body that submitted to the manipulation by the painter.

The moment in "La Corde," which, to my mind, is the most microscopic in visual detail is the unhooking of the boy by the artist:

Le dépendre n'était pas une besogne aussi facile que vous le pouvez croire. Il était déjà fort roide, et j'avais une répugnance inexplicable à le faire brusquement tomber sur le sol. Il fallait le soutenir tout entier avec un bras, et, avec la main de l'autre bras, couper la corde. Mais cela fait, tout n'était pas fini; le petit monstre s'était servi d'une ficelle fort mince qui était entrée profondément dans les chairs, et il fallait maintenant, avec de minces ciseaux, chercher la corde entre les deux bourrelets de l'enflure, pour lui dégager le cou.

This is perhaps the most intimate moment between the artist and his model; with one arm wrapped around the boy's body, the painter holds him in an almost-embrace. And yet it's not really the boy that the painter is almost-embracing, but the cadaver, such that the closest contact that the artist ever has with the model, so physically close that it requires the painter to pry away folds of flesh from the neck to get at the rope, is when the latter has already been rendered a pure object.

The unhooking of the boy by the painter is not just the removal of the body from the "panneau de [l']armoire." It requires the cutting of the noose, which also signifies the severance of any bond between the artist and the boy, who had literally attached himself to the painter's home by self-hanging and prior to that was first the narrator's neighbor and subsequently his model. The beginning of "La Corde" refers to "les rapports des hommes entre eux, ou des hommes avec les choses," and that reference is made in conjunction with "[l]es illusions [qui] sont [peut-être] aussi innombrables." At the end of the poem, however, the definitive rupture between the painter and the boy as

subject and object dispels the illusion that was the model. No longer a puppet for the painter, the boy as illusion is over.

“La Corde” appears to be a poem that condemns the artist and even art. After all, a boy became the victim of suicide under the guardianship of and artistic manipulation by the painter. The general reader of the text would find it difficult to sympathize with the narrator and not consider at least some measure of culpability on his part. This anti-art stance that “La Corde” seems to promote is, I contend, another illusion in itself. It would be too reductive of a reading to simply regard this as a poem against illusion. Although four degrees removed from Plato’s notion of Truth, an aspect of this text that I’d explained earlier, this poem discloses the artifice of art and thereby presents truth through representation. It is through the mimetic art of this poem that the reader knows about the reality of maternal love and the artist’s bad faith in his repeated denial of the boy’s subjectivity to keep him as an illusion through the many disguises. That truth would be located in the mimetic art of the poem destabilizes the binary of reality versus representation and demonstrates “the lie of truth and the truth of lying” (12) that Christopher Prendergast wrote about in *The Order of Mimesis*.

If a pejorative understanding of art is a distortion of reality, as a facile comprehension of mimesis would produce, “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch” are forms of mimetic art that complicate the dichotomy between reality and representation

by presenting reality *through* representation. To borrow Prendergast's formulation cited earlier, this would be the reality of representation and the representation of reality.⁶

4.6 Hashish: From Napoleon to Baudelaire

Having discussed Baudelaire's recuperation of reality through "La Corde," as representation, I will now turn to "Le Poème du hachisch" to further investigate how Baudelaire's text grapples with reality and more specifically how the medium of verbal art, i.e. poetry, condemns the distortion of reality through intoxication. While art and drugs can both be considered mediations of reality, Baudelaire makes clear his stance with regard to the virtue of the former and the vice of the latter.⁷

In Europe, the interest in hashish can be traced back to when Napoleon's armies first returned to the continent with the intoxicant from the Egyptian campaigns of 1798-1801 (Boon 2-3). As Orientalism captured the imagination of the French population, there was a corresponding curiosity in hashish. The psychiatrist Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours took it upon himself to travel to the Orient in order to investigate the drug. The result of his trip was *Du hachisch et de l'aliénation mentale*, a major medical text

⁶ The "representation of reality" is the definition of mimesis given by Eric Auerbach in his encyclopedic tome, *Mimesis*.

⁷ Very recently, on February 19, 2012, the leader of the Front National, Marine Le Pen was quoted by *Libération*, saying, "Le livre sur ma table de chevet, ce sont +Les Fleurs du mal+ [sic] de Baudelaire et je ne suis pas une droguée syphilitique." http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/societe/marine-le-pen-sur-brasillach-faire-la-difference-entre-l-homme-et-l-oeuvre_1084148.html This was said in defense of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had earlier quoted the collaborationist writer Brasillach, as Marine Le Pen insists on that the author is distinct from the work. That Baudelaire had contracted syphilis is not debatable, but I find this French presidential hopeful's claim that the poet was a junkie arguable, given Baudelaire's restrained participation in Le Club des Haschischins and the anti-hashish position adopted in "Le Poème du hachisch."

published in 1845 that delineates and expounds on the different stages of hashish intoxication. Moreau de Tours also initiated Le Club des Hashischins, a group that met between 1844 and 1849 at Hôtel de Pimodan for the experimentation of the drug in vogue. It was in that milieu that notable literati including Gautier, Nerval and Baudelaire were brought into contact with hashish intoxication.

Baudelaire was said to have attended Le Club des Hashischins a few times, but even on those occasions, the poet participated mostly as an observer and refrained from partaking in intoxication. While Baudelaire refused the habitual ingestion of hashish, his corpus took in the drug as object and inspiration.⁸ Published in 1860 as part of “Les Paradis artificiels,”⁹ “Le Poème du hachisch” is a text that outlines the composition, preparation, intoxication and precaution associated with the “confiture verte.”

Compared to the major nineteenth-century texts on intoxication, such as Moreau de Tours’ medical text on hashish and De Quincey’s 1821 “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,” which Baudelaire later translated as “Un Mangeur d’opium,” “Le Poème du hachisch” departs from those two works mainly through its genre and approach.

“Le Poème du hachisch” claims first and foremost to be poetry. In spite of the fact that

⁸ On the topic of Baudelaire and drugs, certain critics have read “Le Rêve parisien,” “Correspondances” and especially “La Chambre double” as poems that encapsulate the drugged experience. Baudelaire’s reticence on his own experience in his hashish writing seems to suggest that while the body of the poet does not (openly) admit the drug, the body of his poetic works, the corpus, can take in the influence of hashish and still maintain its integrity, such that writing remains immune to the dangers posed by the drug that the mind cannot.

⁹ The other part of “Les Paradis artificiels” is “Un Mangeur d’opium,” Baudelaire’s translation of De Quincey’s famous autobiographical account of opium addiction.

the text is completely written in prose and the opening section detailing the preparation and properties of hashish may be uncharacteristically scientific coming from Baudelaire, this work declares itself, through the title, to be poetry.¹⁰

4.7 Anecdotal Intoxication

On the narrative level, “Le Poème du hachish” does not focus on the author’s autobiographical experiences as the source of knowledge. It is through a collectivity of anonymous sources that this poem, especially its middle section entitled “Le Théâtre de Séraphin,”¹¹ recounts the hashish intoxication. Biographical accounts on Baudelaire do not deny his own brush with hashish, but the poet, unlike Moreau de Tours, De Quincey,¹² and even Gautier who penned the novella “Le Club des haschichins,” effectively excludes himself from the discussion of hashish experimentation, as though to present an untainted authorial voice that abstains from meddling in the drug. This stands in direct opposition to De Quincey’s subjective self-revelation and Moreau de Tours’ claim that “[l]’expérience personnelle est [...] le *criterium* de la vérité” (4).

According to the history of cannabis traced in *The Road of Excess*, Marcus Boon notes that “[o]ne of the major tropes of the cannabis literature is the citation of someone

¹⁰ In that regard, “Le Poème du hachisch” can be considered a prose poem.

¹¹ It is possible that Baudelaire had used this title based on Théâtre Séraphin, the clockwork-operated shadow theater of François Dominique Séraphin (1747-1800).

¹² Other differences between Baudelaire’s text and De Quincey’s autobiography include how the latter highlights more the dichotomy between the Occident and the Orient and can be read in the Gothic tradition, which features female victimization and the use of architectural description as ominous prolepsis. For an extended analysis of this, refer to Cannon Schmitt’s “Narrating National Addictions.”

else's experience so as to explain one's own, as though there were always a need to import a framework of understanding from the outside, just as the drug itself comes from "outside" (153). Could this be said of Baudelaire, who invented the voices of the anecdotes to mask his own?

The first anecdote of the four recorded in "Le Théâtre de Séraphin" is actually told from Baudelaire's perspective: "J'ai été témoin d'une scène de ce genre qui a été poussée fort loin, et dont le grotesque n'était intelligible que pour ceux qui connaissaient, au moins par l'observation sur autrui, les effets de la substance et la différence énorme de diapason qu'elle crée entre deux intelligences supposées égales" (OC I 412).¹³ What follows is not Baudelaire's personal experience with hashish, but his witness of a sober musician's bafflement in the midst of intoxicated company. For the second anecdote, the poet then goes from being a witness of a scene of intoxication to the recipient of someone else's hashish tale: "une personne m'a raconté une aventure qui lui était gardé un souvenir très exact de ses sensations" (413). The third anecdote is briefly prefaced with this: "Cette fois, c'est un littérateur qui parle" (416). The provenance of the story is no longer explained. Did the *littérateur* divulge this information to the poet? Or did the poet obtain this account through some other means? While scholars speculate that the *littérateur* was Gautier, to whom *Les Fleurs du mal* is dedicated,

¹³ All quotations from "Le Poème du hachisch" are taken from volume 1 of Pléiade's *Oeuvres complètes* (denoted by OC I) by Baudelaire.

Baudelaire's text leaves those questions unanswered. The source of the last anecdote is even more mysterious: "Cette fois, ce n'est pas un jeune homme oisif qui parle, ce n'est pas non plus un homme de lettres ; c'est une femme, une femme un peu mûre, curieuse, d'un esprit excitable, et qui, ayant cédé à l'envie de faire connaissance avec le poison, décrit ainsi, pour une autre dame, la principale de ses visions " (421). If this anecdote is a conversation between two women, how was Baudelaire privy to it?

Quotations are generally used to convey a sense of authenticity and authority, but the anecdotes cited in Baudelaire's text instill ambivalence rather than assurance. Moreover, the title of the section in which these accounts are presented, "Le Théâtre de Séraphin," suggests a certain theatricality and even the staging of voices on the part of Baudelaire. The accounts of hashish intoxication appear to be non-fiction and yet provoke doubts in the critical reader that give rise to the suspicion these narratives might be fiction instead. As a result, rather than fitting into either fiction or non-fiction, the writing of hashish parallels the experience of intoxication by occupying the space between the real and the unreal. In addition, Baudelaire's rejection of articulation through an explicitly singular and subjective voice is a rhetorical tactic that depersonalizes his remarks on hashish and allows him to assert critical distance in the denunciation of the intoxicant.

4.8 Suicide in Mirrors

The judgment against hashish goes as far as to compare it “au suicide, à un suicide lent, à une arme toujours sanglante et toujours aiguisée” (OC I 439). It should be addressed that there is the common belief that “haschishin” is derived from the Sanskrit word for “assassin,” and while it would be tempting to draw that connection, especially in a study on suicide, that association between the two words is in fact misled. It seems odd, given Baudelaire’s contemporaries’ generally accepting attitude toward hashish and even our current scientific understanding of this intoxicant as a rather benign drug,¹⁴ that the poet would launch such a vehement attack against this resin. According to “Cannabis, the mind and society: the hash realities,” a scientific article published in 2007, it has been found that cannabis has now become “the world’s third most-popular recreational drug [...], after alcohol and tobacco” (887). Baudelaire’s response to hashish appears to be an anachronism and an overreaction. However, the threat that “Le Poème du hachisch” points to, in addition to the surrender of the will and the facile achievement of a high, which are clearly communicated in the last section entitled “Morale,” is the loss of one’s consciousness and capacity to discern.

¹⁴ For more information on the ongoing debate regarding the danger of cannabis addiction, refer to Gianluigi Tanda’s article, “Self-administration behavior is maintained by the psychoactive ingredient of marijuana in squirrel monkeys.”

The poetic insight into the hashish experience that Baudelaire offers is situated within the realm of mimesis, as mirrors¹⁵ are frequently evoked in “Le Poème du hachisch” and intoxication is conveyed to be the conflation of reality and image. As a reflective surface, the mirror implies an original, but also deflects attention away from it to insist on the copy. The tension between the original and the copy, reality and image, sobriety and intoxication, is then at work in the reliance on the mirror trope throughout this poem. The mirror is first used to describe hashish. It later comes up as the reflective surfaces, which the hashish-eaters encounter. The mirror also illustrates the mind of the intoxicated and finally, it is implied in the evocation of Narcissus, for whom the confrontation with and pursuit of his image prove deadly. Through the manipulation of the mirror as a medium of fallacy, Baudelaire reveals the fatality of hashish in the dissolution of the conscious, critical Self.

Similar to *Les Fleurs du mal*, “Le Poème du hachisch ” is divided into sections: “Le Goût de l’infini”; “Qu’est-ce que le hachisch?”; “Le Théâtre de Séraphin”; “L’Homme-Dieu”; “Morale.” It is in the middle section, at the beginning of “Le Théâtre de Séraphin ” that the drug in question is first introduced in the poem as a mirror: “L’homme n’échappera pas à la fatalité de son tempérament physique et moral : le hachisch sera, pour les impressions et les pensées familières de l’homme, un miroir grossissant, mais un pur miroir” (409). Hashish is not a mirror that simply, faithfully

¹⁵ Another common ocular metaphor found in discussions of mimesis is the window.

and truthfully reflects reality as it is, but returns instead a magnified version. Moreover, the hashish consumer is immersed in, rather than escapes from, this exaggeration of the sense of self and the sense of surrounding. The amplificatory effects of the intoxicant serve as an alteration going as far as to distort reality. As the mirror that does not truly reflect what is real, hashish is represented to be misrepresentation.

If hashish is the distortive mirror, then to consume the drug is to gaze into that warped reflection. In second anecdote recorded in "Le Théâtre de Séraphin," there is an actual moment in which the hashishin catches sight of himself:

Mais sur le seuil de la boutique une pensée soudaine me prit, qui m'arrêta quelques instants et me donna à réfléchir. Je venais de me regarder, en passant, dans la glace d'une devanture, et mon visage m'avait étonné. Cette pâleur, ces lèvres rentrées, ces yeux agrandis ! (414-415)

These are the words recounted by a certain *homme du monde* (416), who, "à sa première ou seconde expérience" (413), is a novice when it comes to hashish and attempts to recover sobriety by looking for an antidote to hashish at the pharmacy, having suddenly remembered his obligation to attend a dinner party.

The mirror trope for hashish is literalized in this gaze into the glass, and what is returned to the *homme du monde* is a distortion of himself. The hashishin does not question the unnatural paleness, retreated lips and bulging eyes that look back at him; he accepts this image of himself and is simply shocked. There is no awareness on his part of the role that hashish has in manipulating his perception, as he assumes and

identifies with this imaged misrepresentation. The reflection dictates his identity and he in turn embodies that image returned to him in the glass.

As readers, we only have access to what the hashishin looks like through this recounted reflection, seen through the eyes of someone operating under the mediated and warped effects of intoxication. Encountering the hashish-eater only in his reflection, we can only envision the distorted copy, but not the original. We could even go as far as to say that the sober *homme du monde* is faceless, while the intoxicated *homme du monde* possesses a face of illusion. The face of the hashishin exists for us as the Baudrillardian concept of a simulacrum. Jacques Derrida, in "Rhétorique de la drogue," elaborates that the hashishin not only embodies simulacrum, but also dwells in it:

Que reproche-t-on au toxicomane ? Ce qu'on ne reproche jamais ou jamais au même degré à l'alcoolique ou au fumeur de tabac : de s'exiler, loin de la réalité, de la réalité objective, de la cité réelle et de la communauté effective, de s'évader dans le monde du simulacre et de la fiction. (249)

In a discussion that involves reflections and images, one could not help but also think of the mirror stage posited by Lacan, who believes that the 6- to 18-month-old infant develops a sense of self from the fascinated recognition of his/her unified and thus idealized image in the mirror. While the self-reflection serves as a pivotal moment for the hashishin's sense of self, the reactions that Baudelaire incorporates in his text toward the mirror image differ significantly from Lacan's theory. As opposed to being drawn into his reflection, the intoxicated *homme du monde* is stunned by it. Far from an ideally

unified image, the face that is returned to him is perceived in the unnatural fragments of “ces lèvres rentrées, ces yeux agrandis.” The hashish-eater conceives of himself not as a whole, but in parts, as his sense of self is presented in distorted fragmentation.

4.9 Failed Mind Reading

Having identified with the image of distortion, the hashishin is led “à réfléchir”:
“Je vais inquiéter ce brave homme [...] et pour quelle niaiserie!” (415) His grasp of himself, the newfound image-identity, is understood in relation to others, given that he supposes the pharmacist would perceive him as that distorted face reflected back from the glass. The hashishin approaches reality—as Self in relation to the Other—based on that warped image, which, as Baudelaire’s text reveals, leads to further distortions.

In “Le Poème du hachisch,” reflections generate more reflections. The polysemy of “réfléchir” is at work, because the visual reflection that the hashishin sees of himself in the glass triggers the mental reflection he has of frightening the pharmacist, which then produces another kind of reflection: “Je me figurais cet homme aussi sensible que je l’étais moi-même en cet instant funeste, et, comme je m’imaginai aussi que son oreille et son âme devaient, comme les miennes, vibrer au moindre bruit” (415). Here, the hashishin is envisioning the pharmacist as a kind of reflection of himself, “aussi sensible,” “son oreille et son âme [...] comme les [s]iennes.” Asserting resemblance, the intoxicated man assumes the Other to be a double and, in a way, a mirror-image of himself.

According to recent studies on mirror neurons, what the hashishin is attempting to do is certainly speculation, but also a kind of mind reading. The phenomenon of mirror neurons is discussed in the 2011 article by Deborah Jenson and Marco Iacoboni, “Literary Biomimesis: Mirror Neurons and the Ontological Priority of Representation”:

In the laboratory of Giacomo Rizzolatti in Parma in the late 1980s and early 1990s, researchers heard and saw the same class of neurons in the F5 area of the frontal lobe of macaque monkeys firing when the monkeys themselves executed an action, such as grasping an object, and when the monkeys observed lab staff grasping an object. It gradually dawned on the researchers that a unique alignment of execution and perception was at stake: an internal, physiological, mimetic tracing of another’s experience.

A similar intercorporeity leading to intersubjectivity occurs in humans as well. This is especially true with mind reading, which entails the observation of emotions expressed through someone else’s face and in turn mimicking those facial expressions, not necessarily consciously, which generates within oneself the feeling of the other’s expressed emotions. Empathy works in a similar way.¹⁶

Returning to Baudelaire’s hashishin, not only does he assume sameness on the part of the pharmacist, but he also acts upon that assumption: “je résolu d’entrer chez lui sur la pointe du pied” (415); “je me promettais d’éteindre le son de ma voix comme le bruit de mes pas ” (415). In the case of this hashish-eater, his endeavor to read the mind

¹⁶ On a Diane Rehm show broadcasted through NPR on March 14, 2012, there was a dialogue on the use of botox as it interferes with empathy, because for that drug to get rid of wrinkles, it paralyzes the facial muscles to the point where they can no longer contract and without that muscular contraction, the reproduction of another’s facial expression becomes hindered, which in turn inhibits the ability to feel what the other is feeling.

of the pharmacist fails for the reasons that 1) his speculation took place in the absence of the pharmacist's face, without which he could not observe to mimic to feel, 2) his judgment has been impaired by hashish and 3) even if face to face with the pharmacist, the hashishin, under the influence of the mind-altering drug, is not able to properly discern the other's facial expression, much less emotion.¹⁷

As a result, the mirror-image that the hachischin has created for the pharmacist is another distorted reflection in the text, resulting from faulty perception, because the sober pharmacist is not at all as hypersensitive as the intoxicated man had projected him to be. Contrary to what he had expected, the hachischin admits, "Le résultat fut le contraire de ce que je voulais obtenir. Décidé à assurer le pharmacien, je l'épouvantai " (415). The original pharmacist contradicts the copy, which the hashishin had assumed of him and "il [le] pria simplement de [s]e retirer" (415). Rather than identification and alliance, the interaction between the hashishin and the pharmacist, between the intoxicated Self and the sober Other, unfolds in differentiation and distance.

The hashishin's unquestioned and consequently erroneous assumption of sameness with the pharmacist, which is the attempted collapse of the Self and the Other, is indicative of the progressive work of the intoxicant. Prior to the hashish-eater's identification with his image, he could still separate himself from the Other. Earlier in

¹⁷ This also brings up the neuroscientific issue of "theory of mind," which is the human capacity to understand how someone else thinks and feels.

the anecdote, the “jeune homme oisif ” established himself as a misfit in “une foule sage et discrète, où chacun est maître de soi-même” (414). He was aware that the hashish intoxication would set him apart from and render him incompatible with the other sober dinner guests, because unlike these “hommes sérieux” (414), he was not “sérieux,” “sage,” “discr[et],” or “maître de [lui]-même.” Later in the text, however, with the intensification of intoxication, the hachischin no longer possesses that consciousness of difference. It is instead replaced by the assumption of sameness, as the hachischin mistakenly likens the pharmacist to himself. The shift from correct differentiation to wrongly assumed identification is the result from the progression of the distorting effects of hashish. In attempting to assimilate the pharmacist with himself, the hachishin demonstrates his blindness to difference and reveals the loss of his ability to maintain critical distance.

4.10 The Hankering for Hashish

Another danger posed by hashish, in addition to the collapse of the Self into an image and the faulty judgment that ensues, is that it draws the consumer back for more:

L'homme [...] n'est pas corrigé. Il a continué à demander à la confiture maudite l'excitation qu'il faut trouver en soi-même; mais comme c'est un homme prudent, rangé, *un homme du monde*, il a diminué les doses, ce qui lui a permis d'en augmenter la fréquence. Il appréciera plus tard les fruits pourris de son hygiène. (415-416)

The hashish-eater is judged to be “pas corrigé,” which means that the consumption of hashish is deemed a mistake. The willful ingestion of the intoxicant, no matter how

careful one may be in regulating the dosage, leads inevitably to one's detriment. This constant pursuit of the drug, expressed as a repetitive, habitual experience, is suggestive of an addiction.

Addiction, to Derrida, it is not itself deplorable, but what is reprehensible is its mutual exclusivity with truth and authenticity: "Le toxicomane, on ne lui reproche pas la jouissance même, mais un plaisir pris à des expériences sans vérité. Le plaisir et le jeu [...] ne sont pas condamnés en eux-mêmes, mais seulement quand ils sont inauthentiques et privés de vérité" (249).

What is the allure of hashish that holds the man back from correcting his ways? How is he seduced by the drug to forgo the unmediated grasp of reality to dwell instead in the mediated experience by hashish, which operates in the perpetuation of images and illusions? Baudelaire explains the fatal attraction:

C'est ce que les Orientaux appellent le *kief*; c'est le bonheur absolu. Ce n'est plus quelque chose de tourbillonnant et de tumultueux. C'est une béatitude calme et immobile. Tous les problèmes philosophiques sont résolus. Toutes les questions ardues contre lesquelles s'escriment les théologiens et qui font le désespoir de l'humanité raisonnante, sont limpides et claires. Toute contradiction est devenue unité. L'homme est *passé* dieu (OC I 394, original emphasis).

Not only is a heightened happiness achieved through the intoxicant, but that bliss is also linked to the possession of knowledge; the drug promises discovery and even cosmic understanding.

The “bonheur absolu” that Baudelaire mentions is reiterated by Walter Benjamin in his own experience and experimentation with hashish intoxication, following the reading of Baudelaire’s writing:¹⁸

To begin to solve the riddle of the ecstasy of trance, one ought to meditate on Ariadne’s thread. What joy in the mere act of unrolling a ball of thread! And this joy is very deeply related to the joy of intoxication, just as it is to the joy of creation. We go forward; but in so doing, we not only discover the twists and turns of the cave into which we’re venturing, but also enjoy this pleasure of discovery against the background of the other, rhythmic bliss of unwinding the thread. (123)¹⁹

By referencing Ariadne in “Hashish in Marseilles,” Benjamin relates the reality of his lived experience with Greek mythology, and thereby situates intoxication at that in-between space between fact and fantasy. This resonates with Marcus Boon’s claim that what madness, the dream state and hashish intoxication have in common is that they all occupy the interstice between the real and the unreal, which is also the space of literature (133).

¹⁸ In a letter to Ernst Schoen, dated September 19, 1919, Benjamin writes, “I have also read Baudelaire’s *Paradis artificiels*. It is an extremely reticent, unoriented attempt to monitor the “psychological” phenomena that manifest themselves in hashish or opium intoxication for what they have to teach us philosophically. It will be necessary to repeat this attempt [*Versuch*] independently of this book” (144 *On Hashish*).

¹⁹ The rest of the citation is as follows: “The certainty of unrolling an artfully wound skein—isn’t that the joy of all productivity, at least in prose? And under the influence of hashish, we are enraptured prose-beings raised to the highest power” (123). While Benjamin aligns intoxication with prose, Baudelaire’s text aligns it with poetry, as the hashishin states, “Mais je n’oublierai jamais les tortures d’une ivresse ultra-poétique, gênée par le decorum et contrariée par un devoir!” (OC I 415)

The overwhelming sense of euphoria—summed up by “ecstasy,” “joy” “bliss” and “pleasure”— corresponds with the third stage²⁰ of hashish intoxication, *kief*, as explained by Baudelaire. Nevertheless, implicit in Benjamin’s euphoria and Baudelaire’s *kief* is the threat of death:²¹ Ariadne’s red thread was to help Theseus navigate the dangerous labyrinth containing the monstrous Minotaur. To pursue the hashish experience is then to enter into a space with the risk of death, in which one could become easily lost and consequently trapped.

4.11 Losing Your Mind

The notion of intoxication as entrapment comes out most clearly in the fourth and last anecdote of “Le Théâtre de Séraphin,” as recounted by the anonymous woman after she has retreated to her room, overtaken by hashish:

Vous devinez ici l’effet des panneaux répercutés par les miroirs. En levant les yeux, je vis un soleil couchant semblable à du métal en fusion qui se refroidit. C’était l’or du plafond ; mais le treillage me donna à penser que j’étais dans une espèce de cage ou de maison ouverte de tous côtés sur l’espace et que je n’étais séparée de toutes ces merveilles que par les barreaux de ma magnifique prison. Je riais d’abord de mon illusion ; mais plus je regardais, plus la magie augmentait, plus elle prenait de vie, de transparence et de despotique réalité. Dès lors l’idée de claustration domina mon esprit, sans trop nuire, je dois le dire, aux plaisirs variés que je tirais du spectacle tendu autour et au-dessus de moi. Je me considérais comme enfermée pour longtemps, pour des milliers d’années peut-être, dans cette cage somptueuse, au milieu de ces paysages féeriques, entre ces horizons merveilleux. (423)

²⁰ The first stage is hilarity, followed by the second stage of extraordinary benevolence coupled with intense physical sensitivity.

²¹ The threat of death by drugs became real for Benjamin, who died of a morphine overdose in 1940.

The impressions described are undeniably from a person who is stoned, passively taking in the hashish-induced hallucinations. Under the influence of hashish, she is a “prisonnière étendue, condamnée à l’immobilité” (423) within “les murs [...] recouverts de glaces étroites et allongées, séparées par des panneaux où sont peints des paysages dans le style lâché des décors” (422). As opposed to a sense of liberation and abandon, this hashishin expresses over and over her feeling of “clausturation,” describing her room as a “prison” and “cage,” which keeps her “enfermée.”

Given the account of the intoxicated woman, the discourse of intoxication is also the discourse of containment. It is not only a physical confinement, but also a psychic enclosure, as illusions take captive of the hashish-eater’s perception of her surroundings. Her admission that “[elle] riait d’abord de [s]on illusion ; mais plus [elle] regardais, plus la magie augmentait, plus elle prenait de vie, de transparence et de despotique réalité ” is quite telling in terms of her giving into fantasy. What she recognizes at first as “illusion ” becomes “despotique réalité.” Hashish transforms illusion into reality, to the extent that she could no longer distinguish between the two and consequently loses any sense of true reality.

It is no coincidence that hashish-eater’s sense of entrapment, both physical and psychic, is situated within an enclosed, mirrored space. After all, the mirror for Baudelaire stands for intoxication and the indulgence in images and illusions. The danger of this state is the inability to separate reality from fantasy, the original from the

copy, just as the hashishin from the first anecdote could not sever his identity from the misrepresented image he saw of himself in the glass.

As I had pointed out earlier in this chapter, Baudelaire equates hashish with a “miroir grossissant”: “L’homme n’échappera pas à la fatalité de son tempérament physique et moral : le hachisch sera, pour les impressions et les pensées familières de l’homme, un miroir grossissant, mais un pur miroir ” (OC I 409). To consume hashish is to gaze into a deceptive mirror. In one instance, the poet even conflates the hashish-eater and Narcissus:

Ajouterai-je que le hachisch, comme toutes les joies solitaires, rend l’individu inutile aux hommes et la société superflue pour l’individu, le poussant à s’admirer sans cesse lui-même et le précipitant jour à jour vers le gouffre lumineux où il admire sa face de Narcisse ? (OC I 439)

Baudelaire is evoking Ovid’s character, who is intoxicatingly and irrevocably in love with his own image reflected by the still water. Unable to withdraw himself from gazing vainly into the self-reflection, Narcissus is in effect caught in a closed circuit of desire. Desire starts *and* ends with Narcissus, which takes place at the exclusion of others. It is only the Self and the image of the Self. The initial attraction to the mirror-image, “[t]hat false face [which] fools and fuels his delight” (III v.432),²² leads to an obsession that turns fatal, as Narcissus wastes away from unattainable love and his

²² Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Melville, A. D. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998

body, according to Ovid's tale, eventually disappears. What remains of Narcissus' corporeal evaporation is the eponymous white-petaled flower.

By way of Greek mythology, Baudelaire cautions against hashish as the pursuit of the image, which results in a deadly dissipation for the narcissistic hashishin. The vaporization of the hashishin comes when he is no longer consuming the intoxicant, but is being consumed by it, having surrendered (self-)control to "un faux bonheur et une fausse lumière" (441). The notion of the consumer becoming consumed under the influence of hashish is described by Baudelaire in an earlier text, "Du vin et du hachisch": "Vous êtes assis et vous fumez; vous croyez être assis dans votre pipe, et c'est vous que votre pipe fume; c'est vous qui vous exhalez sous la forme de nuages bleuâtres" (OC I 392). The solid sense of Self is destabilized through intoxication as it disintegrates into smoke.

Baudelaire speaks more specifically on the surrender and loss of the Self in terms of the mind. Concluding the anecdote of the woman under the influence of hashish, enclosed and entranced by her visions, the poet states, "dans le récit de cette dame (c'est dans ce but que je l'ai transcrit), l'hallucination est d'un genre bâtard, et tire sa raison d'être du spectacle extérieur ; l'esprit n'est qu'un miroir où le milieu environnant se reflète transformé d'une manière outrée" (425). What is especially striking is Baudelaire's use of the mirror in discussing the mind on hashish. Recalling the poet's previous designation of hashish as a "miroir grossissant," we can note the connection

between the drug and the drugged mind that is said to be a mirror that returns a reflection “outrée.” Both the intoxicated mind and the intoxicant are said to be distortive mirrors.

It is as though the mind on hashish has lost its own property and has taken on that of the drug, which is reflection in exaggeration and ultimately misrepresentation. This signals the surrender of the altered mind to the intoxicant and given that the two are no longer distinguishable, since both are identified as mirrors of distortion, the hashish consumer is portrayed as someone who has effectively lost her own mind.²³

The severity of hashish’s threat to the mental faculties is expressed by Baudelaire when he compares it to “suicide, à un suicide lent, à une arme toujours sanglante et toujours aiguisée” (439). Hashish is both the self-willed death and the weapon; it is both the end and the means. By describing the drug as a sharp weapon that is poised to make its cut and has in fact already made its cut (hence the bloodiness), Baudelaire is corporealizing the mental demise, the loss of critical and creative capacity. He is giving flesh to the intangible damage, externalizing the internal and translating the intellectual wound into a gory, physical one.

²³ As a poetic tactic, the parallel between the mind and the drug enacts, in effect, Baudelaire’s assertion that “[c]onclure, c’est fermer un cercle” (OC I 440). The poet begins “Le Théâtre de Séraphin” with the hashish-mirror and ends it with the mind-mirror. The end circles back to the beginning by way of the mirror. In addition to this circling, there’s also the bookend effect from setting up these two mirrors, one at the beginning and one at the end of the anecdotal portion of “Le Poème du hachisch.” Thus, the anecdotes of intoxication are enclosed within the mise en abyme of reflections, reinforcing the notion that the discussion of hashish consumption, similar to the hashish experience itself, entails confinement and gives rise to multiple distorted reflections.

4.12 *The Mimesis of Suicide*

As texts that caution against the deadly danger of illusions, “Le Poème du hachisch” is primarily a warning against the influence of hashish on the mind, while “La Corde” focuses on the body and the embodied subjectivity. Even though art and hashish are both presented as media that generate illusions, I have shown that Baudelaire is not anti-art, but is anti-hashish. The poet complicates the distinction between reality and representation by situating the revelation of the artifice of art and the condemnation of the deception by hashish in the mimetic art form of poetry. Representation’s engagement with reality signals the possibility and even disclosure of truth, as the revelation of illusions, in mimesis.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined the trope of suicide in light of the issues of reality and illusion contained in mimesis. I now conclude with the consideration of the mimesis of suicide, that is actual suicides²⁴ generating fictional suicides, fictional suicides generating actual suicide, fictional suicides generating fictional suicides and actual suicides generating actual suicides.

As the author “La Corde” and “Le Poème du hachisch,” texts that I have read focusing on the self-willed death, Baudelaire had his own brush with suicide. In a letter to Narcisse Ancelle dated June 30, 1845, the then 24-year-old Baudelaire writes, “Je me

²⁴ In his sociological study of suicide entitled *Le Suicide*, published in 1930, Emile Durkheim defined that phenomenon as “*tout cas de mort qui résulte directement ou indirectement d’un acte positif ou négatif, accompli par la victime elle-même et qu’elle savait devoir produire ce résultat*” (5, original emphasis).

tue parce que je ne puis plus vivre, que la fatigue de m'endormir et la fatigue de me réveiller me sont insupportables. Je me tue parce que je suis inutile aux autres—et *dangereux à moi-même*. Je me tue parce que je me crois immortel, et que *j'espère*" (Corr I 124-125). These words that vacillated between mortality and immortality, despair and hope, would become less ambivalent, as they would eventually take the form of action. In W.T. Bandy's *Baudelaire devant ses contemporains*, Louis Ménard gives the account of Baudelaire's procurement of Prussic acid, otherwise known as hydrogen cyanide, presumably to poison himself. However, that took a more violent and gory turn, when Baudelaire was said to have stabbed himself with a knife instead of ingesting the toxic. This was believed to have taken place at the end of June in 1845, which would correspond with the dark thoughts contained in the letter to Ancelle.

While there is no other recorded suicide attempt, the thought of ending his own life did not cease to haunt Baudelaire. In another letter, dated April 20, 1860, about 5 years after the one addressed to Ancelle, Baudelaire confesses to his mother: "Songe donc que depuis tant, tant d'années, je vis sans cesse au bord du suicide. Je ne te dis pas cela pour t'effrayer ; car je me sens malheureusement condamné à vivre ; mais simplement pour te donner une idée de ce que j'endure depuis des années qui pour moi ont été des siècles" (Corr II 25).

It is hard to determine how Baudelaire's suicidal mindset impacted his writing on suicide, but "La Corde," a text based on Alexandre's suicide, is one of the most gripping prose poems penned by this poet.

In the case of fictional suicides occasioning other fictional suicides, there is the movie adaptation "Le Roman de Werther," released in 1938, directed by Max Ophüls and based on Goethe's eighteenth-century novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which depicts a lovelorn protagonist who shoots himself. This book is a famous example of a fictional suicide giving rise to actual(ized) suicides, as there were enough "copycat suicides" sparked by this work that, according to David P. Phillips, authorities banned it in Italy, Leipzig and Copenhagen. The mimetic effect of Werther's death has come to be known as the Werther effect, which, in the contemporary context, refers to the contagion of a celebrity's suicide covered in the media prompting a rise in suicides. There are of course many factors in this, such as the identity of the celebrity, how the death is portrayed by the media and the mental states of the individuals receiving the news.

Epilogue

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
(T. S. Eliot, vv.1-7, "The Waste Land")

Resisting Death and Keeping Death Alive

This dissertation began as a reflection on the possibilities and limitations of response to death. Rather than merely accept death and its capacity to silence human response, Baudelaire records his grappling with death as a resistance to the "sans-réponse," the no-response, the lack of expressivity that Lévinas has asserted death to be.

Baudelaire recognizes the threat of silence imposed by death. I have shown in the opening chapter of this dissertation, "Dead Silent," that the very instant of the first-person death, the break between existence and nonexistence, is not capturable. This elusive moment dissolves into silence and absence. At the same time, death, the state of being dead, is not an abrupt annihilation. Existence is not simply extinguished. There is instead a suggestion of something beyond the moment of death. "Une Mort héroïque" suggests an artistic transcendence following the death of Fancioulle; "Le Rêve d'un curieux" portrays the post-death experience and existence as perpetual and indeterminate waiting; and "Le Voyage" postulates a never-ending journey of death.

“Voices Beyond the Grave,” the second chapter, continues to support the notion of an afterlife in Baudelaire’s poetic conception, not in a traditional metaphysical conception, but as the articulation of a post-mortem voice through which the didactic dead contradict the living. Just as voice indicates existence, the post-mortem voice indicates post-mortem existence.

Could the recurring suggestion of an afterlife, even in the form of death’s active contradiction of life, be a reflection of a religious conviction on the part of Baudelaire? There is no clear-cut answer to this question. Moreover, as I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, John E. Jackson and Claude Pichois’ edited volume *Baudelaire: Figures de la mort, Figures de l’éternité*, provides a theological look into Baudelaire’s poetry, which was of course once charged with blasphemy, that does not demand the God of Christianity. I propose that ultimately Baudelaire aspired to a certain “hygiene” of his theory of mind, a hygiene imbued with religious practices and echoes:

Hygiène. Conduite. Méthode. - Je me jure à moi-même de prendre désormais les règles suivantes pour règles éternelles de ma vie :
Faire tous les matins ma prière à Dieu, *réservoir de toute force et de toute justice*, à mon père, à Mariette et à Poe, comme intercesseurs ; les prier de me communiquer *la force nécessaire* pour accomplir tous mes devoirs, et d'octroyer à ma mère *une vie assez longue* pour jouir de ma transformation ; travailler toute la journée, ou du moins *tant que mes forces me le permettront* ; me fier à Dieu, c'est-à-dire à la Justice même, pour la réussite de mes projets ; faire, tous les soirs, une nouvelle prière, pour demander à Dieu la vie et la force pour ma mère et pour moi ; faire, de tout ce que je gagnerai, quatre parts, - une pour la vie courante, une pour mes créanciers, une pour mes amis, et une pour ma mère ; - obéir aux principes de la

plus stricte sobriété, dont le premier est la suppression de tous les excitants, quels qu'ils soient. (OC I 673)

This offers a very personal glimpse into the poet's faith, equally emblemized by the afterlife of his father, who had passed away when the poet was only six, of the maternal nanny from his childhood on whom the poem "La Servante au grand coeur" is based, and of Poe, the macabre American writer whom Baudelaire admired.

Baudelaire's poetry does make it clear that death is not an unambiguous annihilation, but the opening up of something new, as indicated especially by "Le Voyage," the last verse of which is "Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau!*" (v.144, original emphasis). Death as the expansive experience of exploration can also be read in "La Mort des artistes," which refers to the blossoming of art, previously conceived as the artist's brainchild, brought about by "la Mort [qui], planant comme un soleil nouveau, / Fera s'épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau!" (vv.13-14) The notion of expansion is reiterated in "La Mort des amants," which recounts the opening up of an earlier enclosed space of death by "un Ange [qui], entr'ouvrant les portes, / Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux, / Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes" (vv.12-14).

According to Baudelaire, death is not the end for the dead. But what about the living, for whom the death of a loved one does seem like the end, either in the sense of the shattering of their world with the passing of the one they love--as Derrida later proposes in *Béliers*--or in the sense that for the living, the dead really have ended their

existence? Mourning is the response—the ongoing engagement and dialogue—with the death of a loved one in the cognitive present of survivors. It is through the figure of the widow that Baudelaire engages with the process of grief. As my third chapter, “Baudelaire’s Widows,” reveals, mourning and modernity are intimately linked, since Baudelaire’s poetic discussion of widows is framed within his urban poetry. I have also demonstrated that the widow is depicted by the poet to be a figure of modernity par excellence, and that Baudelaire’s representation of the bereaved woman illustrates the work of cognitive memory posited by psychologists and neuroscientists.

Poetry, as employed by Baudelaire, is a medium of reality lived and constructed through representation, as I hypothesize in my last chapter, “Lethal Illusions,” which examines art and hashish as means for the production of illusion. The surrender of critical faculties to indulgence in the illusions produced by the intoxicant, relinquishing the grasp of reality, is condemned by Baudelaire as suicide. Similar to hashish, art is also demonstrated to be a means to suicide, as I have shown through the artist-model interrelation in “La Corde.” However, unlike hashish, art, in the case of poetry, is redeemed by Baudelaire as the channel of a truth understood as the revelation of illusions—not least the illusion of a life without death.

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Biography

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