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*Landmarks of world literature*

**Baudelaire**

**LES FLEURS DU MAL**

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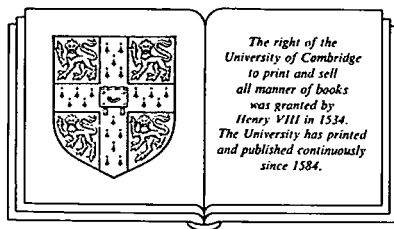
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BAUDELAIRE

# Les Fleurs du Mal

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## *Preface*

Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which used to be the most infamous book of poems in French literature, has in this century become the most famous, and the most admired; this development would surely have astounded his nineteenth-century contemporaries. But then the whole history of this book, from beginning to end, is shot through with paradox. *Les Fleurs du Mal* (which began life, in the 1840s and early 1850s, under two quite different titles: *Les Lesbiennes* and *Les Limbes*) earned its initial notoriety from the trial and judicial condemnation which followed its first publication in 1857; some ninety years later, in 1949, this condemnation was to be officially annulled by a judgment of the Supreme Court of Appeal in Paris. But this ultimate canonisation, both legal and literary, carries a further paradox. *Les Fleurs du Mal* now owes its true prestige, its true attainment of 'landmark' status, to the sheer aesthetic quality of its verses, and it is this above all, therefore, that we must study and appreciate; yet even today a lingering and piquant aura of scandal, of remembered bravado in a challenge to convention and authority, persists from that first publication.

I add a few explanatory notes concerning the present text. All Baudelaire references are to the companion two-volume editions by Claude Pichois of the *Œuvres complètes* and the *Correspondance* (both published by Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1975–6 and 1973 respectively; abbreviated *OCP* and *CPI*). *Les Fleurs du Mal*, with full documentary annotation and (on pp. 1581–91) an alphabetical index to the poems, is in the first volume of the *Œuvres complètes*. (For full details of all other books mentioned, see 'Guide to further reading'.) In providing English versions of the texts of Baudelaire's poems, I have chosen a composite and flexible

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approach, combining more or less free translations, paraphrases, summaries or simply amplified titles, as seemed appropriate in each case; such a method best serves, in my view, to convey to the English-speaking reader the sense, imagery and vocabulary, in part or in full, of the original, whilst avoiding the unidiomatic and stilted awkwardness that so often afflicts even the best literal prose translations. (For the question of verse translations, see pp. 100–3, below.) I should finally mention that my fourth chapter, ‘Swan-song’, has been adapted from my essay ‘The Originality of *Le Cygne*’, as previously published in my *Baudelaire. Collected Essays*, 1990, and that I have re-utilised, elsewhere also, other and briefer passages from those same essays.

In conclusion, I must acknowledge my indebtedness firstly to Andrew Macanulty, James Patty and Ted Taylor for the bibliographical help they have given me; secondly and above all to Peter Stern, for his helpful advice and comment on the organisation of this book.



## Chronology

### Biography

1821 9 April. Birth in Paris of Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, only child of a sixty-two-year-old father, by the latter's second marriage, and of a twenty-seven-year-old mother. The father, after being ordained, had enjoyed success as a private tutor before the Revolution and as a civil servant after it; a painter of sorts himself, he was well connected in intellectual and artistic circles. The mother, Caroline, had been orphaned in 1800 at the age of seven, after living in exile in London during the Revolution, and had then become the ward of a wealthy Parisian family, the Pérignons.

1822

Anonymous publication of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.

1824

24 December. Death of Louis XVIII; accession of Charles X.

1826

Vigny, *Poèmes antiques et modernes*, first edition. (Definitive edition: → 1837).

1827

10 February. Death, at the age of sixty-eight, of Baudelaire's father.

### History, literature and the arts

Death of Napoleon Bonaparte, at Saint Helena.

- Biography*
- 1828 8 November. Remarriage of his mother, aged thirty-five, to the thirty-nine-year-old Major (eventually General) Aupick – whom Baudelaire came to regard, not unnaturally, as both an interloper and an enemy.
- 1829
- History, literature and the arts*
- ADM (= Alfred de Musset), *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium* (free adaptation of De Quincey's *Confessions*).  
 Sainte-Beuve, *Tableau de la poésie française au XVIIe siècle*.
- Sainte-Beuve, *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme*.  
 Hugo, *Les Orientales*; *Marion de Lorme*.
- 1830
- 27–9 July. Revolution: 'Journées de juillet: Les Trois Glorieuses'.  
 2 August. Abdication of Charles X.  
 9 August. Installation of Louis-Philippe as his successor.  
 Musset, *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*.
- 1831
- November. Aupick posted to Lyons, and appointed Chief of Staff of the 7th Division.
- 1832
- January. Baudelaire moves to Lyons with his mother, and is enrolled as a pupil, and later as a boarder, at the Collège royal.
- 21-2 November. First uprising of the silk workers in Lyons.  
 Hugo, *Les Feuilles d'automne*.  
 Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*.

- 1833 → 1835. Balzac, *Histoire des Treize* (including *La Fille aux yeux d'or*).
- 1834 April. The Collège royal, by virtue of its location, is indirectly involved in the silk-workers' uprising. Baudelaire's compassionate reaction to these events, though unrecorded at the time, finds utterance some seventeen years later, in → 1851, in his article on the Lyonnais poet, Pierre Dupont (*OCP* II, p. 31). Aupick promoted to the rank of Colonel, in part as a reward for his role in the repression of the uprising.
- 1835 Hugo, *Les Chants du crépuscule*.  
 Vigny, *Chatterton*.  
 Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*.  
 Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.
- 1836 January. Aupick appointed Chief of Staff to the 1st Military Division in Paris. Further Parisian commands follow in → 1840, 1841, 1842 and 1844. February. Baudelaire moves to Paris with his mother, and enters the Collège Louis-le-Grand as a boarder.
- 1837 Hugo, *Les Voix intérieures*.

- |                                     |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p><i>Biography</i></p> <p>1838</p> | <p>18 April. Expulsion from the Collège Louis-le-Grand, in consequence of a culminating act of indiscipline. While pursuing (nominally) further academic studies from a <i>pension</i>, leads a 'vie libre' and gradually drifts into a recklessly dissolute way of life; by the autumn, has contracted venereal disease, and has begun to accumulate the debts from which he was unable thereafter ever to free himself.</p> <p>12 August. Gains his baccalaureate (with some external help?); on the same day, Aupick promoted to be a Brigadier.</p> | <p><i>History, literature and the arts</i></p> <p>Gautier, <i>La Comédie de la Mort</i>.<br/>       Poe, <i>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym</i>.</p> |
| <p>1840</p>                         | <p>Poe, <i>Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque</i>.<br/>       Hugo, <i>Les Rayons et les ombres</i>.<br/>       Musset, <i>Poésies complètes</i>.<br/>       Sainte-Beuve, <i>Poésies complètes</i>.</p>  |   |

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- 1841 June. Alarmed as much by Baudelaire's resolve to become a writer as by the 'unhealthy relationships' into which he had fallen (and which seemed already to be reflected in his writings), Aupick despatches his stepson, as a remedial and disciplinary measure, on a long sea-voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, with Calcutta as the intended destination. September. Having reached the islands of Mauritius and Bourbon, Baudelaire refuses to travel any further and insists on taking the next boat home.
- 1842 16 February. Arrives back at Bordeaux.  
 28 April. Comes into his father's inheritance, sets up on his own, and to his stepfather's and mother's alarm seems bent on dilapidating as rapidly as possible the modest fortune he has acquired. Reaffirms his determination to become a writer, and shortly after takes as his mistress a coloured girl, Jeanne Duval, thereby embarking upon a long, stormy and poetically fruitful relationship which (unlike others, more transient or unsuccessful) was to persist in one form or another → into the early 1860s.
- Posthumous publication of Aloysius Bertrand's prose poems, *Gaspard de la nuit*.  
 Banville, *Les Caritatives*.

*Biography*

*History, literature and the arts*  
 Balzac, *Illusions perdues*.

1843 May. Publication of the collective volume *Vers*, to which initially he himself was to have contributed, and of which the ultimate joint authors are his friends since 1840, Le Vasseur, Prarond and Dozon.  
 October. Moves to the most famous of his innumerable lodgings, the Hôtel Pimodan (later, the Hôtel Lauzen), where he remains until → September 1845.

1844 August–September. His financial situation being deemed by his family to have reached crisis point, a ‘conseil judiciaire’ or legal guardian is appointed in the person of the solicitor Ancelle; from that time onwards, Baudelaire becomes a ‘remitance man’, eking out a monthly allowance with gifts from his mother and with endless borrowings (mostly never repaid). Immediately, and no doubt as a gesture of protest to mark his severance from his family, he takes on for nearly three and a half years, until → January 1848, various literary pseudonyms (‘Baudelaire-Dufaÿs’, etc.) derived from his mother’s maiden surname.

Vigny, *La Maison du berger*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

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- 1845 Mid-May. *Salon de 1845* (a review of the annual Paris art exhibition): his first publication under his own name, and the first testimony of his lifelong admiration for Delacroix.  
 25 May. First published poem, in *L'Artiste: A une [dame] créole* ('To a Creole Lady').  
 30 June. Suicide attempt: although not without burlesque elements, this is a genuine cry for help from one trapped, as his letter to Ancelle of that date reveals (*CP* I, pp. 124–6), in despair and self-disgust.  
 October. First announcement of his projected volume of poems, *Les lesbiennes*; further announcements will follow in → 1846–7.
- 1846 Early May. *Salon de 1846*: unlike its more conventional predecessor of 1845, this is a thinly disguised (and brilliant) aesthetic treatise.
- Poe, *The Raven, and Other Poems; Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.  
 De Quincey, 'Suspiria de Profundis' (additional last part of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*), in *Blackwood's Magazine*.  
 Gautier, *Poésies complètes* (including *España*).  
 Wagner, *Tannhäuser*: first performance, Dresden.
- 10 May. Death of the artist Emile Deroy (Baudelaire's close friend and aesthetic mentor).  
 Banville, *Les Stalactites*.

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1847

January. 'La Fanfarlo', in the *Bulletin de la Société des gens de lettres*: a semi-autobiographical novella, with references to many as yet unpublished poems.  
 22 April: Aupick promoted to rank of General; 28 November: appointed Head of the Ecole polytechnique.

During this year probably, Baudelaire becomes addicted to opium – taken initially, in the form of laudanum, as an analgesic and relaxant.

1848

January. Reviewing a collection of tales by Champfleury, reverts to his former signature 'Charles Baudelaire'.  
 February. On the outbreak of the Revolution, becomes a Republican sympathiser, is seen 'on the barricades' and helps to edit a short-lived newspaper, *Le Salut public*.

13 April. Aupick appointed, by the new Republican government, Ambassador in Constantinople.  
 15 July. In *La Liberté de penser*, 'Révélation magnétique' – the first of Baudelaire's long series of translations from Edgar Allan Poe.  
 November. First announcement, in an obscure journal of the wine trade, of the forthcoming publication of his poems under a new title, *Les Limbes*. Further announcements, accompanying or within texts of his own, follow in → 1850, 1851 and 1852.

*History, literature and the arts*

22–4 February. 'Journées de février': abdication of Louis-Philippe; proclamation of the Second Republic.

22 June. Dissolution of the National Workshops.

23–6 June. 'Journées de juin': suppression of proletarian revolt.  
 10 December. Election of Louis-Napoleon as Prince-President of the Second Republic.



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- 1849 7 October. Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
- 1850 18 August. Death of Balzac.
- 1851 2 December. *Coup d'état*: seizure of power by Louis-Napoleon.  
 21 December. National plebiscite, whereby Louis-Napoleon gains approval for his new Constitution.  
 Murger, *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (evokes the same world of Baudelaire's friends as → Champfleury's *Les Aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette*, 1853).
- 7–12 March. 'Du Vin et du hachish' (first version of → *Les Paradis artificiels*, 1860) in *Le Messager de l'assemblée*.  
 9 April. 'Les Limbes' (a selection of eleven unpublished sonnets from the projected volume of this title) in *Le Messager de l'assemblée*.  
 18 June. Aupick, having returned from Constantinople, goes next to Madrid as Ambassador. October–November. Baudelaire shows Asselineau (his future biographer, now to become his close friend) the manuscript of *Les Limbes*, 'magnificently' copied out for him by a professional calligrapher; this manuscript will serve eventually as the basis for the printing, in → 1857, of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

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1852

After the political disillusion of December 1851, comes increasingly under the influence of Poe, in whom he sees a 'twin soul' and whose *Tales* he begins comprehensively to translate; having flirted briefly with utilitarianism in two essays, on 'Pierre Dupont' (August 1851) and 'L'Ecole païenne' (January 1852), he moves towards a strongly anti-social questions takes up an increasingly reactionary standpoint.

March and April. 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages', in the *Revue de Paris*.

9 December. Sends anonymously to Mme Sabatier the manuscript, under an earlier title, of *A Celle qui est trop gaie* ('To the Too-Joyous One'); six further anonymous poems follow, the last being dated → 8 May 1854.

1853

8 March. Aupick, on his return from Madrid, is nominated a senator. He acquires, as a summer residence, the so-called 'Maison-joujou', or 'Toy House', at Honfleur.

*History, literature and the arts*

2 November. Second plebiscite: Louis-Napoleon gains recognition for the establishment of the Second Empire.

2 December. Official proclamation of the Second Empire.

Gautier, *Emmaux et camées*.

Leconte de Lisle, *Poèmes antiques*.

June. Haussmann becomes Prefect of the Seine, and begins systematic reconstruction of the city of Paris.

Champfleury, *Les Aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette*, in which Baudelaire figures as 'le poète ami des chats'.

Hugo, *Châtiments*: satirical poems directed, from exile in the Channel Islands, against Louis-Napoleon and the Second Empire.

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- 1854 → Summer 1855. Unsuccessfully woos the actress Marie Daubrun.
- 1855 26 May, 3 June and 12 August. Returns to art criticism with three articles on the *Exposition universelle*: 'Méthode de critique'; 'Eugène Delacroix'; 'Ingres'.
- 1 June. 'Les Fleurs du Mal', in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Eighteen poems – his most substantial verse publication so far; the book's definitive title here appears for the first time.
- Probably during this year, draft article, 'Puisque réalisme il y a', in which Baudelaire attacks Courbet, Champfleury and the new Realist aesthetic.
- 1856 12 March. *Histoires extraordinaires* (first published volume of his translations of Poe's *Tales*). Four further volumes follow in → 1857, 1858, 1863, 1865.
- 1857 27 April. Death of General Aupick. Baudelaire's mother takes up permanent residence at Honfleur.
- 21 June. Publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.
- 17 July. Following hostile review in *Le Figaro*, the Public Prosecutor commits for trial Baudelaire, his publisher and his printer, and all copies of the book
- 26 January. Nerval (Baudelaire's friend, and the inspirer in 1844 and original dedicatee of the poem *Un voyage à Cythère*) found hanged, no doubt by his own hand, in a Parisian street. May–November. Paris Universal Exhibition.
- Courbet, whose paintings have been refused by the Jury, sets up a rival, 'Realist' exhibition of his own – which includes a painting, *L'Atelier du peintre* ('The Painter's Studio'), in which Baudelaire figures.
- October–December. Advance publication, in the *Revue de Paris*, of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Hugo, *Les Contemplations*.
- 29 January and 7 February. Trial (on charges of offending against 'public and religious morality and accepted standards') and acquittal of Flaubert and the *Revue de Paris*. Banville, *Odes funambulesques*.

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*Biography*

are ordered to be confiscated. A number of Baudelaire's friends, including Asselineau, rally to his support; their published or unpublished articles are collected in mid-August under the title *Articles justificatifs pour Charles Baudelaire*.

August–September. Abortive affair with Mme. Sabatier. Now revealed as the author of the seven poems sent anonymously to her in 1852–4, Baudelaire seeks her intervention on his behalf in the impending legal battle; he is taken aback by the ardour of her response, and the two retreat, by mutual agreement, into what henceforth will be a purely friendly relationship.

20 August. Trial of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The Court, having imposed fines on Baudelaire, his publisher and his printer, orders six poems (the so-called 'pièces condamnées'), deemed 'offensive to public morals and accepted standards', to be excluded from any future edition of the book.

24 August. First collective publication, in *Le Présent*, of (six) prose poems, under the title 'Poèmes nocturnes'. Further publications follow, under various alternative titles, in → 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1866.

18 October. Baudelaire reviews, in *L'Artiste*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, now published in book form

from

- 1858 21 October. Pays the first of a whole series of visits, extending → over the next two years, to Honfleur; at certain moments, has the vain hope of installing himself there with his mother.  
 End-1858 → mid-1860: period of renewed poetic creativity, centred on Honfleur.
- 1859 10 and 20 June, 1 and 20 July. 'Salon de 1859', in the *Revue française*.  
 August–November. Renewed (and again unsuccessful) attempt to woo Marie Daubrun.  
 Early November. Publication by Poulet-Malassis of *Théophile Gautier*, with preface by Victor Hugo, in which the latter applies to Baudelaire the famous formula: 'Vous créez un frisson nouveau'.
- 1860 13 January. First cerebral stroke.  
 17 February. Addresses an admiring letter to Wagner, after attending the latter's concerts at the Théâtre-Italien.  
 End-May. *Les Paradis artificiels*.
- 8 December. Death of Thomas de Quincey.  
 Hugo, *La Légende des siècles* I.
- 25 January, 1 and 8 February. Wagner conducts three orchestral and choral concerts of his music at the Théâtre-Italien.

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1861 Early February. Publication by Poulet-Malassis of second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (with the six 'pièces condamnées' duly excised, but with an additional thirty-two poems).  
13 March. Attends first performance of *Tannhäuser*, at the Opéra.

1 April. 'Richard Wagner', in the *Revue européenne*.  
End-April. *Richard Wagner et 'Tannhäuser' à Paris* (publication in booklet form of the article of 1 April, with an addendum: 'Encore quelques mots', taking account of the performances of the opera in March).

11 December. Actively contemplates putting himself forward as a candidate for the Académie française; finally withdraws → 10 February 1862.

1862

23 January. Records, in an entry in one of his 'Intimate Journals' (*OCP* I, p. 668), having received a dire 'warming', relative to his perennial feeling of giddiness: in his own words, he feels passing over him 'the wind of the wing of imbecility'.

14 April. Death at Fontainebleau of his half-brother, Claude-Alphonse — of the same cause as later brought about Baudelaire's own death: hemiplegic paralysis.

Mid-July. Publication of volume IV (devoted to nineteenth-century authors) of Eugène Crépet's anthology, *Les Poètes français*. Seven of the

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13 March. First of three performances only, at the Opéra, of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*.

Hugo, *Les Misérables*.

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introductory articles (those on Hugo, Gautier, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and on three others) are by Baudelaire; the 'Notice' on Baudelaire himself is by Gautier.

6 September. Swinburne, eulogistic review in *The Spectator* of the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

1863 2 September, 14 and 22 November. 'L'Œuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix' – obituary article in *L'Opinion nationale*.

End-September. Poulet-Malassis obliged, by his bankruptcy in ← 1862, to flee to Brussels and relinquish his right to publish works by Baudelaire.

26 and 29 November, 3 December. 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' (essay, in *Le Figaro*, on the draughtsman and water-colourist Constantin Guys, here unnamed; composed ← 1859–61).

1864 24 April. Arrives in Brussels, in fulfilment of plans first projected over eight months previously, to give a series of public readings, in May and June, from his articles on Delacroix and Gautier and from *Les Paradis artificiels*.

13 August. Death of Delacroix.

17 September. Death of Vigny.

October. 'Salon des Refusés': exhibition of paintings refused by the official Salon; includes famous canvas, 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe', by Baudelaire's friend Manet.

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1865 → 1866. Increasingly the victim of illness: neuralgia, stomach cramps, rheumatism, fevers, giddiness, nausea, etc.

1866 End-February or early March. Publication by Poulet-Malassis in 'Amsterdam' (i.e. Brussels) of *Les Epaves*, 'Relics': twenty-three poems, including the six 'pièces condamnées', the poem in Latin *Franciscæ meæ laudes* ('In Praise of my Françoise'), and sixteen further poems which had not appeared in either the 1857 or 1861 editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Around 15 March. After a fall in the church of Saint-Loup in Namur, apoplexy and aphasia set in, together with hemiplegic paralysis on the right side. 29 June. Transported from Brussels to a nursing home in Paris. He survives physically, if not intellectually, for a further → 14 months, thanks to the care of his mother and his friends.

October. *Le Parnasse contemporain* (collection in book form of periodical publications of new verse) reprints from its March and July numbers sixteen of his poems, fifteen of them under the title 'Nouvelles Fleurs du Mal'.

*History, literature and the arts*

1 February. Mallarmé, 'Symphonie littéraire', in *L'Artiste* (part 2: eulogy of Baudelaire). 16 and 30 November, 23 December. In *L'Art*, enthusiastic articles by Verlaine on Baudelaire (who did not appreciate them; see *CPI* II, pp. 625, 626, 972).



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1867

31 August. Death.

2 September, Funeral, and burial (in the family vault) at the Cimetière Montparnasse; the memorial speeches are heard by around sixty people. His 'jinx', his *guignon* (the title of one of his poems), pursues him to the end: as Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler remark (*Baudelaire*, p. 593), he dies 'inconveniently', on a Saturday in midsummer . . .