

**POE AND BAUDELAIRE:  
THE CREATION OF MUTUAL LEGACY**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is nearly impossible to discuss Charles Baudelaire without simultaneously invoking the name of Edgar Allan Poe. The two authors have been linked to each other ever since Baudelaire's famous "shock of recognition" upon reading Poe's tale, "The Black Cat", translated in the French newspaper, *La Démocratie Pacifique*, in 1847. "Mon semblable, Mon frère!" he exclaimed. Later he explained to his friends "The first time I opened one of his books I saw, to my amazement and delight, not simply certain subjects which I had dreamed of, but sentences which I had thought out, written by him twenty years before" (Quinn 15). After this exciting discovery, though, Baudelaire once again became preoccupied with his own writing and did not revisit Poe until 1856. It was at this time that he began to search actively for more tales by Poe and more information on his life.

Most of this information came from Poe's biography by Rufus Griswold; thus many of his ideas about the American author's life were skewed and based on misinformation<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, when Baudelaire eventually discovered that Griswold had written the biography with the malicious intent to slander Poe's name, he became incensed and

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<sup>1</sup> Baudelaire related to the French public that after an argument with his foster father Poe ran away from home to participate in the Greek Revolution. He then, according to the French poet, went to Russia where Americans saved him from exile to Siberia after he got in trouble with the Russian government. It makes for an interesting story, but none of this ever happened (Vines 11).

attempted to ruin Griswold's reputation in France. His efforts were largely wasted, though, for few Frenchmen were concerned with the reputation of the obscure American biographer. However, this did not deter the French poet, who avidly pursued gathering and translating Poe's tales and reading his theoretical essays such as "The Philosophy of Composition".

Gradually, Baudelaire did succeed in learning about Poe's life through other channels. He sought out Americans in Paris and asked them about Poe and his works. The more the French poet discovered about his "semblable" the deeper the connection he felt towards him. The similarities in style and subject he initially identified in "The Black Cat" expanded to parallels in his personal life. Poe's parents died when he was very young and he was sent to stay with his uncle John Allan and Frances Valentine Allan. He developed a close relationship with his aunt, but he and his uncle were constantly at odds<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, it was John Allan who refused to formally adopt him. When he died in 1834 he left Edgar none of his massive fortune because he was displeased at Poe's choice to pursue a literary career and at his general lack of success.

Baudelaire was empathetic to this chapter in Poe's life and felt he was even more tied to him because of their mutual experiences. His father passed away when Baudelaire was still young and in a short while his

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<sup>2</sup> Poe had three maternal figures in his life: Elizabeth Arnold Poe (his biological mother who died when he was age two), Frances Allan (his foster mother), and Maria Poe Clemm (his aunt and mother-in-law). Baudelaire would come to idolize Clemm, believing that Poe was closest to her (Vines 10, 11).

mother remarried. This was traumatic because he felt his mother had betrayed him. The new relationship seemed to shatter the close and tender relationship he shared with his mother. Though he would always care for her and seek her approval, there was so much contention between himself and his stepfather that Baudelaire began to act out. His habits became so extravagant that his parents were compelled to put him under the supervision of an accountant which only added to the tension. Like Poe's parents, Baudelaire's family never approved of their son's career choice and saw it as a decision to be lazy and juvenile.

This struggle and need for approval was, in many ways, satisfied by reading Poe. In the American author's tales Baudelaire read his own ideas and felt justified. They were often so far from popular French literary culture that his poetry and prose never received enough success for him to feel truly accomplished. Thus, when he encountered Poe there was a sense that he was doing something right. He began to believe that the French public was at fault for his lack of recognition, just as the narrow views of Americans were at fault for Poe's struggle for success. Indeed, Baudelaire came to believe that the only reason Poe's stories were not overwhelmingly successful was because Americans were not able to understand Poe's genius.

Indeed, the differences between the French and American reception of Poe is intriguing. "By most standards, Poe was not a very good writer...Aldous Huxley called him 'vulgar', with a show-off manner he

likened to wearing a gaudy ring on every finger and George Orwell declared that he was “at worst...not far from being insane in the literal clinical sense” (Jackson 3). To this day many wonder at the lasting success of such an unconventional author. This is an important point; everyone knows Poe not because he was mediocre but because somewhere in his works is found a certain type of genius. “Conan Doyle admitted only two masters in the genre of the short story, Maupassant and Poe” and today HP Lovecraft and Stephen King acknowledge Poe as part of their inspiration and founding genius (Jackson 4).

If Poe enjoyed only a small amount of success in America, in France he has been placed among the ranks of high literary culture. This was largely due to Baudelaire. It is well known that *Les Fleurs du Mal* was put on trial upon their first publication because they were seen as an insult to public decency and six of the poems were banned until 1949. Like Poe, the French poet struggled throughout his life with debt and poverty because of the lack of interest in his publications. His only true success came from the publication and sales of *Les Histoires Extraordinaires* and *Les Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires*. Despite having limited success with his own works, though, Baudelaire was motivated to proclaim Poe as a literary genius and successfully promoted him to an “honorary French classic author” (Jackson 7).

In his famous essay “From Poe to Valéry” T.S. Eliot examines Poe’s success in France. His first assertion is that the French are more receptive

to Poe because they view all of his works as a whole, while Americans view them individually. When accepted as a whole one can see the expression and overall sense of unity in the author's works, as well as an impressive variety of form and subject. While the French admit that Poe's works can sometimes seem "fragmentary", this is clearly only due to unfortunate circumstances such as poverty, frailty, or poor health. This is true. Baudelaire himself comments in his essay "Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe" that his American "brother" was the victim of the literary and social views of American society.

Eliot's larger argument, though, that the French read Poe's works as a whole, is built on faulty logic. Again, we need look no further than Baudelaire to find a counter example. If anything, the French author was introduced to Poe's works more slowly than the average American reader. After his initial shock, Baudelaire had trouble finding other tales written by Poe, and even when he did, he only came by them in small groups. A volume of "The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe" did not exist. Even if Poe's works were more accessible to the French public during Eliot's time, the fact that the man who introduced Poe to France had a completely different experience is enough to falsify the argument.

However, Eliot offers a second theory, stating that when Baudelaire began to translate Poe he must not have had a solid understanding of the English language and was unable to see the faults in Poe's works that are so glaringly obvious to English speaking readers. Of course, when

Baudelaire first began translating Poe's tales his English was only passably good and he made many mistakes. However, as he continued his search for information about his newfound American "semblable" the French poet became determined to learn more English and his skills vastly improved precisely because he spent so much time reading Poe and translating his works.

Eliot's final explanation of Poe's success in France is that Baudelaire's translations of Poe's tales were more enjoyable because his French was better than the American author's "shoddy" English. However, being a poet himself, I doubt that Baudelaire would have sung Poe's praises to the French literary circles had he found his craftsmanship to be insufficient. Additionally, it is remarkable that Poe was accepted by a society that so adamantly opposed poems with the same themes and motifs by a French author. Had it really only been a matter of language, the French should not have approved of Baudelaire's translations any more than they approved of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

It is generally accepted, though, that Poe is successful in France because of Baudelaire, but there are many conflicting beliefs about the extent of Poe's impact on Baudelaire's writing. While it is largely acknowledged that the American poet must have had an effect on his personal life, accounts vary as to the extent of the American author's presence in Baudelaire's poetry and prose. This logic itself is flawed. I would contend that for a man who took so much of his inspiration from

his daily experiences and the city around him it would be impossible to ignore Poe's influence on his mind and heart out of his writing. Indeed, there are countless examples of ways in which Baudelaire's personal life infiltrated his writing, such as his prose poem "A une Heure du Matin" and poem "Rêve Parisien". If scholars claim that Poe influenced Baudelaire on a personal level, they imply that he also affected him professionally.

However, many examine Baudelaire's oeuvre separately. From this vantage point scholars argue that Poe's influence was limited. Some such as Lois Hyslop cite the dates of publication of Baudelaire's poetry. It is difficult to construct a definitive timeline for the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* largely because Baudelaire never ceased rewriting individual poems and changing their order in the collection. He fought bitterly with his editors and frequently stopped the presses to make final adjustments to the latest drafts. However, it is believed that most of the poems were written between 1840 and 1850. Since this was ten years before Baudelaire's discovery of Poe, these scholars contend that the American author could have had no direct impact on the poetry of Baudelaire. I would argue, though, that if the two authors were writing about similar themes and in a similar style prior to any knowledge of each other, then Baudelaire did recognize something of himself deep in Poe's works.

Dudley M. Marchi would agree. He says, "Baudelaire learned from his close contact with Poe's verse how to produce artistic beauty, musical

sonority, and an intense emotional register in his own poetry" (5). Indeed, it is easy to find many elements of Poe's literary theories in Baudelaire's poetry and prose, but also in the French author's critiques of his contemporaries. He was a more prolific critic than his American "semblable", of course, but he revised many of his aesthetic ideals after reading essays such as "The Philosophy of Composition".

While he does not do so directly, I would argue that Walter Benjamin offers the strongest argument in favor of Poe's influence on Baudelaire's works in his essay "Some Motifs on Baudelaire", starting with the two author's literary theories. His explanations of Baudelaire's ideas of beauty, "correspondence", the need to shock his readers, and his relationship to the masses all have strong echoes of Poe. Margaret Gilman also contends that Baudelaire owed much of his ideas of beauty to the American author as well (96). That every insight into Baudelaire's ideals of literature and the city naturally reflect those of Poe is proof of their strong connection to each other and, more importantly, evidence of Poe's thoughts on Baudelaire's pages.

Not only does Benjamin demonstrate the ways in which the American poet's ideas are found in Baudelaire's works, but he supports his argument by including the presence of Poe's social criticism. He includes a short comparison of Baudelaire's "Les Foules" and Poe's "The Man of the Crowd". Poe's story is cited as an example of the motif of the crowd in literature (170), but in discussing the masses in literature as a

whole, Benjamin stumbles once again on Baudelaire's relationship with Poe. He notes that Baudelaire was not a flâneur, yet the French author was tied to the city streets and the masses. Though Poe lived much of his life in solitude he was acutely aware of the social norms and political ideals in his native Virginia. He and Baudelaire both write about the city and crowds with the same tone, and though Baudelaire's criticisms are blunt and Poe's are revealed through irony, they each judge harshly and on similar matters. Indeed, they envision themselves in the same place on the social ladder and eventually Baudelaire would dub them both "un poète maudit". Benjamin's essay is compelling because it demonstrates that the two authors are intrinsically tied together through their lives, their literature, and their literary and social criticism<sup>3</sup>.

### *FRENCH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE*

French literature in the first half of the nineteenth century was fairly restrained. According to Patrick Quinn, "The romantic movement...was largely a matter of surface movement and theatrical gestures. It did not innovate. It was not radical" (44). They loved their old ideals founded on order, science, and reason and would not be shaken from it (Quinn 44). This was what Baudelaire fought against with his

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<sup>3</sup> In this well-known essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin provides an in-depth exploration of the French poet's works and the effect they had on his life. He focuses on Baudelaire's relationship to the Parisian masses and his life-long struggle of simultaneously being tied to them and separated from them by his poetry.

poetry and prose poems; he attempted to shock them out of this tired mentality through new themes, motifs, and literary techniques. No doubt this environment contributed to his identification as a “poète maudit” and his frustration with lack of acceptance and understanding. His crowning moment of success in shaking the banal norms of literature, ironically, was when he introduced *un Américain* and promoted him as a genius and a necessary addition to the French literary canon.

This promotion in itself was radical because, for the most part, the French did not have a very high opinion of Americans or their culture. The most common view was that Americans were only semi-civilized (Marchi). Baudelaire agreed. In fact, the French poet’s view of America explains why he had so much sympathy for Poe. He regarded Poe’s difficulties in his career as a result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. America was unimaginative and unappreciative of anything original or insightful. It was a place where artistic production was stifled by an overwhelming commercialist democracy (“*Sa Vie et Ses Ouvrages*”). Baudelaire was confident that in another environment, such as France, Poe could be a literary giant.

Given the American response to Poe the French poet makes a reasonable hypothesis. “The general reading public, which might be expected to show a warm interest in Poe, or at least a dutiful respect for him, has shown neither” (Quinn 10). It is well known that Poe’s lack of success was due as much to the unusual content of his tales as it was to his

personal habits. Not only did his compatriots disapprove of his drinking, but Poe also succeeded so much in shocking his readers that he frightened them away. This fate was similar to that of Baudelaire in France, which makes Poe's success there even more intriguing.

"Ironically", Dudley Marchi argues, "the salient qualities of Poe's tales – macabre, fantastical, satanic, realistically depicting the darker side of life as endowed with a degree of consoling beauty – were the very same qualities so admired in France, which the French reading public objected to in the poetry of Baudelaire." (2) Logically, then, Poe should not have been a success in France at all. While I disagree with the idea that Poe's tales "realistically" depict the darker side of life (his creative methods of torture in many of his tales can hardly be considered "realistic"), Marchi raises an important question. Since Baudelaire and Poe's connection was based so heavily on their literature, how is it possible that Baudelaire had so little success in France while Poe achieved so much?

### *NARROW-MINDED AMERICANS*

Today, the segment of Poe's oeuvre that is most commonly read in France (and in America) is comprised of his tales, but when he was first being introduced French poets and critics were drawn to his literary theory and poetry (Quinn 35). Marcel Françon argues that Baudelaire was shocked by Poe's works not because they were new and akin to his own

ideas, but because they had concepts that were French in origin (Quinn 35).

Poe's literary theory...derived chiefly from the thought of Coleridge and in this way may be tied up to antecedent ideas in Germany, those of A.W. von Schlegel especially. But behind Schlegel, in turn, there is eighteenth-century French thought. A minor French critic of that era, Houdart de la Mote, emphasized the 'unity of interest' principle...Hédelin another eighteenth-century French writer, seems to be the man remotely responsible for the theory that a long poem is a contradiction in terms (Quinn 36).

I doubt that Baudelaire would have felt such instant and deep feeling for Poe based merely on the connection of his theories to French literary ideals. To begin with, French literary traditions were something that Baudelaire was often trying to disrupt with his work. Secondly, it was not until after he read many of Poe's tales that Baudelaire acquired a copy of "The Philosophy of Composition" or "The Poetic Principle". However, as a reason for Poe's ultimate acceptance throughout France, this is a strong explanation. For a society that so clearly valued reason and logic in its literature and art it is only natural that it would first examine the theory behind the literature before making their final judgment<sup>4</sup>.

The most familiar argument for Poe's French success is that Baudelaire improved Poe's work when he translated them. While there are some small examples of this, such as correcting Poe's geography or

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<sup>4</sup> "The phrase 'ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français' is an axiom that is so well known and is only one example of the pervasive respect for logic in France. It has been suggested that Poe was so appealing in France because of the logical quality of his work – a logic that was 'divorced from reality'" (Quinn 31).

mathematical calculations in “The Extraordinary Tale of Haans Phall”, the argument is not compelling. All works are inherently modified through translation, but since Baudelaire believed Poe to be so brilliant, I doubt that he would have intentionally changed the originals significantly. Any changes he would have made would have made Poe’s works more like his own, confusing their favorable reception even more.

Patrick Quinn’s argument is more substantial. The French historically valued reason. Poe’s tales are “far from aimless and uncontrolled effusions. They have shape and an individuality that they would not possess unless...firmly controlling intelligence behind them” (Quinn 31,32). When Baudelaire introduced Poe to the French literary public they saw this rationale – something truly shocking coming from an American – and were drawn to it. What this argument lacks, though, is an explanation as to why they did not see this reason in Baudelaire. The French author admired so many of Poe’s stylistic traits and literary theories that he incorporated them into his own works. His poems, then, should be just as logical if not more so. Nevertheless, Baudelaire struggled to promote his own works and suffered financially due to their lack of popularity.

These circumstances make the French poet’s sustained promotion of Poe intriguing. Initially it seems as if the shock of recognition caused him to give up promoting his own career in exchange for broadening another’s horizons. While some argue that Baudelaire’s motivation was

the deep connection he felt to Poe others, such as Jonathan Culler, believe it was to create a man as great as himself in order to outshine one of his rivals, Victor Hugo. This is a more logical hypothesis. Since their works shared so many themes and their views on literary theory were so in tune, perhaps Baudelaire saw Poe's tales as a medium for presenting his own ideas to the French public.

If Baudelaire hoped that presenting Poe's works would open an audience for his own poetry, he would not achieve his goal until many years after his death. If, however, he was interested in presenting the ideas to the public at any cost, then he was brilliantly successful. Once he introduced Poe's work into the mainstream it went on to have a major impact on the literature of the nineteenth century and, years later, on Europe as a whole. Indeed, Baudelaire's translations would not only inspire authors, but also painters such as Manet, who painted "The Raven" and Redon, who painted an interpretation of "The Tell Tale Heart". For the poet who believed that there was a correspondence between all art forms, this, perhaps, was the ultimate success.

While none of these explanations are completely satisfying, and all of the evidence that Poe had minimal impact on Baudelaire can be discounted, they raise important points. What, ultimately, was the connection between Baudelaire and Poe and how did they affect each other's lives and careers? Further, how is it that the French poet was able to build such a successful career for Poe in France when he himself

struggled to get by, and what motivated him to do so? Through a close examination of their literature, their social criticism, and their literary theory I address these questions; in the process I explore not only the impact the two authors had on each other, but also the effect their relationship has had on French and American literary canons.

## I. LITERARY THEORY IN POE AND BAUDELAIRE

### *POETICS*

Baudelaire continued to revise much of his work throughout his life, particularly his collection of poetry, *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This makes it difficult to map out a definitive time line for its creation, but scholars are fairly certain that most of them were written between 1840 and 1850, before Baudelaire began to translate Poe's works and become familiar with him. Though many poems were originally composed during those years, Baudelaire revised most of them throughout his life. Some scholars cite this as proof that Poe could not have had an influence on his poetry. However, Poe's theoretical ideas as well as many of the over-arching themes in his tales are abundantly present in Baudelaire's works; I would argue that the French poet's constant revision gave him the opportunity to incorporate traits of his American "brother's" works into his writing as he became more deeply immersed in them<sup>5</sup>.

Even in the very structure of Baudelaire's collection of poetry we find an uncanny connection to Poe. *Les Fleurs du Mal* was intended to be read as several short poems that, when read together, created a whole that told a larger story. In fact, Baudelaire was so intent on this that when he

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<sup>5</sup> While there is no evidence of exactly when and how Baudelaire edited his poems, it is understood by scholars that he did so frequently and accounts from his friends detail that he did so with Poe's tales in mind.

first submitted only a handful of the poems to a magazine, he informed the editor that he wished to be included in the decision of the order of the poems, once the editor had made his selection (Runyon 2). Over the years, scholars have studied how the poems work together to form a whole and have pointed out that instead of being continuous, each poem repeats elements of the poem before in what is almost always a completely different context. "The Poems play off each other in pairs by virtue of the resulting discrepancy, indeed quite often an ensuing opposition, between how the repeated element functions in one context and how it functions in the other" (Runyon 10).

This adheres to Poe's theory of unity, an element that Baudelaire himself noticed in the American author's tales. He says, "In the books of Edgar Poe, the style is closely woven, concatenated; neither the reader's recalcitrant will nor his laziness can pass through the meshes of the net woven by logic. All the ideas, like obedient arrows, fly to the same target" (qtd. in Runyon 7). Baudelaire continues that the tales are also linked together by repetition and re-framing of ideas, much like he felt his own poems to be (Runyon, 7-8). Central themes and motifs, such as death, suffering, sin, motion, horror, and perversity, tie the works of both authors together, but there is also their specific content that reinforces the bonds and relationships between the individual pieces.

This was, perhaps, one of the many places in which the French poet saw Poe's genius shine through. Yes, the beauty of the short story was

found in its brevity, as the American author explains in his “Philosophy of Composition”, but the true beauty of Poe’s collection of stories was, for Baudelaire, in how they worked together to form a whole entity. Maybe this was a way for the French poet to boost his own ego as well; if there was genius in the unity of Poe’s short stories, there was also genius in his poems and the way he ordered them.

Perhaps this subtle psychological support from his *semblable* was what drove Baudelaire to continue to revise his poetry. The ultimate goal of creating a collection that had many pieces which were beautiful alone, but infinitely more expressive when linked to each other to create a whole made him constantly strive to be better, even after his poems were successfully published. It is difficult to say, but the overwhelming presence of Poe’s style and theories prove that, regardless of the motivation, Baudelaire felt that his American brother’s literary “genius” was something worth emulating.

### ***STYLISTIC IDEALS***

The stylistic elements of Baudelaire’s poetry are also reminiscent of Poe. Despite the court hearing of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and the ban of several of the poems based on their immorality, Baudelaire’s use of rhyme and rhythm, which broke the boundaries of French literary norms, were beneficial for his career in many ways. His American “brother” was not so lucky. T.S. Eliot remarks in his essay “From Poe to Valery” that many

Americans considered Poe's use of rhyme to be frivolous. In this stanza from "The Raven" we can illustrate Poe's typical use of this poetic device.

Then this ebony bird **beguiling** my sad fancy into **smiling**,  
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it **wore**,  
 'Though thy crest be shorn and **shaven**, thou,' I said, 'art sure no **craven**.  
 Ghastly grim and ancient **raven** wandering from the nightly **shore** -  
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian **shore!**  
 Quoth the raven, '**Nevermore.**'

Eliot argues that the rhymes here are too obvious to be effective, something that is lost on Baudelaire, who actually admired Poe's "quality of rhyme that is introduced in modern poetry, but with more precision and intention" (qtd. in Chesters 20). He agreed with Poe (and Eliot) that forced rhymes were even more of a hindrance to beauty than overpowering rhythm, but he obviously disagreed with Eliot's belief that Poe's rhymes were anything but tasteful. Perhaps, Eliot ventures, Baudelaire did not catch the elementary nature of rhyming "raven" and "craven". He suggests that the French poet's judgment of Poe's poetry was clouded by his high opinion of the man. I doubt very much, though, that the French poet would have exalted Poe and his tales if he had believed these "weaknesses" Eliot identifies. If the French author believed that Poe's poetry as it stood was weak in any way, he would not have emulated it in his own works as often as he did.

The French author's use of alliteration can perhaps be linked to Poe's style, especially considering that alliteration was not necessary in French poetry and was often even discouraged (Chesters 14). In fact, many French poets have celebrated Baudelaire's mastery of this literary

technique (Chesters 14). If Poe's genius was due to his love of method and calculation, as is evident in his "Philosophy of Composition" and "Poetic Principle", then the use of alliteration is something his French brother might have emulated. This would have been not only a tool for him to create powerful poetry, but also a way to disrupt what he considered to be the banal norms of French poetry that stayed within the constraints of French poetic theory and traditional style.

If the French poet's use of alliteration is not strong enough evidence of his admiration of Poe, there is also his use of rhyme. Baudelaire's use of internal rhyme is remarkable because it is so subtle and understated, yet holds the poem together in a powerful way. The French poet's rhymes are, on the surface, weak and in many ways mundane given that his obvious rhymes are based on vowels alone, rather than vowels and consonants. However, the simple rhymes are reinforced by other, subtler repetitions found in the middle of the line (Chesters 15). For example, in the first three lines of "Le Voyage"

Pour l'enfant amoureux de **cartes et d'estampes**  
 L'univers est égal à son vaste appetit.  
 Ah! Que le monde est grad à la **clarté des lampes!**

This is in accordance with Poe's belief that rhymes that were too obvious or overstated detracted from the over-all beauty of the poem. Both poets were against prescribed poetry – poetry that lacked true emotion and was written to be romantic and over-blown as was the dominant style of the time (Chesters). Baudelaire viewed the use of internal rhyme and subtle

rhythm as an opportunity to counter the expectations of the reader, another way to disrupt the banal. He thus utilized not only his content (which was certainly jarring for the French public) but also his techniques to achieve this goal by such tactics as deliberately trying to avoid end-rhymes and using unnatural rhythms.

In general, poetic rhythm consists of four elements: intensity, pitch, character, and duration (Chesters 27). “What Baudelaire inherited [from the French poetic ideals] were “the triple principles of stress-patterning (the metrical units within a line), isosyllabism (equal line-lengths) and rhyme (Chesters 27). Rhythm in his poetry is subtle and complex, often reinforcing the rhyme, as in the line from “Le Voyage”

Tel le vieux vagabon, piétinant dans la boue

where there is a linking of the same syllable with the main rhyme, creating a form of echo (Chesters 28).

Each of these elements works together to create a unity within each poem. This was crucial for both the French author and for Poe. Indeed, since Baudelaire’s views echoed those of Poe, the French author followed many of the same rules in his own poems. Though concepts such as alliteration were more common in American poetry at the time, his poetry was still just as shocking for his contemporaries, due to both syntax and content.

*MAN'S NATURAL PERVERSITY IN BAUDELAIRE AND POE*

Serving as Baudelaire's introduction, "Au Lecteur" sets the tone for the entire volume of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is hardly surprising that many found it to be insulting, especially after they read the rest of the volume. In the final stanza Baudelaire openly insults his readers by comparing them to himself. In a society in which Baudelaire's dandyism and habits such as abusing drugs and alcohol were considered vulgar and shocking, few, if any, would be flattered by being judged by the poet as a hypocrite, let alone being regarded as his "twin". This was perhaps a way to provoke them to change or at the very least to be aware of their behavior; an attempt to disturb the societal norms. This open provocation is one element that we do not see in Poe. The American author does not openly accost the individual reader and in fact rarely even addresses him.

Au lecteur

La Sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,  
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,  
Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,  
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;  
Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,  
Et nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux,  
Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste  
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté  
Et le riche métal de notre volonté  
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!  
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;  
Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,  
Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent.

Ainsi qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange

Le sein martyrisé pauvre qui baise et mange  
 Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,  
 Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin  
 Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

Serré fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,  
 Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons,  
 Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons  
 Descent, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,  
 N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins  
 Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,  
 C'est que nôtres âme, hélas! N'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,  
 Les sinces, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,  
 Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants,  
 Dans la ménagerie infâme de vos vices,

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!  
 Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grand cris,  
 Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris  
 Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;

C'est l'Ennui! – l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,  
 Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.  
 T le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,  
 Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, mon frère!

Baudelaire's poem begins with a litany of several themes; folly, mortal sin, and depravity. The French poet has no qualms in pointing out that man sins constantly and breeds a guilty conscience. This guilt is something we cannot escape, even with our "faint" attempts at repentance. Line six, "We take a handsome price for our confession" is a commentary on the absurdity of religion and the church. Baudelaire repeatedly claimed to follow Satanism, which was a sort of anti-Christianity religion, though he also claimed to pray to God nightly.

Once he has pointed out the many common sins of man and the futility of religion or any form of repentance, Baudelaire introduces the main character of the poem, the Devil. He makes a rather grand entrance on “evil’s cushion” and is instantly blamed for controlling man in every way, removing man’s responsibility to control his perverse impulses. We (man) are slowly being escorted to Hell despite our efforts to resist. Most importantly, the Devil is responsible for filling our heads with monsters. The worst and most powerful monster implanted within us by “His Majesty” is Ennui. This demon is personified as one of the greatest and most devilish monsters, capable of swallowing the Earth and all its inhabitants. Ennui is present in many of Baudelaire’s poems, and is generally the devil that feeds on boredom or discontent and causes man to sin.

In the last two stanzas of “Au Lecteur” Baudelaire’s introduction to this monster is dynamic and powerful.

One worse is there, fit to heap scorn upon –  
 More ugly, rank! Though noiseless, calm, and still,  
 Yet would he turn the earth to scaps and swill,  
 Swallow it whole in one great, gaping yawn:

Ennui! That monster frail! – With eye wherein  
 A change tear gleams, he dreams of gibbets, while  
 Smoking his hookah, with a dainty smile...

– You know him, reader, - hypocrite, - my twin!  
 (Translation by Norman R. Shapiro)

According to Baudelaire, Ennui embodies – and is responsible for – the inherent perversity of man. This is the central subject of the poem. The French poet gives examples of the various ways in which man himself is

naturally inclined – even destined – to sin, such as snatching at “passing and clandestine joys”. But his true purpose is to point out that man is so engulfed in sin that we can not escape. The only possible reason that every man has not committed the sin of suicide is because “our souls lack enterprise”. We are so consumed by Ennui that we can not even put ourselves out of our misery.

Man’s tendency toward perverse actions is also a central theme in Poe’s tales, for example in his tale “The Imp of the Perverse”. The story opens with a four-page description of the narrator’s (whom we assume to be Poe) description of perversity.

In the sense I intend, it is, in fact, a *mobile* without motive, a motive not *motivirt*. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or...we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should *not*....no reason can be more unreasonable; but, in fact, there is none more strong (827).

The pretense of this lengthy explanation, we read toward the end, is that the narrator fears that the reader might have misunderstood his purpose. Poe’s point is the same as Baudelaire’s: man has a perverse and devilish propensity to sin and thus transgresses. Rather than present it in a dark, depressing tone as Baudelaire does, Poe chooses to almost make light of it. “There lives no man who at some period, has not been tormented, for example, by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener by circumlocution” (828). Wordiness is an offense far less serious than suicide, but Poe’s humor does not stop there. His naturally perversity overwhelmed him at

that very moment, and he continues with a paragraph explaining this compulsion, which could easily be condensed to one or two sentences.

The narrator begins the tale of his encounter with the Imp by alluding to a murder he committed in order to inherit an estate. This is more reminiscent of Baudelaire's idea of perversity than circumlocution and already we are intrigued, hoping to learn more detail. He tells us of the many years of comfort he enjoyed feeling as if he had committed the crime undetected. However, years later he slips into perversity once more and the modern reader hears echoes of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov. "One day, whilst sauntering along the streets, I arrested myself in the act of murmuring, half aloud... 'I am safe – I am safe – yes – if I be not fool enough to make open confession!'" (831). Of course, the tale ends with his hurried confession which he blames on none other than the "Arch-Fiend", perversity. (829).

In its structure this tale is similar to Baudelaire's "Au Lecteur" and explains – though in a slightly different manner – man's innate desire for the perverse and its cause. Baudelaire begins with an explanation and examples of the ways in which man has a desire to sin and do harm. Poe does the same with his opening analysis which reads almost like a scientific study. Both authors create dynamic endings, pushing the reader to recognise the true power of this devilish fiend. Baudelaire uses syntax; he ends a stanza with the climax of the description of a terrible monster

and creates a dramatic pause by waiting until the very beginning of the last stanza to name him.

...  
Yet would he turn the earth to scaps and swill,  
Swallow it whole in one great, gaping yawn:

Ennui! That monster frail! ...

Poe's drama relies heavily on syntax as well. Rather than create dramatic pauses, the poet uses punctuation to speed up and slow down the pace of the narrator's thoughts.

"...I would have done it, but a rough voice resounded in my ears – a rougher grasp seized me by the shoulder. I turned – I gasped for breath. For a moment, I experienced all the pangs of suffocation; I became blind, and deaf, and giddy; and then, some invisible fiend, I thought, struck me with his broad palm upon the back. The long imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul."  
(831)

The abundance of semi-colons, dashes, and commas forces the reader to rapidly digest the action. The last sentence is jarring because of its brevity and lack of punctuation. The final period is all we are given and so the statement falls flat, rather than rolling to a stop as the one before it. The style of each author gives the reader a sense of urgency and horror upon the discovery of this perversity. In both of their works, though, it is merely an initial glimpse at the many ways in which this fiend or monster effects our lives.

### *MOVEMENT AND JOURNEYS IN POETRY AND PROSE*

In “Le Voyage” Baudelaire focuses on the soul and how it struggles to move away from the body. The sense of movement throughout the poem is powerful and carries the reader from beginning to end.

Movement, whether it relates to the soul or the body, is a key motif in Baudelaire’s poetry. While the soul is often represented as ascending, the human race is seen as descending. There is a pervasive sense that the soul is trapped and being kept down by the flesh. Unlike how it is portrayed in “Au Lecteur”, where we see the downward movement of everyone alike, in “Le Voyage” there is a sense that a soul moves upward toward the clouds, while men are doomed to travel the sea with heavy hearts.

#### Le Voyage

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

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

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

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

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

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

The desire to travel motivates the movement in this poem; movement of soul and body. People board either a literal ship to see the world or a figurative ship to take a journey in their mind. The beauty of traveling is lost on most men because they are traveling – or moving – in order to get away from something, not for the sake of adventure. They travel with heavy hearts, not hearts “as light as balloons” like those of children.

Movement is also pervasive in Poe's tales and appears in both physical and mental transportation. Much like in Baudelaire, the movement is usually either up or down; either toward something lighter or mystical or toward something dark, dangerous, or deadly. For example, in Poe's “Descent into the Maelstrom”, the narrator describes a terrifying downward spiral into the sea. There is frantic swaying and pitching. The men on the ship are thrown into a whirlpool, their soul and their bodies almost certainly doomed. Still, even as the narrator begins his story, we are aware of the strong bond he has with the sea and his great knowledge of it. In fact it is at the point of greatest danger – when they are circling inside whirlpool – that the narrator becomes infatuated with his surroundings. As his tale unfolds the suspense mounts, but there is also a great deal of precision in his descriptions of the changeable sea.

It may appear strange, but now, when we were in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than when we were only approaching...I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power (442-443).

As the narrator lets go of the importance of his mortality, he begins to feel removed from the situation, if not even uplifted. "Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me" (444). If we compare this to "Le Voyage", it is clear that the poet is describing something similar. Indeed, the last line of the second stanza seems to speak directly to the condition of Poe's characters. "Here we are, leaning to the vessel's role and pitch/ cradeling our infinite to the finite sea". The soul of the narrator has already risen outside of his body by the time he is in the throes of the whirlpool. This is the literal depiction of what Baudelaire is describing; man is dragged down in his daily tasks, but the soul yearns to rise into the heavens. The bright circle of sky above the narrator's ship in Poe's story is no accident.

### ***THE AUTHORS AS LITERARY CRITICS***

The stylistic ideals and literary theories Poe and Baudelaire applied to their own writing formed their opinions of other authors of their time. This caused their critiques to be personal as well. They paid no heed to traditional judgments or contemporary classifications, except to discount them by promoting their own views and opinions (Gilman 4). Each believed his theory to be the only viable doctrine and that good literature

– and above all good poetry – could only be created if backed by their personal set of rules.

In his “Poetic Principle” (1850) and “Philosophy of Composition” (1846) Poe discusses his views on technical requirements of poetry and literature as a whole. Together these two works provide a comprehensive explanation of the American author’s views on literary style and technique. What he reveals here are the foundations for his literary criticism. Though he only wrote straight critiques for income in magazines his opinions and views come through in his own writing. He was strict and methodical in his style and composition; his works were so vastly different from what other American writers were producing that his pieces themselves could be seen as critiques of contemporary authors.

Though Baudelaire never wrote a comprehensive text on literary criticism akin to Poe’s detailed explanations of literary style and form, he was a more prolific critic of his contemporaries than his American brother. Just as Baudelaire’s poetry emerged out of the intrinsic relationship he had with the Parisian crowds, so too were they inspired by his contentious relationship with the Parisian literary circles. Like Poe, he used his craft not only as a platform to discuss contemporary social and political issues, but also as a reflection of what he thought was wrong with contemporary French literature. This is one of the reasons he was so elated to discover Poe. By challenging American literary style the American author – his semblable – was also challenging popular French literature. After his

initial introduction to Poe through “The Black Cat”, “The Philosophy of Composition” and “The Poetic Principle” were some of the first of Poe’s works Baudelaire read. He introduced Poe to the French people by proclaiming him a genius, but also and, perhaps, more importantly, by writing and publishing critiques of his tales and poetry.

Most of these critiques of his “brother” did nothing but sing his praises, and I would suggest that perhaps their intention was to promote Poe to the French public in nothing but a positive light. In fact, most often Baudelaire only revoiced the theories already stated in Poe’s works, and in many of his articles we see his overwhelming enthusiasm for the genius of his transcontinental contemporary; not only in his theories, but also in how he critiqued other American authors.

Poe’s was not a highly esteemed critic in America, much like he was not a well-liked author. Rather than see this as a reflection of his talent, the French poet regarded this as a reflection on American society as a whole. He argues that Poe applied his criticism “in accordance with the category to which the object of his analysis belonged” instead of conforming to the American norm of a critic who adjusts his opinions to match those of the public” (Carlson 70; ch. 10). This was apparently Baudelaire’s own method in his criticism, and it is possible that his jab at the American norm was in fact a disgusted commentary on other French critics.

It was through reading these works that the French poet's deeper understanding of Poe's works, as well as their connection to his own oeuvre, began to emerge. While Baudelaire primarily translated Poe's tales and a few of his poems, the fact that he read these literary theories is crucial to understanding Poe's influence on the French author. His reading of the American author's literary theory is explained fairly clearly in his essay "New Notes on Edgar Poe". Indeed, the second half of this essay is essentially quoted from Poe's "Poetic Principle". Baudelaire absorbed Poe's views on beauty, progress, and the perversity of man, but he never failed to alter each theory slightly, either by adding conditional or clarifying statements or leaving out part of his American brother's explanation (Gilman 96). A close examination of the theories of the two authors shows that the French author's beliefs are independent from those of Poe, while still being unmistakably linked to them.

### ***BEAUTY, TRUTH, AND UNITY***

Neither Poe nor Baudelaire understood beauty in the common sense. Rather than thinking of something traditionally evoked by the word, such as a flower or a classically beautiful woman, they each believed that all beauty had an element of abnormality or distortion. Baudelaire's theory placed a larger emphasis on this idea than Poe's. This concept of a link between beauty and strangeness is, perhaps, another reason why Baudelaire was so taken with Poe's works. Not only was there

the initial phenomenon of the shock of recognition; there was also the profound resonance Baudelaire felt upon his deeper analysis of his “semblable”. “A manuscript note by Baudelaire...reveals...his fraternal feeling toward Poe: ‘In conclusion, I may say to Edgar Poe’s unknown French friends that I am proud and happy to have introduced them to a new kind of beauty’” (Baudelaire 28; ch. 1).

Rather than emphasizing the strangeness of beauty, Poe believed that it was linked more strongly to melancholy and woe. It was, in his opinion, these two traits that lead to the elevation of the soul. Poe’s views on beauty as it exists – or should exist – in poetry are central in both of these critical essays. In his “Philosophy of Composition” he states that “beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem” and that “beauty of whatever kind...invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears” (1376, 1377) which is exactly what his own tales and poetry did for Baudelaire. What grasped the French author was that only the best artists can even hope to achieve the representation of their unique beauty in their work. This was absolutely how he viewed Poe. Not only was he developing and perfecting new genres (the short story, detective fiction, and tales of horror), but he was also writing literature that the French culture was more prepared for than American culture<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Literary activity in France in the beginning of the nineteenth century was fairly restrained and they had not fully embraced innovation within the romantic movement. Poe’s tales were original enough to peak the interest in literary circles and spark new inspiration (Quinn 44).

For both authors, Beauty was inherently linked to Truth. Baudelaire believed that the use of rhythm, meter, and rhyme, were considered crucial technical elements that must be paid close attention to in order to achieve beauty and thus, ultimately, lead to truth. He believed that “it is one of the astounding prerogatives of art that the horrible, artistically expressed, becomes beauty, and that sorrow, when given rhythm and cadence, fills the heart with a serene joy” (qtd. in Hyslop 37). It is possible that this idea comes from Poe’s thoughts on melancholy invoking beauty. However, while rhythm in poetry could create beauty and thus truth, both authors believed that a poem should only be written for the sake of writing a poem – “poetry for poetry’s sake”.

In “The Poetic Principle” Poe describes “the heresy of the didactic”. This idea that the aim of poetry was to create truth was, to the two “brothers”, absurd. However, while Poe merely contradicts this statement, Baudelaire continues to expand on it saying,

I do not mean...that [poetry’s] final result is not to raise man above the level of vulgar interests ...I say that, if the poet has pursued a moral aim, he has diminished his poetic force; and...his work will be bad. Poetry can not, under penalty of death of failure, be assimilated to science or morality; it does not have Truth as its object...the means for demonstrating Truth are other and elsewhere (qtd. in Gilman 95).

Poe tries to bring these concepts of Truth and Beauty together, complicating their relationship. He says, “Truth...demands a precision...which [is] absolutely antagonistic to...Beauty” (“Philosophy of Composition” 1376). Still, for both the American author and Baudelaire

the concept of unity was central and necessary to all literature. Without it, beauty and truth could not possibly exist. This theory of unity is particularly relevant in the short story, a genre that Poe would become a master of. Poe's tales were designed to be read in one sitting, for "if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed" ("Philosophy of Composition" 1375). Unity was not only relevant to prose, though. In his "Philosophy of Composition" Poe states that there is no such thing as a long poem, only short poems strung together that excite various emotions sequentially. Baudelaire agreed with this, and was stunned at the level of craftsmanship of the American author's tales. He believed that much of Poe's genius was due to his attention to detail and his ability to create tales that were concise yet powerful.

Of course, when Baudelaire discovered Poe's idea of imagination he seemed to adopt it immediately. For Poe, "imagination...is a faculty that is almost divine and that perceived from the very first moment, by ways other than those of the philosopher, the intimate and secret relations between things, their correspondences and analogies" ("Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe" 71). He argues that the fascination in this discussion of imagination lies not only in Baudelaire's agreement with Poe, but in the fact that the insight relates directly to the French author's idea of "correspondence".

“Correspondence” was Baudelaire’s word for expressing his belief that everything – all forms of art – were working together and in constant communication with each other. For example, a painting could relate to a piece of music, a poem to a painting, or a painting could relate to a poem that could relate to a piece of music. In his view, all art – and all artists – shared something unique: the ability to view the world from the outside. He believed that not only should there be unity in literature, but in all art forms. This understanding of the relationship between art and artists was something that Baudelaire incorporated into his critiques as well as his own writing. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, for example, each poem stands alone, but they work together to form a whole body and paint a larger picture. The true beauty is found in the way each poem makes a different point and serves a different purpose, depending on the context in which it is read.

It is striking that Poe and Baudelaire found similar faults with the works of their compatriots, but what is more intriguing is that Baudelaire – and consequently the French public – found little to criticize about Poe. The two authors’ critiques of their societies shed light on the similarities between French and American culture through the eyes of a poet and thus draw another connection between Poe and Baudelaire as they were situated in their worlds. To be sure, their literature had similarities – and there was, of course, the “shock of recognition” which moved Baudelaire to his very core – but given the struggle both authors endured for

acceptance in their own countries, it is remarkable that Baudelaire could promote Poe in such a way as to prevent the French public from discouraging and rejecting the American's works as they had his own poems.

Some scholars argue that Baudelaire's literary theories owe nothing to Poe, largely because they were written several years before he knew of Poe's existence. However, that the French poet gained a deep understanding of Poe's theories and expanded on them to make them his own, I would argue, clearly demonstrates that the American author had a large impact on Baudelaire's literary theory and, consequently, his works. Indeed, a key element in the relationship between the transcontinental brothers is that Poe provided Baudelaire with affirmation of his own ideas. Even though Baudelaire read Poe several years after he began writing, this support inspired him to continue writing in the face of the discouragement from the French literary public. Being a type of support Baudelaire searched for and never received from his family, this affirmation was critical because it gave him the confidence to continue to write in a society in which his work was not overwhelmingly well received. It is as if reading Poe's works – particularly his theories – fueled a new train of thought in the French author and gave him the intellectual spark he needed to continue to revise and improve his poetry and refine his critiques of contemporary artists.

## II. POE IN BAUDELAIRE'S PROSE POEMS

Baudelaire's social criticism is most apparent in his Prose Poems. Though he was not the first prose poet in France, he was the first to give this literary genre a name that would stick and the first to pursue it with such ardor (Krueger 11). Titled *Petits Poèmes en Prose: Le Spleen de Paris*, these sketches of Parisian life stand out because of their open criticisms of modern day literary and social norms and were something drastically different for Baudelaire. The very term "prose poem" is a contradiction, and that was no accident on the part of the French author. He intentionally never defined the term in full and today ambiguity is a central technical part of the genre. He wrote the prose poems in the "spirit of invention, [and] resistance [to society and literary norms]" (Krueger 11,12). It was another attempt to jar the banal norms of literary culture. However, the French literary public was not jarred at all, but instead apathetic to Baudelaire's new literary attempt (Hyslop 102). Those who were not apathetic only found disappointment in the fact that Baudelaire was telling a story, something they had never seen or expected of him after *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Krueger 11).

Baudelaire's American "brother" experienced similar responses to his tales, poetry and essays. When he began publishing them, they were not at all popular in America because they were a new type of literature. The public had never read anything akin to "The Fall of the House of

Usher” or “Murder in the Rue Morgue” and those who didn’t consider it vulgar found themselves confused.<sup>7</sup> Baudelaire, naturally, found this to be an injustice to the American author. He believed any shortcomings were on the side of the literary public, not his beloved Poe. The proud French poet may have been obliquely commenting on the injustice done to him by his fellow Frenchmen when he wrote about Poe’s misfortune for the French public.

Stylistically the prose poems were unique and often complicated precisely because they did not fit into any established literary genre. They “provide thematic unity *within* each of Baudelaire’s collections and between them” (Krueger 12), but each can stand on its own and few follow the same structure. For instance, some tell stories while others seem to more closely resemble expanded journal entries. This is logical, considering that many of the prose poems were autobiographical. For example, the boys in “Les Vocations” represent some of the French author’s own boyhood dreams. The almost obsessive focus on insanity and deranged behavior that is found throughout the prose poems might have been inspired by his own fear of losing his mind and not being able to write (Hyslop 97).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, though Poe does not refer to himself in his

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<sup>7</sup> Poe actually called “Eureka” a prose poem and it was one of his most abstruse works that was understood very little and hardly appreciated until well after his death. Even today, many scholars struggle to read “Eureka” and view it as a chore rather than a pleasure (Hoffman 273-274).

<sup>8</sup> At the end of his life, Baudelaire was suffering from syphilis. Since dementia was a part of the disease, his concern and obsession with losing his mind was warranted.

tales (when “I” is used in his tales we are inclined to think a fictional narrator is speaking, not Poe himself), this self-loathing and degradation of the human condition as a whole is common in the American author’s short stories.

These themes of insanity and self-loathing are those we see glimpses of in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Indeed, some prose poems like “L’Invitation au Voyage” are based directly on individual poems in the famed poetry collection (Hyslop 85, 86), but they expand on the theme. Some scholars have even suggested that Baudelaire wrote the prose poems precisely because there were fewer restrictions in form that allowed him to explore these themes and ideas more fully (Hyslop 85). The themes that are most prevalent in the prose poems – urban life, the outsider, poverty, and social injustice – are oddly some that are not abundantly present in his collection of poetry. Though many of the prose poems are set in Paris, the city itself is never mentioned directly and often seems to fade into the background.

What we see of Paris is not glittering or romantic, but grey and harrowing, viewed through tableaux of the poor or others who have been cast out of society. It is often gloomy and unkind to the individual, almost forcing them to remain alone to watch the masses and reflect on them silently. These images range from widows such as the one in “La Veuve” to the decrepit clown in “Le Vieux Saltimbanque”. Whether our view is from the inner passages of Baudelaire’s imagination as he reflects on some

facet of city life or through a story with only slightly developed two-dimensional characters, each prose poem is meant to be seen through the eyes of the poet as Baudelaire saw him in society: outcast and alone.

***CHARACTERS IN THEIR OWN WORKS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN  
"THE MAN OF THE CROWD" AND "LES FOULES"***

All of the prose poems are filled with Poe's literary theories and themes, but where the connection between the two authors, in a biographical as well as literal sense, is most apparent is in a reading of Baudelaire's "Les Foules" in conjunction with Poe's "Man of the Crowd". Poe's story opens with the narrator sitting in a classic London coffee shop reading a paper and alternately looking out the window that is covered with grime. Soon, however, the throng outside the window becomes more interesting than the words on the page and the narrator begins to examine the world around him. There is a huge sense of movement, again based on the narrator's description of the dense throng of people outside the window, but what could become a picture of frantic movement and chaos is contained by the narrator's categorization of the crowd.

His categories and judgments are based solely on the "figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expressions of countenance" of individuals passing by (389). His observations begin rather generally; there are those that are focused on getting through the crowd, and those who "talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if *feeling in solitude on account of the very*

*denseness of the company around*" (389). Though it is noted that these are the only differences between the two groups, the distinction is an important one for it provides a first glimpse into one of the central themes in the tale: being alone in a population of many.

The focus is then changed to the multitude of individuals. These included "noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, [and] stock-jobbers" who, together with their compatriots, make up mini "tribes" within the larger crowd (389). How the narrator delineates between these sub-groups is, again, based solely on their appearance. For example, the "junior clerks of flash houses" are marked by their "tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips...they wore the cast off graces of the gentry" (389). The many examples of the narrator's method of deduction are not important in themselves; rather, it is what Poe accomplishes through this that is far more intriguing.

He is essentially deconstructing the crowd, much like the character, Dupin, deconstructs the lives of the suspects in Poe's detective fiction. In fact, many scholars, such as John Frow, regard this tale to be a detective story without the crime. There is the basic formation of an "intimate relationship with the indifferent other" formed through the investigator's discovery of "intimate details of the nameless person whom he pursues"

(Frow 43), a component which could arguably be the skeleton of all of Poe's detective fiction which he wrote later on in his career.<sup>9</sup>

In categorizing the crowd on the London street into sub-groups, the narrator's focus settles on an individual who does not seem to fit in any tribe he has thus-far created. Perhaps this is why he is so captivated. The narrator admits that "As I endeavored...to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness..." (392). He simply cannot pin a label on him. This "countenance...of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age" compels the narrator to exit the smoke-filled coffee shop and take to the street (392). He begins to envision the Man of the Crowd as a suspect whom he must pursue, just like a detective in a crime novel would. Even as the narrator obtains a better view of his suspect thanks to the light of the streetlamps, he is no more able to put him in a box, for he is full of contradictions. "I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and...I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger" (393). It is ultimately this mounting list of contradictions that provokes the narrator to continue his pursuit.

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<sup>9</sup> This is the most common tactic of Dupin, the detective in Poe's early detective stories such as "The Purloined Letter". In these stories, the narrator is always fascinated by Dupin's ability to uncover details of the suspect's daily life or whereabouts at the time of the crime.

Here begins a wild chase motivated solely by personal curiosity, but more importantly this crazed ambulation through London is a mechanism to give the reader a view of several crowds, each with its own personality. It begins with a transformation of the original crowd outside the coffee shop, which is “put into commotion, and overshadowed by a world of umbrellas. The waver, the jostle, and the hum increased in a ten fold degree” (393). This digresses into a new crowd on a cross street which “although densely filled with people, was not quite so much thronged as the main one” (393). This, eventually, leads them to a bright, empty square. With each new crowd or empty space, the demeanor of the Man of the Crowd changes drastically. After following him for almost two days the narrator gives up and comes to the conclusion that this man cannot be alone. Moreover, he declares, “This old man...is the type of the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*” (396). He understands all of this without ever speaking to or interacting directly with this mysterious person.

Some scholars have hypothesized that this tale is about different ways of reading and being read. The narrator stops reading the newspaper and begins to read the crowd as he reads the word on the page. This explains the sentence at the beginning and end of the story “*er lasst sich nicht lesen*”.<sup>10</sup> Kevin Hayes argues that much like there are books that cannot be read, so are there people who cannot be judged by their

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<sup>10</sup> It does not permit itself to be read.

appearance (446). Others, such as Phillip Lopate, believe Poe's tale is about city life and anomie. Poe is displaying his concern that people are losing their ability to be alone because of the city crowds. He then links this observation to Walter Benjamin's idea of the Flâneur. Benjamin characterized the flâneur as "a bit of a dandy, but also a quasi-scientist, 'a botanist of the pavement'" (Lopate 4).

In his essay, "Some Motifs of Baudelaire" Benjamin equates the French poet to this character. He writes, "If [Baudelaire] succumbed to the force by which he was drawn to them (crowds) and, as a flâneur, was made one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman make-up. He becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them" (172). Baudelaire, then, is a sort of flâneur; however, while Baudelaire equated Poe's Man of the Crowd to this social character, Benjamin makes a point that the Man of the Crowd "exemplifies...what had to become of the flâneur once he was deprived of the milieu to which he belonged" (172). If Baudelaire was a flâneur, perhaps he saw Poe as the Man of the Crowd, one who had been deprived of a literary public who appreciated his work.

I would argue that "The Man of the Crowd" is a metaphor for the relationship between Poe and Baudelaire on a biographical and professional level. Just as the narrator pursues the Man of the Crowd, so Baudelaire pursues Poe. The narrator uses clues of the man's garments, gait, and demeanor in order to discern who is he and what his motivation

might be, while Baudelaire uses Poe's literature and what other American authors wrote about him to discern who he was as a person, but also as an author. Baudelaire creates a literary character for the French public based solely on what he learns from what Poe has written and what others have written about his American brother. Baudelaire begins with who Poe is through his literature, indeed, that is what his initial "shock of recognition" is based on. However, the more he reads the more he learns or, perhaps, creates.

The French poet discovers Poe's "mistreatment" by the American public and his struggles for success and is outraged, but he obtains this information by reading. As he translated Poe's works he was not only reading English and translating (perhaps, as some scholars argue, transforming) it into French prose, but also "reading" Poe as a person and, certainly, transforming him into a literary genius for the French public. Indeed, if Poe is the Man of the Crowd, then the city as it is depicted not only helps to exemplify the solitude of a poet in modern literary culture, but specifically Poe's struggle to be a part of it. While it is true that Poe refused to sacrifice his literary beliefs to be more successful, there was a natural desire to be understood and accepted as an author. There is a clear barrier between the Man of the Crowd and the crowd itself, but his frantic racing from one crowd to the next shows his apparent need to be a part of one, even peripherally.

In using the sentence “it does not permit itself to be read” in his opening, Poe immediately begins to stress the idea that it is, on some level, impossible to read a person or even a book as it is meant to be read (Hayes 447). Baudelaire had many misconceptions about Poe’s life, largely because much of the portrait he created in his head was based on Griswold’s biography. This misinformation caused him to misread or misunderstand certain pieces of the life of his American brother. Consequently, the portrait of the American author presented to the French literary public by Baudelaire was, perhaps, not quite accurate.<sup>11</sup> Since we never meet the Man of the Crowd directly in Poe’s story, it is impossible to discern whether the narrator’s ultimate “reading” of him (that he is a man of crime) is accurate or not, but nevertheless he and Baudelaire arrive at the same conclusion after their pursuits: their lives have been changed forever because of the man they have followed.

If we take Poe’s tale to be a metaphor for the relationship between him and his French brother, as well as a metaphor for the poet in the city, then Baudelaire’s prose poem, “Les Foules” spells it out for us. He writes, “He who can readily identify with the crowd enjoys ecstatic delights...” (59), which is what we see in the narrator of Poe’s tale. The narrator is delighted by his sheer curiosity and that leads him to frantically – or in Baudelaire’s words “ecstatically” – pursue him. Baudelaire continues in a

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<sup>11</sup> This is partly due to Griswold’s biography, but also due to Baudelaire’s infatuation with Poe, which gave him a biased view of the author’s life and works.

highly reflective tone about the poet's existence within a crowded city. There is no metaphor, just a French poet's reflections on a poet's (his own) place in the bustling urban environment.

However, when Baudelaire says "Like those lost souls which wander in search of a body to inhabit, he can enter the personality of anyone else, whenever he likes" (59), it is possible that he is indirectly referencing his relationship with Poe. I do not wish to contend that Baudelaire was a lost soul, nor that he could actually inhabit the world of Poe, but it is possible that Poe's literature – the literature that shocked Baudelaire into the recognition of his "semblable" – allowed him to understand, and in that way inhabit, Poe and, certainly, a different emerging body of literature than his own. How else would he have come to feel so close to this man he never met or communicated with?

Did Baudelaire take Poe's tale to be, on some level, his own self-portrait? If so, which character did he identify with, the man of the crowd or the narrator? For Poe and Baudelaire, how they thought of themselves within society was a fundamental piece of the structure of "The Man of the Crowd" and "Les Foules". The observer as an outsider relates to the two authors' views of the poet in society. Both the man of the crowd and the subject of Baudelaire's sketch are figures of "le poète maudit", or an accursed poet that lives outside of society and often succumbs to drugs, drink, and other vices.

Baudelaire defined himself as this poet and when he learned about the conditions of the American literary culture and its treatment of Poe he bestowed the title on his brother as well. Poe never refers to himself in these terms, though he does make it clear that he feels he is living on the margins of society, even in literary circles. This is consistent with Baudelaire's tendency to delve deeper into the world of Poe, including literature, life, and even his very identity. It is, perhaps, what he is reflecting on in his prose poem. Though their identity of a "poète maudit" sets them apart from everyone else, it connects them to each other and gives the French poet an opportunity to wallow in the "ecstatic delights" of pursuing Poe through his literature. Indeed, one could say that he is not only the narrator in "The Man of the Crowd", but also a sort of Dupin, sifting through literature in search of clues about a man he has never met.

Though their approach is different, both authors are focusing on the same themes and larger ideas. To begin with, reflection is an element that is present in both works, though it reveals itself in different ways. For Poe, reflection is not always peaceful. It is unclear what exactly the Man of the Crowd is reflecting on – or whether he is reflecting on anything at all – but the narrator contemplates what this man's motivation could possibly be while he is often literally running through crowded, harrowing streets of London in cold rain and fog. In reading "Les Foules" one gets the sense that Baudelaire is somewhere by a fire, calmly reflecting not only on Poe's tale but the poet's ability to view crowds from the outside, even as they

exist within them. Perhaps he himself is the “perambulating loner” he mentions in *Les Foules*, just as the frantic man of the crowd in Poe’s tale might be said to represent the American author.

The ability to absent yourself from the identity of the crowd – what it does to the individual, how it changes the mentality of the crowd if each views himself as separate – is really the over-arching focus of these two works. Both authors knew something of this not only through their literary careers but also through their personal lives. There was a barrier built between Baudelaire and his parents early on because they did not agree with his choice of work and Poe was literally removed from his family upon the death of both of his parents. At this time even his sister was taken from him to live with another relative. Baudelaire made many friends but still felt himself to be above them in many respects, mostly on the intellectual level, but Poe found fewer strong friendships as his life progressed out of boyhood and was in many ways always destined to try to fend for himself.

Due to the differences of their lives, each author’s view of the Man of the Crowd or the poète maudit is slightly different. Poe’s point seems to be that if one is alone in a crowd then he undoubtedly has secrets and is usually harboring “the type and genius of deep crime” (“Man of the Crowd” 396), while Baudelaire seems to think that the ability to be alone in a crowd is essential to the poet. For the French author, the poet is naturally a sort of flâneur calmly roaming the streets in solitude out of

necessity. The level of intrigue of the narrator in Poe's tale and the intensity of the man of the crowd gives the impression that there is something grand and mysterious about these men who are each one of many. The Man of the Crowd's gilded dagger signifies that there is something there, just below the surface that is unknown.

Baudelaire is much different. We almost hear a bit of pride in his opening line "Not all men have the gift of enjoying a crowd bath. Luxuriating in the throng is an art of its own..." (59). Being alone in a crowd is a talent – an indulgence rather than something dark and terrible. He gives the impression that one must be above others in order to be able to enjoy a crowd, and one feels that he believes himself to be one of the lucky few who can succeed in doing this. I would venture that he took Poe's tale to be an indication that the American author, too, understood the nuances of solitude within a throng of people. Whether this was an accurate reading or not is not terribly important, for it is just another clue for Baudelaire to add to his mental portrait of his brother.

This is the ultimate point of the two works and it demonstrates what is, arguably, the strongest connection between the two authors. "Les Foules" could be interpreted as simply a commentary on the tale Poe had already written, but I would contend that it is another display of the relationship the French author felt with Poe. That the two works coincide on so many different levels is an indication that Baudelaire and Poe really did share something that went deeper than their literature. The subject

matter of their oeuvres demonstrates this, but more than that the way Baudelaire was able to interpret Poe's tale shows the French poet's deep understanding of his American brother. He saw something that the American public probably did not – the presence of the self-portrait of the author – and wrote a profound reflection that ventured into the psychology of Poe, the brother he never met but to whom he was intimately connected.

Though Poe could not have intentionally written his tale as a metaphor of this relationship (he, of course, never knew about Baudelaire's shock of recognition), this reading of the story is compelling not only because of how uncanny it is, but also precisely because of its accidental nature. That there is a story that so deeply connects the two authors, and so accurately explores their existence within their respective cultures offers even more overwhelming proof that regardless of the timeline, these two authors shared an undeniable bond.

### III. DISTRESSING ENVIRONMENT: POE AND BAUDELAIRE AS SOCIAL CRITICS

In many poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal* such as “Le Jeu” and in his Prose Poems such as “Les Yeux des Pauvres”, Baudelaire criticized Parisian society, focusing on the poor and downtrodden masses that filled the dirty city. Poe, on the other hand, examined society from a variety of angles and pointed out silly beliefs of high society and the absurdities of politics. Baudelaire critiqued Parisian society through type characters and larger groups (i.e. the widow, the clown, the poor). By contrast, Poe focused on political issues and social norms in all spheres, singling out individuals in order to illustrate his point. He did not limit his critiques to those who were downtrodden but used satire to attack even those in positions of power, such as politicians and war heroes.

Just as they chose their subjects differently, so too did they view them from slightly different perspectives. Baudelaire was inspired by the masses and he felt a deep connection to them (Benjamin 167) yet he was also able to separate himself, largely because of his poetry. This was a blessing and a curse: being separate from the masses allowed him to see their flaws, and being amongst them granted him understanding of them but also – more importantly – led him to feel the need to work to distance himself from their mundane existence. Poe also felt his craft set him apart from those around him, but he was less tied to the masses than

Baudelaire. Crowds were becoming a prominent feature in literature during his time, and so it is no accident that some of his more famous tales, such as "Man of the Crowd", focus on this subject. However, there is no indication that he could ever escape the hustle and bustle of city life. Whereas Baudelaire lived within this emergent urban madness and learned to remove himself from it, Poe avoided it completely, preferring to remain in his own world of imagination. This distance was important, for it gave the American author space to critique those around him and their habits and allowed him to cultivate his satirical, biting voice.

Since Baudelaire was critiquing Parisian life long before he encountered Poe, this part of his oeuvre cannot be attributed to the American author's influence. Indeed some argue that, if this is the case, it is evidence that Poe and Baudelaire have less of a connection. However, I would claim that it highlights the close relationship of the two authors even more. It is important that without knowing of each other's works, they both used their art as a tool and a medium to speak out against social absurdities. If Baudelaire and Poe were writing about the same themes without having any knowledge of each other's works, then it is proof that Baudelaire really did see something of himself in Poe's tales when he initially encountered them. When Baudelaire began reading Poe's fiction and critiques, he discovered that his American brother's "political and social ideas were just what [he] was ready for, and he accepted them unreservedly" (Gilman 113). That Baudelaire's political doctrine is

revealed in his critiques of the individual and the common citizen makes his point no less powerful than that of Poe's satires of political and social heroes. Indeed, it suggests that the shock of recognition was inspired not only by mere similarities in contextual ideas, but by a larger picture and purpose that Baudelaire found in Poe's works.

Though Poe cannot be credited with sparking the French poet's interest in social criticism, the presence of critiques through the satire in Poe's tales was potentially eye opening for Baudelaire. In the original dedication to Mrs. Clemm in *Les Histoires Extraordinaires* in 1854, Baudelaire "makes it clear that Poe's stories first gave him a completely false idea of the author's life" ("Edgar Poe: Sa Vie et Ses Ouvrages" 28). However, as he became more familiar with Poe's stories through translating them he used the criticisms as a way to further understand who Poe was and what his views were on topics ranging from politics to cocktail parties. Baudelaire came to realize that "in the story teller is to be found a philosopher" ("Edgar Poe: Sa Vie et Ses Ourvrages" 65).

It is possible that, in addition to understanding Poe's criticisms on a personal level<sup>12</sup>, Baudelaire even agreed with Poe's critiques of the American public. Given that the French author was always on Poe's side and generally felt the American population to be inferior to the French when it came to literary debates, it is not much of a stretch to consider that

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<sup>12</sup> The deep connection Baudelaire felt to Poe, as well as the similarities between their observations of the cities in which they lived gave the French author a profound understanding of the American poet.

he felt the same way about their attitudes regarding politics, social etiquette, and values. In praising the poet as a critic, Baudelaire commented that the American author “made...war upon false reasoning, silly imitations, solecisms, barbarisms...” (“Edgar Poe: Sa Vie et Ses Ouvrages” 66). This is, without a doubt, true. Poe had little patience for things that were at odds with his views and he had no qualms attacking them in tales such as “The Business Man”, in which he satirizes the importance placed on mundane careers<sup>13</sup>.

***“WHAT A HORRIBLE LIFE! A HORRIBLE CITY!”***

Baudelaire’s position in relation to French society is evident throughout his works, but particularly in his prose poems. In this collection of short pieces Baudelaire’s social criticism is perhaps most apparent and, indeed, closest to that of Poe. In fact, some scholars regard Baudelaire’s prose poems to be the “literature of daily experience” (Powers 79). Through the prose poems, the French author merged this common genre with poetry to give himself more space to criticize his surroundings.

While Baudelaire viewed himself as a *poète maudit* and often felt like an outsider of Parisian society, his well-trained eye penetrates this

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<sup>13</sup> “If you ever perceive a man setting up as a merchant, or manufacturer; or going into the cotton or tobacco trade, or any of those eccentric pursuits; or getting to be a dry-goods dealer, or soap-boiler, or something of that kind; or pretending to be a lawyer, or a blacksmith, or a physician – anything out of the usual way – you may set him down at once as...an ass” (Poe 373, 374).

world and critiques what it sees in the “snapshots” of Parisian life seen in the prose poems. He sought to protest against the “common place and the banal” elements of Parisian life (Hyslop 37). There is a sense of frustration and disappointment with society, and even, perhaps, with the city itself, which shines through the collection as a whole, though the focus of the individual prose poems varies widely.

Perhaps one of the most revealing prose poems is “A Une Heure du Matin”, in which the poet not only criticizes the masses, but also himself and the city of Paris itself. It begins with the narrator’s overwhelming relief and comfort in solitude. “At last I am allowed to relax in a bath of gloom. First, a double turn of the key in the lock; I have the feeling that this turn will amplify my solitude...” The meaning of these opening lines rests in the interpretation of the word “gloom”. If we interpret it to mean twilight or dusk then the poet is simply coming home at the end of the day. He finds comfort in the darkening shadows. However, given Baudelaire’s tendency toward dark themes and depressing motifs, I understand “gloom” as an indication of the narrator’s mood.

This interpretation, however, is juxtaposed with the image of a solitude that is growing larger by the minute. It is reminiscent of *Ennui* in “Au Lecture” and other poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, waiting to swallow up everything in its path. Oddly, we do not feel that the narrator is afraid of this solitude, but rather in search of it – even desperately seeking it – just as the narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” desperately seeks the man of

mystery in the London streets. Baudelaire once again has turned something that was commonly avoided or feared by the general public and transforms it into something comforting and welcome.

“A Une Heure du Matin” continues with an outcry, “What a horrible life, a horrible city!” which disrupts this fleeting sense of warm, grey comfort. The narrator is clearly discontented with the world around him. Perhaps this is why he takes comfort in the shadows that make the details surrounding him fade away. Rather than running away from solitude, as men of the crowd seem to do, he is running away from being consumed by the “horrible city”. He proceeds with an account of his day.

I saw a few ‘men of letters’, one of whom asked if you can travel to Russia overland – no doubt he imagined that Russia is an island; argued my head off with the editor of a review, who answered every protest with ‘We stand for descent folk’ – which implies that all other papers are scribbled by scoundrels...

The pace of this paragraph is much faster than the opening one. It describes uncomfortable or uninteresting encounters in a manner that make them appear as if they were expected or routine. The narrator (whom we can assume is Baudelaire himself) is disgusted with mankind, but also with himself. The talk of “men of letters” is biting. Not only is he implying that they are unintelligent, but he is also insinuating that he is superior. Alternatively, this could be read as a moment of self-loathing in which the French poet equates himself with these men, believing that he and his works are of inferior quality as well.

Self-loathing was not unusual for Baudelaire. In fact, much of his frustration with the world and his position in it stemmed from this. Some even believe that it was his struggle for acceptance, rather than the need for inspiration, that inspired him to resort to drugs and alcohol consistently throughout his life. He also refers to another conflict in his personal life, that between him and his editors. Baudelaire was known for his constant battles with editors and printers, and in many ways this defined his career<sup>14</sup>. He struggled to meet deadlines and, consequently, usually lost money on business transactions with printers, editors, and publications.

Perhaps the most fascinating point in “A Une Heure du Matin” is the final paragraph. We immediately get a sense that the frustration with the “men of letters” pales in comparison to the poet’s general despair and depression. More importantly, though, this is the first moment in which we understand the narrator’s desperation. “O souls of those whom my poems have celebrated, strengthen me and sustain me, drive far from me all falsehood and the corrupting exhalations of the world”. We see his need for acceptance, which is so strong that he actually relies on it for physical support. No matter how painful the conversations with “men of letters” are, or how many elements of society he is discontented with, Baudelaire believes that he has reached at least a fraction of them and,

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<sup>14</sup> Poe was also notorious for arguing with his editors and lost money as well as jobs at magazines such as *The Southern Literary Messenger* because of it.

moreover, truly needs them in order to feel justified. This is one reason why the kinship he felt with Poe was so important; it gave him gratification knowing that someone on a different continent understood his works in principle, even though he had never read them.

As his concern mounts, it seems that Baudelaire is in the process of working himself into a frenzy. He continues, "O my Lord and God, grant me the grace to produce a few lines of poetry which will convince me that I am not the dregs of mankind, and not inferior to those I despise!" Baudelaire vacillated between believing in God and Satan, which is apparent in his works. In *Les Fleurs du Mal* there are multiple references to Satan as the ruler of everything and everyone, but it is also known from Baudelaire's personal journals that he prayed to God nightly ("Mon Coeur Mis en Nue" 105). That he invokes the name of God here is less intriguing than his reference to poetry.

The poet does not wish to be one of the masses and even quickly moves away from the idea of needing their acceptance. Above all, poetry will save him from these feelings of depression and the gloomy solitude. This is, once again, a return to the idea of how Baudelaire (and Poe) viewed the poet's role in society. While being a *poète maudit* was a struggle, that was also their sole salvation – it saved them from being sucked in to the mundane, or swallowed up by the terrible monster, *Ennui*. "A Une Heure du Matin" provides a clear progression that is characteristic of Baudelaire's life as a whole. He expresses his longing for

solitude, then the ever-present frustration with the Parisian population, then comes to a confession that ultimately he is afraid of being consumed by these masses and, above all, returns to his craft and his insecurity.

***“A WONDERFULLY INVENTIVE AGE”***

Poe’s concerns for his own career are not so prominent in his works. While he, like Baudelaire, was constantly trying to find a balance between shocking the public and making a living, acceptance by the public was less important to him than it was to his French brother. The public, he knew, already had an opinion of him and his habits, and so writing about these would not be shocking; indeed, perhaps nobody would have noticed. In attacking those in the public sphere and slashing common ideals down, Poe was able to *épater les bourgeois* (perhaps not always to his own benefit) and use his craft as a platform to develop not only forms of literature such as the horror story and the detective fiction, but also his own views and political ideals.

It is odd, then, that Poe is rarely associated with social criticism. Indeed some scholars believe that Poe was completely removed from the world around him and so had no point of reference concerning American society (Parrington qtd. in Marchand 28). However, more recent scholarship argues that, though he did not do so directly, Poe’s criticisms of society can be found hidden within many of his tales (Marchand 30). I

would, in fact, argue that the depth in many of the American author's tales is due to the satire of contemporary type characters and social issues.

For example, in his story "The Man That Was Used Up", Poe criticizes the military, society, and the contemporary obsession with technology and progress. It focuses on Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, a war hero returned from fighting the "Bugaboos and the Kickapoos" in India. We are introduced to him by the narrator's infatuation. "There was something, as it were, remarkable – yes, *remarkable*, although this is but a feeble term to express my full meaning – about the entire individuality of the personage in question" (307). Already we see a similar pattern to that in "The Man of the Crowd" in which the narrator is compelled to pursue the man because of his mystery. Rather than a dark and foreboding character, General John A.B.C. Smith is bright, and his commanding presence practically jumps off the page. "There was an air distingué pervading the whole man, which spoke of high breeding, and hinted at high birth" (307). We, too, are instantly intrigued and compelled to follow the narrator as he enquires of various people for more information on this formidable character.

This search for information takes us deeper into the narrator's world. We see parlors, operas, and cocktail parties, as well as widows, gentlemen, and young ladies. While they are not the focus of the story, they provide a necessary depth. More importantly, they function as Poe's running commentary on society, specifically their high praise of modern

technology. Their half-finished (and sometimes even half-started) stories provide a solid backdrop for the General, who symbolizes the “significance that Jacksonian America placed on martial accomplishment” (Blake 323).

This was a popular issue during Poe’s time. Many military heroes were being appointed to high political positions, which was controversial, particularly for members of the Whig party like Poe (Blake 336, 337). It has even been suggested that General John A.B.C. Smith was a satire of general Winfield Scott (Blake 326), as a figurehead for other military heroes whose identity was based solely on their accomplishments in combat. This is an important element in the tale, for it is clear from the beginning that his reputation precedes him and, moreover, everyone has heard. “Smith! – Why, not General John A.B.C.? Bless me I thought you *knew* all about *him!*” (311). This, it seems, is the ultimate purpose of the gossip and the presence of standard members of society – they demonstrate the power of a reputation and how that alone can make a man who he is.

Still, interwoven with these compliments and hints at high stature, there are odd phrases that are equally important, if not more revealing. In church, a doctor overhears the general referred to as a man and shouts, “Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live; he cometh up and is cut down like a flower!” At first, this seems like an offhand interjection that is wildly out of place. Perhaps, one thinks, its purpose is

to disrupt the conversation to prolong the narrator's search. This is, in part, true, but above all it is another layer of the contemporary debate Poe is exposing: the doctor does not believe the general is truly a man. He, equally, does not think him ridiculous, but rather solely an example of the success of science and technology. He is not natural, but he is an example of progress. This in conjunction with fragments of conversation such as "This is a wonderfully inventive age!" (311) adds to the underlying thought that something is not entirely right with this "remarkable" man.

When the narrator discovers the general's secret he is shocked. He at first believes he is in the dressing room alone, but upon kicking a bundle by the door is greeted with "Hem! Ahem! Rather civil that, I should say!" (314). The narrator is alarmed, which the bundle – or the general – finds odd. He even comments on how strange it is that the narrator shouldn't know him. This, of course, is Poe's entire point: the General could not exist without his reputation or the "scientific" advancements of the age. Military men are so concerned with themselves that they will go to absurd extremes to continue to operate as a member of society. The general's explanation to the narrator focuses solely on the nuances of his construction and more details of his battles in India. This is all that is left of his identity.

Of course, the more prominent political satire here is that of the "self-made man". In Jacksonian democracy this idealistic figure – one that had been present in American culture and literature since Benjamin

Franklin – was emphasized and much political rhetoric and war propaganda focused on him. The idea was simply that a man with nothing could rise to great power and fortune if he worked hard enough and wanted it badly enough. In “The Man That Was Used Up” Poe literalizes this concept through the truncated figure of the general. Not only does he need to be physically assembled but, further, in this construction he also accounts his entire identity.

The general’s servant, Pompey, complicates this idea of the “self-made” man. If the general represents all military heroes and demonstrates how society constructs people’s identities, then Pompey represents slavery during Poe’s time. Poe uses this same name for the servant in “The Gold Bug” and other stories, signaling that slaves were not meant to be viewed as individuals or their own person. Pompey’s presence deepens the depiction of the general as a social fraud. His popularity rests on his physical construction but, more than that, he is not self-made at all. He requires Pompey to construct him and this adds another layer of irony.

“Without his newly assembled prostheses, Smith is legally not a person. ...Pompey must complete his task in order for the General to regain ‘the right to enjoy his property’ – which in 1839 included his weary valet...in repossessing his body, [he] repossesses the right to kill, enslave, and dispossess” (Blake 341). The irony and meaning behind this is deepened when compared to the underlying beliefs of the Jacksonian democracy: the war on India was fought to bolster the rhetoric of white

supremacy and slaves in America were necessary to perpetuate it (Blake 349). Thus, if General John A.B.C. Smith is *nothing* without Pompey, he satirizes core beliefs of Jacksonian democracy, the social construct of the self-made man and the absurd faith society placed in new technology in the name of progress.

### ***THE ABSURD NOTION OF PROGRESS***

Progress was, indeed, an absurd notion for both Poe and Baudelaire. In “Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe” Baudelaire says:

...that progress in so far as there is any) increases suffering in proportion as it refines enjoyment, and that, if the epidermis of the peoples of the earth goes on becoming more delicate, they clearly pursue only a retreating goal – an *Italiam fugientem* – a conquest lost at every moment, a progress that is forever its own negation (67,68).

Poe agreed. In his tale “Some Words With a Mummy” he goes to fantastic measures that border on absurd to make his point. A doctor has finally gained permission to unwrap a mummy, presumably to explore the process of embalming and some secrets of Egyptian culture. The focus, however, is that this is something which has never been done – or even attempted – before. Already Poe has introduced the idea of progress for its own sake. After exposing the body, there is shock and horror when the company discovers that the mummy was not dead. He had merely been embalmed when he fell into catalepsy and was still a living man

thousands of years later<sup>15</sup>. There ensues a long conversation comparing Ancient Egyptian culture to the nineteenth century, and this is where Poe truly reveals the ridiculous nature of progress.

His overall point is that there has not been much progression at all. The name of the mummy itself, Count Allamistakeo, attests to this. It is not only a further hint that he was buried by mistake, but also a suggestion that the men are all full of misconceptions about their society. The company brags to the Count of various attributes of nineteenth century society, but each time the mummy quietly reveals that the Egyptians had much the same things, even those of higher quality or greater size. Poe's crowning moment, though, is when the conversation turns to American democracy.

We then spoke of the great beauty and importance of Democracy...He listened with marked interest...he said that, a great while ago, there had occurred something of a very similar sort. Thirteen Egyptian provinces determined all at once to be free, and so set a magnificent example to the rest of mankind. ... The thing ended, however, in the consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, into the most odious and insupportable despotism that ever was heard of upon the face of the Earth. ... It was *mob* (820).

The absurdity lies in the fact that Americans were so proud of their democratic morals during Poe's time and thought themselves very original. The narrator is shocked to discover this is not true and in outrage points out the "Egyptian ignorance of steam" (820). A man of the

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<sup>15</sup> Catalepsy is also a recurring event in Poe's stories, for example in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Premature Burial".

company quietly “demanded if [he] was really such a fool as not to know that the modern steam engine is derived from the invention of Hero, through Solomon de Caus” (820). Even the steam engine, considered to be one of the greatest inventions of the industrial movement, was not true progress. In the end, the only “true” progress the company can find is that of “Pononner’s lozenges of Brandreth’s pills” (821). Not exactly the result of remarkable bounds of progress of American democracy.

Baudelaire not only read this tale, but also felt the same way about progress in French society. The French poet believed that progress was impossible because “there can not be any progress...except within the individual and by the individual himself. But the world is composed of people who can think only in common, in the herd” (“*Mon Coeur Mis en Nue*” 66). Here he combines his distaste for progress with the belief that individuality is of the utmost importance. While the belief of the individual might have been his own, Baudelaire took his ideas of progress from Poe (Gilman 110). This inspiration reinforced his loathing for American society and their treatment of his American brother. It was more proof that Poe’s literary theories and social attitude was in response to what he believed to be the uninspired writings of his contemporaries as well as the public’s narrow-minded response to his published works.

Even more important, though, was the effect this discovery of Poe’s antiprogress had on Baudelaire’s works. In his prose poem “*Everyman’s*

Chimera" ("Chacun sa Chimère")<sup>16</sup> a group of men is traveling down the road together. A Chimera clings to each of them but they hardly seem to notice. When the narrator inquires where they are going, the man "replied that he had no idea, any more than the rest of them, but obviously they must be going somewhere, as they were compelled by some irresistible desire to plod on and on". The prose poem, at first, is wildly confusing. Why are there Chimeras in Paris, and how is it that not one of the men has noticed their presence or is bothered by them?

The tale becomes clearer when related to Baudelaire's views on progress. Like Poe's "Some Words With a Mummy", it introduces absurdity of the concept of progress without true purpose. The men are plodding onward under unfavorable conditions merely because there is a force compelling them to do so. This force could potentially be society and man's tendency to fall into a group. The Chimera could also be the literal presence of the force, representing either a perverse desire but, more plausibly, society's notion of progress. The absurdity of the Chimera reflects Baudelaire's belief that the notion of progress was preposterous.

The final paragraph is a reflection of the French author's thesis in "Mon Coeur Mis a Nu" that there is no unity among French society. "For a few moments I racked my brains in an effort to solve and understand this mystery; but very soon an irresistible indifference came over me,

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<sup>16</sup> In Greek mythology, a large female monster composed of many different animals.

overwhelming me even more than they were by their Chimeras"<sup>17</sup>. In addition to being an example of natural individualism, it is also an example of the poet's refusal to join the crowd and, ultimately, refusal to succumb to the progressive ideals of French society.

### *LINKED BY DISDAIN*

Baudelaire and Poe incorporated social criticism into their works differently, focused on different issues, and were not inspired by each other to do so. Still, their views on the societies in which they lived had many commonalities. Regardless of their method – using an individual to represent a crowd, drawing on personal experiences – they were each dismayed and disgusted by the frivolity of those around them. Baudelaire was outraged at the blasé regard for the condition of the poor. Both authors were concerned that the identity of the individual rested in the hands of the masses. The masses had the power to make a man through their gossip, obliterate him with their apathetic response, or validate or invalidate a man's career.

Their different relationships to the masses, then, are why Poe and Baudelaire critique their societies differently. Baudelaire must inherently acknowledge his own faults when he criticizes the masses, because in some ways they are one. Poe believes himself to be above the masses, and thus turns his satirical eye on them, leaving his personal situation out

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<sup>17</sup> Translated by Francis Scarfe.

completely. This is why "The Man of The Crowd" can be read as a metaphor for their relationship. Just as the narrator and the man of the crowd exist differently within bustling London life, so too did the two transatlantic brothers exist differently within their respective societies, and respond differently to their connection with them.

#### IV. MAKING A LASTING IMPRESSION: THE CREATION OF A MUTUAL LEGACY

The relationship between Poe and Baudelaire is remarkably multifaceted. Even the famed “shock of recognition” – the moment when Baudelaire first glimpsed his connection to Poe – has two layers which immediately overlap, making them inseparable, perhaps nearly indistinguishable. When Baudelaire first read Poe’s “The Black Cat” it compelled him to further explore the man behind the literature. As Baudelaire hungered for more information about who this man was, he also longed to read more of his works. The more he read and discovered, the more common traits began to appear and the Poe he learned of through the tales began to merge with the Poe he learned of through biographies and newspaper articles.

As far as transcontinental connections their relationship was mostly one-sided. Poe knew very little (if anything) of Baudelaire and his poetry and thus did not promote it in American literary circles. However, most scholars agree that Poe’s presence in French literature began with Baudelaire’s translations of his tales and the publication of *Les Histoires Extraordinaires*. Still, though the brotherly compassion Baudelaire developed for Poe is powerful and compelling, the most fascinating aspect is how it spread and, in many ways, how that identification consumed Baudelaire’s whole life. The impact it had was crucial to creating the man

and the poet. I would argue that neither Poe nor Baudelaire as we know them today would exist were it not for Baudelaire's discovery of the American author.

There are countless examples of Poe's influence in Baudelaire's works: themes of death and mortality, stylistic techniques, critiques of contemporary society, and literary theories. Their subjects overlap and their similar literary theories appear in different ways in their various works. These specific examples as they stand alone may not be significant or compelling however, when they are strung together a clear image of the role the American author played in Baudelaire's life begins to emerge. Baudelaire and Poe had a profound influence on each other, to be sure, but their relationship is enriched when placed in the context of French and American literature and culture.

### ***BAUDELAIRE'S SUCCESS THROUGH POE***

Much of the scholarship on the relationship between the two authors focuses on how Baudelaire aided Poe's career and solidified his reputation in Europe. This is woefully shortsighted, for it is equally important that Poe shaped Baudelaire's career as well. That he did so unconsciously is of little importance, for the French author's legacy is owed as much to Poe as it is to his *Fleurs du Mal*. It was not until he began to publish his translations that Baudelaire began to gain any kind of measurable success. His first volume to be published was *Les Histoires*

*Extraordinaires* in 1856. While he published *Les Fleurs du Mal* a year later, after all of the drama and opposition surrounding it very few people bought it and Baudelaire made almost no profit. In the same year he published his second volume of translations entitled *Les Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires*. Since he was typically slow to present finished manuscripts to his publisher, it speaks to the French poet's dedication to Poe that these two works were published in the same year. While it is commonly agreed that the poems included in *Les Fleurs du Mal* were written over the preceding decade, once it was published there was so much tension surrounding it that Baudelaire was, finally, in the limelight.

This, perhaps, was perfect timing. While he was being forced to revise and, in some cases, cut his own poems that were drawing so much attention and being ridiculed, Baudelaire's translations were becoming a success. Whether it was intentional or not is unclear, but the strategy turned out to be brilliant. As he was being reviled by his contemporaries Baudelaire continued to promote Poe and began his own climb to success. Though this success would not be fully realized until years after Baudelaire's death, it is understood that he was aware that his translations were rapidly gaining popularity. One must wonder if Baudelaire saw the irony in this, given the horror his own works were inspiring, though they shared so many similar qualities.

Though he was very much his own author and created original works, Baudelaire would not have been so successful, even after his

lifetime, if it were not for the implicit affirmation he received from his American brother. It was through this validation that Baudelaire was able to stand up to the disapproval and repulsion of the French reading public and literary circles. Baudelaire felt profoundly that it was indeed the shortcomings of the French population and not his own lack of talent or misrepresentation of ideas that caused him such suffering. Obviously, Baudelaire never spoke to his American “semblable” nor did his translations receive any recognition from Poe, but this was of little consequence. The two authors were indebted to each other both personally and in their literature. Baudelaire knew he owed much to his American twin, but Poe would never know what his brother an ocean away would do for him.

### *POE'S DEBT TO BAUDELAIRE*

Throughout his literary career Poe struggled to gain success and very few in American literary circles understood or appreciated his works. It seems that as a society we grudgingly credit the birth of detective fiction and horror stories to this author, yet we cannot seem to fully support the tales that actually did so<sup>18</sup>. Perhaps it was a true lack of understanding of Poe's irony and social commentary, or true horror at his outlandish plots, but the more compelling theory is that the author's personal life was so

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin Jackson suggests Poe might be “the worst writer ever to have had any claim to greatness” by Kevin Jackson (Jackson 3).

intrinsically tied to his writing that Americans could not separate the two. They could not accept his personal habits and thus could not accept his work.

Baudelaire solved this problem in France with his first-hand understanding of “unethical” personal habits. He was able to use this element of his connection to Poe to present it to the French in a favorable light. He excused it, blaming it on something most Frenchmen could blame things on – the narrow-minded views of Americans. Had Baudelaire never translated Poe’s works it is possible that he would still be considered a marginalized American author without much recognition. Were it not for Baudelaire it is almost certain that Poe’s renown would not have expanded beyond his homeland. Indeed, after the popularity and high standing of *Les Histoires Extraordinaires* and *Les Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires* was solidified in France Poe’s tales were translated into Russian and German and subsequently traveled across Europe.

Of course, this popularity in France has far surpassed that in America, but it has translated into greater success for Poe here. When his European following strengthened, Americans – particularly American authors and critics – were compelled to take a second look at his work. In his lecture delivered to the Library of Congress in 1948 T.S. Eliot says “we should be prepared to entertain the possibility that these Frenchmen have seen something in Poe that English-speaking readers have missed” (Eliot). While Eliot’s reasons for the American poet’s popularity are flawed and

shallow, this thesis is fairly accurate. Rather than accuse Americans of missing something, I would credit the French – or rather, Baudelaire – for having reserved judgment of Poe’s personal habits long enough to absorb the novelty and genius of his tales. After that, they were able to blend the man and the author together to create a whole identity. This identity included flaws, but they were flaws that did not hinder the appeal of his writings. This is what Baudelaire helped the French discover and, ultimately, forced literary critics across the globe to grapple with.

#### *A LASTING IMPRESSION*

The effect these two authors had on each other’s careers has changed French and American literary canons. I do not wish to argue that the works of either Poe or Baudelaire are crucial turning points in either body of literature. However, that one man’s “shock of recognition” motivated him to promote a foreign author to his countrymen and was compelled to make him great is monumentally important to each country’s literary history. Baudelaire’s deep understanding of Poe’s literary theories, social criticism, tales and poetry broadened the span of French literature. Indeed, since the publication of *Les Histoires Extraordinaires* and Poe’s favorable reputation in France, there has “hardly been a French author who has not paid his respects to Poe in some way”

(even if he did so subconsciously) (Quinn 13). This alone speaks to the profound nature of this connection<sup>19</sup>.

What we should understand from the deep and complex relationship between these two men is not only how powerfully personal experiences can shape literature, or even how one man's work can change a vast aspect of an entire culture, but the role the literature played in building and supporting the relationship between these two poets. It was Poe's literature that drew Baudelaire to him, the literature that inspired him to learn more about the man. It was the lack of success Baudelaire's literature had which compelled him to translate Poe's tales and promote them as feats of literary genius, and it was the reception of the refined minds of the French literary public to the American author's tales as well as his aesthetic ideals which opened up an entire world of success for both of them.

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<sup>19</sup> After Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Paul Valéry continued the ardent admiration of Poe. Jean-Luc Godard used "The Oval Portrait" in his film *Vivre Sa Vie*. The American author was even celebrated at the bicentennial in 1989 – his works were at the forefront of many bookstore windows.

## APPENDIX

**Travel**

The child, in love with globes and maps of foreign parts,  
 Finds in the universe no dearth and no defect.  
 How big the world is, seen by lamplight on his charts!  
 How very small the world is, viewed in retrospect.

Some morning we start out; we have a grudge, we itch  
 To hurt someone, get even, - whatever the cause may be,  
 Here we are, leaning to the vessel's roll and pitch,  
 Cradling our infinite upon the finite sea:

People who think their country shameful, who despise  
 Its politics, are here; and men who hate their home;  
 Astrologers, who read the stars in women's eyes  
 Til nearly drowned, stand by the rail and watch the foam;

Men who must run from Circe, or be changed to swine,  
 Go tramping round the deck, drunken with light and air,  
 Thinking that wind and sun and spray that tastes of brine  
 Can clean the lips of kisses, blow perfume from the hair.

But the true travelers are those who leave a part  
 Just to be leaving; hearts light as balloons, they cry,  
 'Come on! There's a ship sailing! Hurry! Time's getting short!'  
 And pack a bag and board her, - and could not tell you why.

Those whose desires assume the shape of mist or clouds;  
 Who long for, as the raw recruit longs for his gun,  
 Voluptuousness immense and changing, by the crowd  
 Unguessed, and never known by name to anyone.

-translation by George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay

### To the Reader

Folly, depravity, greed, mortal sin  
 Invade our souls and rack our flesh; we feed  
 Our gentle guilt, gracious regrets, that breed  
 Like vermin glutting on fowl beggars' skin.

Our sins are stubborn; our repentance, faint.  
 We take a handsome price for our confession,  
 Happy once more to wallow in transgression,  
 Thinking vile tears will cleanse us of all taint.

On evil's cushion poised, His Majesty,  
 Satan Thrice-Great, lulls our charmed soul, until  
 He turns to vapor what was once out will:  
 Rich ore, transmuted by his alchemy.

He holds the strings that move us, limb by limb!  
 We yield, enthralled, to things repugnant, base;  
 Each day, toward Hell, with slow, unhurried pace,  
 We sink, uncowed, through shadows, stinking, grim.

Like some lewd rake with his old worn-out whore,  
 Nibbling her suffering teats, we seize our sly  
 Delight, that, like an orange – withered, dry –  
 We squeeze and press for juice that is no more.

Our brains teem with a race of Fiends, who frolic  
 Think as a million gut-worms; with each breath,  
 Our lungs drink deep, suck down a stream of Death –  
 Dim-lit – to low-moaned whimpers melancholic.

If poison, fire, blade, rape do not succeed  
 In sewing on that dull embroidery of our pathetic lives their artistry,  
 It's that our soul, alas, shrinks from the deed.

And yet, among the beasts and creatures all –  
 Panther, snake, scorpion, jackal, ape, hound, hawk –  
 Monsters that crawl, and shriek, and grunt, and squawk,  
 In our vice-filled menagerie's caterwaul,

One worse is there, fit to heap scorn upon –  
 More ugly, rank! Though noiseless, calm, and still,  
 Yet would he turn the earth to scaps and swill,  
 Swallow it whole in one great, gaping yawn:

Ennui! That monster frail! – With eye wherein  
A change tear gleams, he dreams of gibblets, while  
Smoking his hookah, with a dainty smile...

– You know him, reader, - hypocrite, - my twin!  
- Translation by Norman R. Shapiro

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