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HELEN ABBOTT

BAUDELAIRE IN SONG

1880–1930

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Preface and Acknowledgements

> Les contradictions donc des jugements ne m'offensent, ni m'altèrent: elles m'éveillent seulement et m'exercent.
>
> Montaigne, *Essais* III: 8

This study has been several years in the making. As a singer and musician myself, being able to perform the song settings of the literary works I analyse in my academic practice has afforded me a deep engagement with the complexities of the relationships between words and music. As a specialist in nineteenth-century French literature, thought, and music, taking on some of the bigger, thornier, questions about how poetry is set to music had thus far eluded me, however. My approach this time is to take on those larger challenges, which I could not have done without the support of colleagues, friends, and family who have generously given of their time and expertise.

In my previous book on five different nineteenth-century French song settings of Baudelaire's 'La Mort des amants', I set out a way of analysing song based on a 'settability' model which I devised on the basis of measurable parameters in both poem text and music score. This new book challenges and revisits some of the assumptions I made in that 2012 study. It therefore recognizes that new findings can change previous thinking. I could not have developed these ideas without the critical conversations with my research collaborator Dr Mylène Dubiau at the Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès. Our paths crossed, fortuitously, at the Oxford Lieder Festival where I was presenting a co-curated study day on Baudelaire song settings with Artistic Director Sholto Kynoch and launching my first book. This new book acknowledges the importance of happenstance connections and of guiding discussions with colleagues from across the globe, and particularly France, the UK, and the USA, including academics and professional musicians with whom I have worked over the years. I have been able to test out many of my new ideas through conference papers, lectures, and recitals at universities in the UK and France in particular, and special mention should be reserved for the various cohorts of students on my Poetry and Performance courses at both Bangor University and the University of Sheffield, whose lively seminar discussions provided so many varied perspectives on the issues uncovered in a combined musicopoetic text. I am also grateful to François Le Roux for generously allowing me access to his unparalleled library of French song scores at the *Centre International de la Mélodie Française*, and to David Bevan and Maxime Goergen for assisting me in sourcing some key articles.

A further note should be reserved for the relationship between the present study and a wider research project, generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) 2015–19: The Baudelaire Song Project (http://www.baudelairesong.org). While this book forms an integral part of the wider project, it

focuses on a defined corpus of five classical art song sets from a fifty-year period in Europe, whereas the wider project looks at song settings of Baudelaire's poetry from the 1860s to the present day, in all musical genres from *chanson* to hip-hop and beyond. While the present study uses only a 'light-touch' digital methodology to inform the detailed song analyses offered in Chapters 4 to 8, the project research team, and especially research associate Dr Caroline Ardrey, are developing a full digital methodology for examining the extensive data set, using a combination of Sonic Visualiser, Audacity, and other bespoke digital humanities tools, to generate and examine ten different annotation layers. The long discussions with Caroline as we pored over spreadsheets, scores, and digital markups provided me with an invaluable sanity check, to ensure that I understood what does and does not work and how my approach could be improved.

This study also draws on a wide range of experience and skills that go beyond my literary and musical training, not least of all the professional training in financial modelling and Excel data analysis which I garnered at the start of my career, prior to entering academia, when I worked in investment banking in the City of London. It is also informed by scientific approaches. It is not by chance that sections of this study draw on the ideas of adhesion science, as this is an area I have been exposed to for many years. A certain Prof. Steven Abbott is directly related to me and specializes in the chemistry of adhesion science. I am grateful for all the years of challenging 'arts versus sciences' discussions which have helped to bring me to this point in my thinking.

Similarly, I could not have approached settings of Baudelaire in German and Russian without the assistance of a number of colleagues and friends who are experts in those languages. I am grateful, therefore, to Peter Bullock, Dagmar Divjak, Julia Dobson, Matthew O'Sullivan, Katrin Probyn, and Adrian Wanner for their generosity with their time, offering support with translations, engaging in critical discussions about cultural contexts, and giving suggestions about how to source further information.

On a more practical level, I am grateful to Mary Lowe for the use of her tranquil flat (and the cake supply that came with it) as I drafted the early chapters of this book during an otherwise busy and disruptive time because of major building works at home, and to Robert Mackley for hosting me during my Cambridge research trips. The final stages of this book were completed just as we moved house and would not have been possible without the support of my husband Richard, who ensured our new study was up and running swiftly, so that I could get back to my writing desk.

Beyond the practicalities, by far the most significant support I have received in preparing this book has been Richard's unswerving dedication as he not only listened to me as I grappled with challenging sections of the argument and analysis but also spent time playing through each of the songs so that I could get to know the scores in detail, accompanying me as I sang through each of the thirty or so works on repeated occasions. Richard also accompanied my recital of the Vierne *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire* at the University of Sheffield in February 2014, for which I remain particularly grateful, knowing as I now do the complexity of

Vierne's piano writing. It is to Richard, also, that I owe the typesetting of the music examples, prepared with meticulous care, and by dint of working late into the evenings to get them completed on time.

And so, to Richard, for everything.

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Baudelaire's Musical Contexts

Approaches to Analysing Poetry's Relationship with Music

WHAT KIND OF POETRY? WHAT KIND OF MUSIC?

During the Second Empire in France (1852–70) Paris was a city full of music. It was during this era that Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) published *Les Fleurs du mal*, a collection of 100 or so verse poems, and an innovative collection of fifty prose poems. The poet was able to hear music across the city, in venues as diverse as the opera house, the salon, the café-concert, the casino, singing clubs (the *goguette* or *lice*), and city parks (*musique en plein air*).[1] The effect on Baudelaire's poetry of the different types of music emerging from these venues, and the reciprocal effect of his poetry on new music emerging during this time, sparks a wider set of debates surrounding the relationship between words and music. While Joycelynne Loncke's founding study, *Baudelaire et la musique* (1975), examined each of the key musical institutions and genres relating to Baudelaire's musical contexts, and critiqued Baudelaire's famous relationship with Wagner, neither she nor subsequent Baudelaire scholars have fully addressed the extent and scope of musical works inspired by Baudelaire.[2] As Joseph Acquisto has highlighted, the Wagner relationship has eclipsed so much of the scholarship on Baudelaire and music that there is now a 'near-total association . . . of the term "music" with "Richard Wagner"' in Baudelaire studies.[3] The need to examine Baudelaire's other musical relationships, and particularly song settings of his poetry, has been highlighted by Baudelaire scholars Antoine Compagnon and F. W. Leakey in different contexts. Compagnon signals

[1] For a more detailed description of Baudelaire's involvement with and attitude towards each of these venues, see Joycelynne Loncke, *Baudelaire et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1975), pp. 79–95.

[2] Critical studies on the relationship between Baudelaire and Wagner have flourished in the last thirty years in particular, from Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Musica ficta (Figures de Wagner)* (1991), and Margaret Miner's *Resonant Gaps between Baudelaire and Wagner* (1995), through to Mary Breatnach's 'Writing About Music: Baudelaire and *Tannhäuser* in Paris' (2001), Eric Touya de Marenne's *Musique et poétique à l'âge du symbolisme: Variations sur Wagner: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Claudel, Valéry* (2005), Joseph Acquisto's study on the persistence of the lyric in Baudelaire's writing on Wagner in *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music* (2006), Peter Dayan's analysis of the untranslatability of Wagner's music for Baudelaire in *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (2007), Alain Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner* (2010), and Florent Albrecht's *Ut Musica Poesis: Modèle musical et enjeux poétiques de Baudelaire à Mallarmé (1857–1897)* (2012).

[3] Joseph Acquisto, *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music*, p. 156.

in his 2003 study on Baudelaire how 'la notorieté que les mélodies donnèrent aux poèmes de Baudelaire ne doit pas être négligée', flagging up how, in fact, the significance of song settings of the poet's work has been largely neglected.[4] It indicates how commentary on Baudelaire songs has been largely limited to a reductive set of famous songs by Duparc, Debussy, and Fauré. Back in 1992, F. W. Leakey's landmark study on Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* was one of the first to recognize the wide range of musical works inspired by Baudelaire's verse, although the analysis, which covers just a page of Leakey's conclusion, is necessarily brief and reductive. While Leakey's value judgements critiquing Duparc's, Debussy's, and Fauré's settings of Baudelaire may sound problematic to our ears today, his overall point about musical works inspired by Baudelaire is valid, and the passage is worth citing in full:

> Perhaps . . . Baudelaire's truest legacy to subsequent creative artists should be sought in another artistic medium than literature: in music—appropriately enough, in the case of a poet who especially fostered in certain of his texts (in prose as well as in verse) the notion of sensory inter-relationship and of the correspondence one with another of these various arts. Already in his own lifetime Baudelaire's verses had attracted the attention of several composers—among them his (mainly literary) friend . . . Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whose setting of *La Mort des amants* excited the admiration of at least one contemporary, Émile Blémont. But the most justly famous of all songs to words of Baudelaire's is Duparc's *L'Invitation au voyage*—marred only by the composer's strange decision to omit altogether from musical treatment the second of its three stanzas. Almost as beautiful are Duparc's other Baudelaire setting, *La Vie antérieure*, and Debussy's version of *Le Jet d'eau*; this latter is the third of a set entitled *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*—all five of these poems being among Baudelaire's very finest (the others are *Le Balcon*, *Harmonie du soir*, *Recueillement*, and *La Mort des amants*): a testimony to Debussy's unerring taste. But he was then still a young composer; the other four songs of this set are not quite up to the standard of *Le Jet d'eau*, lacking its inspired simplicity and haunting cadences, and certainly do not approach the uniform excellence of his later and more numerous Verlaine settings. Another supreme master of the *mélodie* who set both of these poets was Gabriel Fauré—but his choice of Baudelaire texts is noticeably less discerning than Debussy's, and with him, too, subsequent Verlaine groups are markedly superior. Among the many further French composers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have set poems of Baudelaire's, I must mention one recent figure, Léo Ferré, who hails interestingly from a quite different musical sphere, that of *chanson*, and who in numerous songs from *Les Fleurs du mal* has shown exceptional sensitivity, intelligence and understanding of prosody. Two particularly successful settings are those of his *Les Métamorphoses du vampire* (declaimed, in a sinister *parlando*, against a lightly atmospheric background) and of *Harmonie du soir* (an insidious *valse musette*, in appropriately strophic form, with a continually whirling accompaniment in which, as the genre dictates, a piano-accordion predominates). Almost as numerous are the non-French composers who have been attracted to Baudelaire's poems: the Russian Gretchaninov, for instance, in the opening years of the [twentieth] century, selected a whole group; Alban Berg's intricate concert aria, *Der Wein*, linked three poems from the 'Vin' section (*L'Âme du*

[4] Antoine Compagnon, *Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*, p. 16.

> *vin*, *Le Vin des amants*, *Le Vin du solitaire*), in German translations by Stefan George from his *Blumen des Bösen* of 1901; among the most interesting and inventive settings in our own country are those by Jonathan Harvey, with his cycle for voice and piano to which he has given the collective title *Correspondances*, and which was preceded, several years earlier, by a remarkable melodrama, *L'Horloge*, in which the speaking voice is accompanied by insect-like scurryings on the violoncello. Nor is the musical inspiration derived from *Les Fleurs du mal* confined to vocal compositions: Debussy's piano prelude, *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*, borrows its title from the third line of *Harmonie du soir*; the final movement of Berg's *Lyric Suite*… is closely related to the sonnet *De profundis clamavi*; an impressive Violoncello Concerto by Henri Dutilleux takes as its title a half-line from *La Chevelure*: 'Tout un monde lointain…', and in the score prefaces each linked movement with quotations from other Baudelaire poems which contributed to the genesis of the piece.[5]

Leakey highlights the broad range of responses to Baudelaire poetry from French composers of different genres through to foreign composers working with Baudelaire's verse in translation, or those responding to his poetry without setting the text to a sung vocal line (but using techniques of spoken delivery). Yet his comments deploy deliberately vague quantifiers, such as 'several composers' or 'almost as numerous', and thus pinpoint how little is known about the full picture of Baudelaire song settings today. The way in which Leakey begins to categorize the different types of musical response to Baudelaire (whether *mélodie*, *chanson*, concert aria, melodrama, or instrumental works for piano, cello, or string quartet) flags up a set of interrelated questions with which this chapter will start: What kind of poetry inspired composers' musical responses to Baudelaire?; What kind of music did his poetry generate?; Where could this music be heard? Although almost all of Baudelaire's verse poems have been set to music by professional and amateur musicians over the 150 years since their first publication (notably thanks to attempts at "complete" settings of *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Léo Ferré and Georges Chelon), this fact alone does not give us a clear indication of the range and type of poetic language that particularly attracts and inspires composers and songwriters to Baudelaire's texts. In fact, Baudelaire has often been considered to be a poet whose work is particularly unamenable to music, and this conundrum is worth unpacking, given the extent of the works inspired by Baudelaire's poetry, already hinted at by Leakey in 1992.

Two comments on Baudelaire's 'difficulty' will suffice to give a flavour of critical perceptions of his work and the possibility of its being set to music. First of all, the French opera composer Camille Erlanger famously stated in a 1911 interview with Fernand Divoire in *Musica* that: 'j'estime qu'il y a des poètes dont les vers sont définitifs et qui portent en eux-mêmes toute leur musique. Exemple: Baudelaire, qui se suffit totalement à soi-même.'[6] This suggests that Baudelaire's poetry is self-sufficient, with the negative implication that if you attempt to exploit it for other musical purposes, it will generate problems. Just a few years later, but writing in a

[5] F. W. Leakey, *Baudelaire* Les Fleurs du Mal, pp. 103–4.

[6] Camille Erlanger, in Fernand Divoire, 'Sous la musique que faut-il mettre? De beaux vers, de mauvais, des vers libres, de la prose?', p. 60.

German context, music critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno reiterates the point of Baudelaire's 'difficulty' for composers, citing this time the oppositional duality of the poet's aesthetic thought as a sticking point for musicians: 'Baudelaire's dialectical attitude toward Romanticism makes setting him very much more difficult; the attempt to do so will almost invariably contradict one or the other of his opposing impulses.'[7] Unlike Erlanger's view that Baudelaire's poetry does not need the addition of music, Adorno's suggests that trying to set Baudelaire to music means doing a disservice to his characteristic duality. Both Erlanger and Adorno thus paint rather problematic pictures, and this does not bode well for an analysis of Baudelaire songs. Happily, however, there are alternative views on Baudelaire's amenability to music, although these views have only begun to emerge more recently, often supported by what academia calls 'practice-led research', which enables the cross-fertilization of the critical scholarship and work in the same field by music professionals. Emblematic of this practice-led development, which also explores more than one genre of music, is a recent three-CD 'livre-disque' released by Decca-Universal in November 2013, coordinated by essayist and journalist Stephane Barsacq and entitled *Charles Baudelaire le musicien*.[8] Disc 1 focuses on music that Baudelaire enjoyed hearing and/or wrote about (typically orchestral music, such as works by Beethoven, Liszt, Wagner, and Weber). Disc 2 focuses on the art song settings of his work by composers such as Debussy, Duparc, and Fauré. Disc 3 focuses on the popular song *chansonnier* settings, from the 1950s onwards, of his poetry by singer-songwriters such as Léo Ferré, Serge Gainsbourg, and Juliette Noureddine. The selection of music is interspersed with newly commissioned readings by the actress Irène Jacob, famed for her role as singer and music teacher in the film *La Double Vie de Véronique* (dir. Kieślowski, 1991). It is refreshing to see this renewed interest in Baudelaire as impetus for the popular song form and for fresh readings of his poetry, as these remain areas which have been largely overlooked in the critical scholarship to date. This study attempts to situate itself in this new vein of research which draws on work with performers and practitioners, and explores a wider corpus of song settings of Baudelaire's poetry, revisiting Loncke, Leakey, and Compagnon to reconsider Baudelaire's musical output in extraordinarily diverse forms ranging from the modest salon song to highbrow French *mélodie*, via avant-garde settings in translation and parallel language versions, and acknowledging the poet's reach through to cutting-edge electronica and mainstream gothic rock. It is this concept of the poet's 'reach' which invites us to look back at the source material to interrogate what might be within it to inspire so many musicians, songwriters, and composers.

Baudelaire's verse output spans the main years of the Second Empire, but his early verse publications date from the 1840s, and, as Claude Pichois has shown, his first published work was a co-authored satirical *chanson* text in collaboration with Gustave Le Vavasseur, mocking the work of the popular and prolific poet-chansonnier

[7] Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the smallest link*, p. 119.
[8] *Charles Baudelaire le musicien*, livre-disque, Stéphane Barsacq, ed., with Irène Jacob.

Béranger.[9] As Graham Robb has explored in his major study on Baudelaire's early career, Baudelaire himself was familiar with popular music forms such as satirical or parodic song and engaged in the act of rewriting lyrics to an existing folk tune or traditional air.[10] Robb highlights the importance in Baudelaire's modern aesthetic of the *romance* and the *chanson rustique* in particular: 'la chanson imitée ou adaptée par le poète peut être la romance qu'on entend au bal public—inspirée par l'actualité ou purement commerciale—aussi bien que la chanson rustique, vraiment populaire, associée par celui qui l'entend à une enfance réelle ou mythique.'[11] These more popular forms of song are heard in public spaces which Robb categorizes as a feature of 'la vie extérieure', and bring to the fore a 'lyrisme apparemment frivole ou banal' which Baudelaire goes on to manipulate and transform in his own inimitable form of modern poetry.[12] From this we can deduce that Baudelaire, in his early career, was far from being involved in the manicured soundworld of the refined salon (which, expanding upon Robb's categorizations, we might call 'interior music'). Instead, Robb's research suggests that Baudelaire actively responded to the more clamorous, light-hearted forms of music heard in public fora. Baudelaire's engagement with the more refined salon contexts was to transpire as the Second Empire came into being, around 1851–2, when he started to frequent the company of the singer and courtesan Apollonie Sabatier, who lived in the Hôtel Pimodan on the Île Saint Louis, near to Baudelaire's own lodgings, and later held a Sunday evening salon on the Rue Frochot, frequented by writers, painters, and musicians alike.[13] The influence of Sabatier's salon on Baudelaire's poetic output goes hand in hand with the development and refinement of his poetic craft, which acknowledged the expectations of the salon aesthetic but also started to carefully unpick the rules of poetry, in terms of both accepted content and conventions of form. In particular, as David Evans has shown, Baudelaire makes a concerted effort to interrogate the stability of poetic rhythm by increasing adjacent accents and *accents mobiles* between 1850–2 and 1858–9.[14] In so doing, he contested the accepted convention of a tetra-accentual alexandrine as notionally 'beautiful' or 'perfect'. This foregrounds how Baudelaire experiments subtly with versification and metrical accentuation, key features which define the auditory (and quasi-musical) properties of French verse. Baudelaire does not create cacophonous, noisy poetry inspired by the exterior music heard in public contexts, but neither does he create refined, gentle poetry inspired by the interior music encountered in the literary-artistic salons. Instead, he exploits both auditory worlds to challenge the very status of poetry as a stand-alone art form and to redefine a poetic value system. His is a

[9] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 213–14. Further references will be designated by the abbreviation B.*OC* in the text.

[10] Graham Robb, *La poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française 1838–1852*, pp. 243–78. Robb dedicates an entire chapter to 'Baudelaire chansonnier'.

[11] Robb, *La poésie de Baudelaire*, p. 243.

[12] Robb, *La poésie de Baudelaire*, p. 243.

[13] Baudelaire dedicated a number of poems to Madame Sabatier, notably 'Le Flambeau vivant' and '*Que diras-tu ce soir…*', both of which were originally sent to her in letters dated February 1854.

[14] David Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé*, pp. 54–5.

poetry which resists stable categorization but is not always overt in the way it challenges conventions.

By the time Baudelaire published the 100 poems of the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857, a number of those same poems had already appeared in print in various newspapers and journals, including *L'Artiste*, *L'Écho des Marchands de vin*, *Le Messager de l'Assemblée*, *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, and *La Revue française*, using versions of the texts that were then published (sometimes with minor alterations) in his major collection of poems.[15] In terms of poetic form, *Les Fleurs du mal* is notable for the prominent use Baudelaire makes of sonnet form (around half of the poems are sonnets), even though the sonnet had largely fallen out of fashion by the middle of the nineteenth century in France. Baudelaire is sometimes credited with reviving the sonnet form particularly through his inventive use of the irregular sonnet, but he also deploys a wide range of other poetic forms in *Les Fleurs du mal*, including those with line repetition structures (such as the *strophe encadrée*, *pantoum*, or verse-refrain forms). Metrically, although the alexandrine predominates, Baudelaire also employs a range of different verse metres, ranging from five to twelve syllables, including heterometric verse forms.[16] Following the August 1857 trial condemning the collection for moral outrage, the new, expanded 1861 second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, with 126 poems (thirty-five new ones, of which fifteen formed the new 'Tableaux parisiens' section, minus six poems banned following the trial), further confirms Baudelaire's predilection for a wide variety of verse forms and metres but also reasserts the idea that his verse remains broadly traditional. As Evans has put it: 'Despite his pioneering role in the first caesural experiments, Baudelaire's form is generally considered rather regular.'[17] Nonetheless, as Evans also argues, Baudelaire's verse metrics develops in the mid-1850s 'toward a more insistent inscription of the *faux accord*' which starts to undermine metrical regularity through subtle accentual means, proposing a new way of thinking about French verse metre and about redefining the characteristics of poeticity which 'is not simply a move toward irregularity.'[18] Similarly, Rachel Killick's analysis of Baudelaire's use of sound techniques characterizes his approach as an 'imaginative reinterpretation of the "rules" of "regular" . . . rhyme' in which he is interested 'neither in the mechanical observance nor the unconsidered flouting of "rules".'[19] This view does not promote Baudelaire as an out-and-out verse innovator who imposes wholesale change upon French versification, but instead affords him recognition as a poet who subtly and carefully reworked metrical accentuation and rhyme patterns to

[15] For full details of Baudelaire's poems published in newspapers and journals, see Alain Vaillant, ed., *Baudelaire journaliste*.

[16] For further analysis of Baudelaire's use of verse forms and metre, see in particular: Albert Cassagne, *Versification et métrique de Charles Baudelaire*; David H. T. Scott, *Sonnet Theory and Practice in Nineteenth-century France: Sonnets on the Sonnet*; Rosemary Lloyd, 'Baudelaire Sonneteer: Flare to the Future'; David Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé*.

[17] Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea*, p. 42; p. 65. This concurs with Cassagne's 1906 study of Baudelaire's metrics, as highlighted also by Antoine Compagnon. See Compagnon, *Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*, pp. 20–1.

[18] Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea*, p. 44.

[19] Rachel Killick, 'Baudelaire's versification, conservative or radical?', pp. 63, 66.

counter the rigidity of fixed tradition with a more nuanced reading of verse strictures, inflected by irony and a renewed self-awareness and perception of the changing status of the poet's role in the modern world. There is a political dimension which underpins this view: Baudelaire allows for different models of poetry to coexist, in an approach that is fundamentally more democratizing because of its refusal of a poetic ideal in which only the stable rules of the past are allowed to define content and form. Opening up the poetic value system to other models is sustained, in part, by Baudelaire's inclusion of social outcasts such as prostitutes and beggars as the protagonists of some of his poems alongside angels and kings in others.

Woven in with his verse production from around 1855 onwards comes the other strand deployed in Baudelaire's task of expanding the poetic landscape: the prose poem form. By opening up poetry through the short prose form, enabling readers who may be less comfortable with the weight of verse tradition to engage with poetic language in a different format, Baudelaire's prose poetry puts across even more socially and politically engaged topics, now released from the strict formal boundaries of verse. While he is widely regarded as the inventor of the prose poem form, whose fifty prose poems were published posthumously under the collective title *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), more recent views contest this perception, suggesting that Baudelaire simply appropriated the short prose form from writers such as Aloysius Bertrand, whose *Gaspard de la nuit* is ironically referenced in the opening 'Lettre-Dédicace'.[20] Ross Chambers, for example, suggests that Baudelaire's supposed 'generic invention in *Le Spleen de Paris* turned out to be less a radical transformation of lyricism . . . than an accidental adaptation.'[21]

Whatever the extent of Baudelaire's poetic innovations, he remains one of the most important poets of the nineteenth century in France, one whose dialectical aesthetic shaped modern literature. His poetry is loaded with splenetic and violent language as he talks of love (for example, in the closing stanzas of the banned poem 'À celle qui est trop gaie' (ll. 25–36)), and beauty is recast as a rotting corpse or a hellish monster (as in 'Une Charogne', or the 'monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu', l. 22 of 'Hymne à la Beauté'), with the result that his poetic language is suffused with images that make more and more demands of his reader. By creating an intoxicating vision of poetic language and its possibilities, Baudelaire recasts the Romantic view of the divinely inspired poet calling on his Muse as he draws on nature for his poetic resources. Instead, Baudelaire's modern aesthetic interrogates the role of the city and the rise of industry and commerce, together with the challenges that these new developments create for the nineteenth-century Parisian poet. The societal changes, driven in part by the unstable political landscape of the first half of the nineteenth century in France, mean that Baudelaire could hardly have been anything other than a poet who embraced change; but we should be reluctant to hail him as the sole inventor of the modern lyric and/or the prose poem form. Thus, rather than categorizing Baudelaire as a specific type of poet

[20] See, for example, Valentina Gosetti, *Aloysius Bertrand's* Gaspard de la Nuit*: Beyond the Prose Poem*.

[21] Ross Chambers, *An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise*, p. 150.