

CONTENTS

Spleen: <i>Old Pluvius, month of rains . . .</i>	63
Spleen: <i>When the low, heavy sky . . .</i>	63
Obsession	65
Heautontimoroumenos	67
The Irremediable	69
The Clock	73
A Landscape	75
The Sun	77
The Swan	79
The Seven Old Men	83
The Little Old Women	89
The Skeleton Laborer	95
Comes the Charming Evening	97
The Gaming Table	101
Parisian Dream	103
Morning Twilight	107
The Martyr	109
Lesbians	115
An Allegory	123
Abel and Cain	125
Litany to Satan	127
The Voyage	133
The Rebel	147
The Abyss	147
The Moon Offended	149
The Unforseen	151
Meditation	155
A Madrigal of Sorrow	157
What a Pair of Eyes Can Promise	161
Notes on the translators	163
Index of translators	167

THREE DRAFTS OF A PREFACE

by Charles Baudelaire

I

PREFACE

France is passing through a period of vulgarity. Paris, a center radiating universal stupidity. Despite Molière and Béranger, no one would ever have believed that France would take to the road of progress at such a rate. Matters of art, *terrac cognitæ*.

Great men are stupid.

My book may have done some good; I do not regret that. It may have done harm; I do not rejoice at that.

The aim of poetry. This book is not made for my wives, my daughters, or my sisters.

Every sin, every crime I have related has been imputed to me.

Hatred and contempt as forms of amusement. Elegists are vulgar scum. *Et verbum caro factum est*. The poet is of no party. Otherwise, he would be a mere mortal.

The Devil. Original sin. Man as good. If you would, you could be the Tyrant's favorite; it is more difficult to love God than to believe in Him. On the other hand, it is more difficult for people nowadays to believe in the Devil than to love him. Everyone smells him and no one believes in him. Sublime subtlety of the Devil.

A soul to my liking. The scene. — Thus, novelty. — The Epigraph. — D'Aureville. — The Renaissance. — Gérard de Nerval. — We are all hanged or hangable.

I have included a certain amount of filth to please the gentlemen of the press. They have proved ungrateful.

II

PREFACE TO THE FLOWERS

It is not for my wives, my daughters, or my sisters that this book has been written; nor for the wives, daughters, or sisters of my neighbors. I leave that to those who have some reason to confuse good deeds with fine language.

I know the passionate lover of fine style exposes himself to the hatred of the masses; but no respect for humanity, no false modesty, no conspiracy, no universal suffrage will ever force me to speak the unspeakable jargon of this age, or to confuse ink with virtue.

Certain illustrious poets have long since divided among themselves the more flowery provinces of the realm of poetry. I have found it amusing, and the more pleasant because the task was more difficult, to extract *beauty* from *Evil*. This book, which is quintessentially useless and absolutely innocent, was written with no other aim than to divert myself and to practice my passionate taste for the difficult.

Some have told me that these poems might do harm; I have not rejoiced at that. Others, good souls, that they might do good; and that has given me no regret. I was equally surprised at the former's fear and the latter's hope, which only served to prove once again that this age has unlearned all the classical notions of literature.

Despite the encouragement a few celebrated pedants have given to man's natural stupidity, I should never have believed our country could move with such speed along the road of *progress*. The world has taken on a thickness of vulgarity that raises a spiritual man's contempt to the violence of

a passion. But there are those happy hides so thick that that poison itself could not penetrate them.

I had intended, at first, to answer numerous criticisms and at the same time to explain a few quite simple questions that have been totally obscured by modern enlightenment: What is poetry? What is its aim? On the distinction between the Good and the Beautiful; on the Beauty in Evil; that rhythm and rhyme answer the immortal need in man for monotony, symmetry, and surprise; on adapting style to subject; on the vanity and danger of inspiration, etc., etc.; but this morning I was so rash as to read some of the public newspapers; suddenly an indolence of the weight of twenty atmospheres fell upon me, and I was stopped, faced by the appalling uselessness of explaining anything whatever to anyone whatever. Those who know can divine me, and for those who can not or will not understand, it would be fruitless to pile up explanations.

C.B.

How the artist, by a prescribed series of exercises, can proportionately increase his originality;

How poetry is related to music through prosody, whose roots go deeper into the human soul than any classical theory indicates; That French poetry possesses a mysterious and unrecognized prosody, like the Latin and English languages;

Why any poet who does not know exactly how many rhymes each word has is incapable of expressing any idea whatever;

That the poetic phrase can imitate (and in this, it is like the art of music and the science of mathematics) a horizontal line, an ascending or descending vertical line; that it can rise straight up to heaven without losing its breath, or go perpendicularly to hell with the velocity of any weight; that it can follow a spiral, describe a parabola, or zigzag, making a series of superimposed angles;

this little book I have at a single stroke both won and deserved that glory. Submitted several times over to various publishers who rejected it with disgust, put on trial and mutilated in 1857 as a result of a quite bizarre misapprehension, then gradually revived, augmented, and fortified during several years' silence, only to disappear again thanks to my losing interest, this discordant product of the *Muse of modern times*, again enlivened with a few violent new touches, dares today for the third time to face the sun of stupidity.

This is not my fault, but that of an insistent publisher who thinks he is strong enough to brave the public distaste. "This book will remain a stain on your whole life," one of my friends, a great poet, predicted from the beginning. And indeed all my misadventures have so far justified him. But I have one of those happy characters that enjoy hatred and feel glorified by contempt. My diabolically passionate taste for stupidity makes me take peculiar pleasure in the falsifications of calumny. Being as chaste as paper, as sober as water, as devout as a woman at communion, as harmless as a sacrificial lamb, it would not displease me to be taken for a debauchee, a drunkard, an infidel, a murderer. My publisher insists that it might be of some use, to me and to him, to explain why and how I have written this book, what were my means and aim, my plan and method. Such a critical task might well have the luck to interest those minds that love profound rhetoric. For those I shall perhaps write it later on and have it printed in ten copies. But, on second thought, doesn't it seem obvious that this would be a quite superfluous undertaking for everyone concerned since those are the minds that already know or guess and the rest will never understand? I have too much fear of being ridiculous to wish to breathe into the mass of humanity the understanding of an art object; in doing so, I should fear to resemble those

That poetry is like the arts of painting, cooking, and cosmetics in its ability to express every sensation of sweetness or bitterness, beatitude or horror, by coupling a certain noun with a certain adjective, in analogy or contrast;

How, by relying on my principles and using the knowledge which I guarantee to teach him in twenty lessons, any man can learn to compose a tragedy that will be no more hooted at than another, or line up a poem long enough to be as dull as any epic known.

A difficult matter, to rise to that divine callousness! For, despite my most commendable efforts, even I have not been able to resist the desire to please my contemporaries, as witness in several places, laid on like make-up, certain patches of base flattery aimed at democracy, and even a certain amount of filth meant to excuse the dreariness of my subject. But the gentlemen of the press having proved ungrateful for tender attentions of this kind, I have eliminated every trace of both, so far as possible, from this new edition.

I propose, in order to prove again the excellence of my method, to apply it in the near future to celebrating the pleasures of devotion and the raptures of military glory, though I have never known either.

Notes on plagiarisms. — Thomas Gray. Edgar Poe (2 passages). Longfellow (2 passages). Statius. Virgil (the whole of *Andromache*). Aeschylus. Victor Hugo.

III

DRAFT OF A PREFACE FOR THE *Flowers of Evil*

(*To be combined perhaps with earlier notes*)

If there is any glory in not being understood, or in being only very slightly so, I may without boasting say that with

Utopians who by decree wish to make all Frenchmen rich and virtuous at a single stroke. And moreover, my best, my supreme reason is that it annoys and bores me. Do we invite the crowd, the audience, behind the scenes, into the workshops of the costume and scene designers; into the actress's dressing-room? Do we show the public (enthusiastic today, tomorrow indifferent) the mechanism behind our effects? Do we explain to them the revisions, the improvisations adopted in rehearsal, and even to what extent instinct and sincerity are mixed with artifice and charlatanry, all indispensable to the amalgam that is the work itself? Do we display all the rags, the rouge, the pulleys, the chains, the alterations, the scribbled-over proof sheets, in short all the horrors that make up the sanctuary of art?

In any case, such is not my mood today. I have no desire either to demonstrate, to astonish, to amuse, or to persuade. I have my nerves and my vertigo. I aspire to absolute rest and continuous night. Though I have sung the mad pleasures of wine and opium, I thirst only for a liquor unknown on earth, which the pharmacutics of heaven itself could not afford me; a liquor that contains neither vitality nor death, neither excitation nor extinction. To know nothing, to teach nothing, to will nothing, to feel nothing, to sleep and still to sleep, this today is my only wish. A base and loathsome wish, but sincere.

Nevertheless, since the best of taste teaches us not to fear contradicting ourselves a bit, I have collected at the end of this abominable book certain testimonials of sympathy from a few of the men I prize most, so that an impartial reader may infer from them that I am not absolutely deserving of excommunication, and that since I have managed to make myself loved of some, my heart, whatever a certain printed

rag may have said of it, is perhaps not "as frightfully hideous as my face."

Finally, the uncommon generosity which those gentlemen, the critics . . .

Since ignorance is increasing . . .

I take it on myself to denounce imitations . . .

(Translated by J.M.)

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 ténébres qui puent.

Ainsi qu'un débauché 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 poulmons
Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

TO THE READER

Folly and error, avarice and vice,
Employ our souls and waste our bodies' force.
As mangy beggars incubate their lice,
We nourish our innocuous remorse.

Our sins are stubborn, craven our repentance.
For our weak vows we ask excessive prices.
Trusting our tears will wash away the sentence,
We sneak off where the muddy road entices.

Cradled in evil, that Thrice-Great Magician,
The Devil, rocks our souls, that can't resist;
And the rich metal of our own volition
Is vaporized by that sage alchemist.

The Devil pulls the strings by which we're worked :
By all revolting objects lured, we slink
Hellwards; each day down one more step we're jerked
Feeling no horror, through the shades that stink.

Just as a lustful pauper bites and kisses
The scarred and shrivelled breast of an old whore,
We steal, along the roadside, furtive blisses,
Squeezing them like stale oranges for more.

Packed tight, like hives of maggots, thickly seething,
Within our brains a host of demons surges.
Deep down into our lungs at every breathing,
Death flows, an unseen river, moaning dirges.

If rape or arson, poison, or the knife
Has wove no pleasing patterns in the stuff
Of this drab canvas we accept as life —
It is because we are not bold enough !

Amongst the jackals, leopards, mongrels, apes,
Snakes, scorpions, vultures, that with hellish din,
Squeal, roar, writhe, gambol, crawl, with monstrous shapes,
In each man's foul menagerie of sin —

There's one more damned than all. He never gambols,
Nor crawls, nor roars, but, from the rest withdrawn,
Gladly of this whole earth would make a shambles
And swallow up existence with a yawn . . .

Boredom ! He smokes his hookah, while he dreams
Of gibbets, weeping tears he cannot smother.
You know this dainty monster, too, it seems —
Hypocrite reader ! — You ! — My twin ! — My brother !

— Roy Campbell

THE BLESSING

When, by a decree of the sovereign power,
The poet makes his appearance in a bored world,
With fists clenched at the horror, his outraged mother
Calls on a pitying God, at whom these curses are hurled :

“ Why was I not made to litter a brood of vipers
Rather than conceive this human mockery ?

5

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 notre âme, hélas ! n'est pas assez hardie.

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

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde !
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands 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.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
— Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère !

BÉNÉDICTION

Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,
Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé,
Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes
Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié :

— “ Ah ! que n'ai-je mis bas tout un nœud de vipères,
Plurôt que de nourrir cette dérision !

4