

Excerpts from *My Heart Laid Bare & Other Texts*

Charles Baudelaire

Translated from French by Rainer J. Hanshe

FLARES

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FLARES

What is created with the mind is more alive than matter.

Love can be derived from a generous feeling: the taste for prostitution; but it is soon corrupted by the taste for property.

Love wants to abandon itself, to confound itself with its victim, as the conqueror with the vanquished, & yet preserve the privileges of the conqueror.

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SUGGESTIONS · FLARES

Nations have great men only in spite of themselves, — like families. They make every effort not to have one. And thus, to exist, the great man needs to possess a force of attack much greater than the force of resistance developed by millions of individuals.

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Are there mathematical follies and madmen who think that two and two make three? In other words, — can hallucination, if these words do not scream out [to be coupled], invade the things of pure reasoning? If, when a man becomes accustomed to sloth, dreams, and idleness, to the point of constantly deferring what is important till the morrow, another man awakened him one morning with terrible lashes, and whipped him ruthlessly until, being unable to work out of pleasure, he would work out of fear, would not this man — the whip-bearer — really be his friend, his benefactor? Besides, one could say that pleasure would come after, much more correctly than one says : love comes after marriage.

Similarly in politics, the true saint is the one who whips and kills the people for the good of the people.

Tuesday, May 13, 1856

What is not slightly deformed seems insensitive; — whence

it follows that irregularity, that is, the unexpected, surprise, astonishment, are an essential and characteristic part of beauty.

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FLARES

I have found the definition of Beauty, — of my Beauty. It is something ardent and sad, something a bit vague, giving wing to conjecture. I will, if you like, apply my ideas to a sensitive object, to the object, for example, most interesting in society, to the face of a woman. A seductive and beautiful head, a woman's head, I say, is a head that makes one dream, at the same time, — but in a confused way, — of rapture and of sadness; which includes an idea of melancholy, of lassitude, even of satiety, — either an idea contrary, that is, to an ardor, a desire to live, associated with [a certain sadness] ebbing bitterness, stemming from privation or despair. Mystery, regret, are also characteristics of Beauty.

A beautiful male head has no need to convey, except perhaps in the eyes of a woman, — in the eyes of a man of course — this element of rapture, which in a woman's face [even the most melancholic] is a provocation all the more [enervating] attractive as the face is generally more melancholic.

But that head will also contain something ardent and sad, — spiritual needs, darkly repressed ambitions — the idea of an unused, thundering power, — sometimes the idea of a vengeful insensitivity, (for the ideal type of the Dandy must not be neglected in this subject), — sometimes also, — and it is one of the most interesting characteristics of beauty, — mystery, and finally (so that I may have the courage to confess to what degree I feel modern in aesthetics), *Sadness*. — I do not pretend that Joy can not be associated with Beauty, but I say that Joy is one of the most vulgar [the least important] ornaments; — whereas Melancholy is, so to speak, [the illustrious companion] <[the natural companion]> <the illustrious companion>, to such an extent that I can hardly conceive (would my brain be a bewitched mirror?) of a type of Beauty where there is no *Sadness*. — Supported on, — others would say: obsessed with — these ideas, one can conceive that it would be difficult for me not to conclude that the most perfect type of virile Beauty is *Satan* — in the manner of Milton.

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There is in the act of love a great resemblance to torture, or to a surgical operation.

There is in prayer a magical operation. It is one of the great forces of the intellectual dynamic. It is like an electric recurrence.

If a poet asked the State for the right to have a few bourgeois in his stable, one would be very astonished, whereas if a bourgeois asked for some roast poet, it would be quite natural.

When I have inspired universal disgust and horror, I shall have conquered solitude.

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FLARES

Do not despise anyone's sensibility. The sensibility of each person is his genius.

The mixture of the grotesque and the tragic is as pleasing to the mind as dissonances to blasé ears.

What is intoxicating in bad taste is the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing.

Germany expresses dreams by the line, as England by perspective.

There is in the birth of all sublime thought a nervous jolt that makes itself felt in the cerebellum.

Spain puts the ferocity natural to love into its religion.

STYLE.

The eternal note, the eternal and cosmopolitan style: Chateaubriand, Alph. Rabbe, Edgar Poe.

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FLARES

Civilized peoples, who always speak foolishly of *savages* & of *barbarians*, soon, as d'Aureville says, you will not *even be worth enough to be idolaters*.

What is not a priesthood today? — Youth itself is a priesthood, — according to youth.

And what is not a prayer? — Shitting is a prayer, what democrats say when they shit.

The world will end. The only reason that it might endure is that it exists. How feeble this reason is, compared to all those

who announce the contrary, particularly this one: what does the world henceforth have to do under heaven? — For, supposing that it continue to exist materially, would it be an existence worthy of the name of the Historical Dictionary? I do not say that the world will be reduced to the expedients and grotesque disorder of the South American republics, — that perhaps we shall even revert to a savage state, and that we shall go, via the grassy ruins of our civilization, to seek our food, with rifle in hand. No; — for that fate and those adventures would still presuppose a certain vital energy, an echo of the earliest ages. New example, and new victims of inexorable moral laws, we will perish by way of that through which we believed we lived. The mechanical will have Americanized us so much, and progress will have so completely atrophied in us our entire spiritual character, that nothing among the sanguinary, sacrilegious, or anti-natural dreams of utopians can be compared to its positive results. I ask every thinking man to show me what remains of life. Of religion, I believe it useless to speak of it and to seek its remnants, since the trouble of denying God is the only scandal in such matters. Property had virtually disappeared with the abolition of the law of primogeniture; but the time will come when humanity, like an avenging ogre, will seize its last scrap from those who believe themselves to be the legitimate heirs of revolution. Still, that will not be the supreme evil.

The human imagination can conceive, without too much difficulty, republics or other communal states, worthy of some glory, if they are led by sacred men, by certain aristocrats. But it is not however through political institutions that universal ruin, or universal progress, will manifest itself; for the name [phrase] matters little to me. It will be by the abasement of hearts. Need I say that what little remains of politics will struggle painfully in the clutches of general animality, and that those who govern will be forced, in order to maintain themselves & to create a phantom of order, to resort to means that would make our present-day humanity, although so hardened, shudder? — Then, the son will flee the family, not at eighteen, but at twelve, emancipated by his gluttonous precocity; not to seek heroic adventures, not to free a beautiful prisoner from a tower, not to immortalize [to practice in a garret the sublime craft of writer] a garret through sublime thoughts, but to found a trade, to amass wealth, and to compete with his infamous papa, — founder and shareholder of a newspaper, which will spread enlightenment and which would make *Le Siècle* of the day seem to be an abettor of superstition. — Then, errant women, outcasts, those who have had several lovers, and who are sometimes [were once] called Angels, [because of bewildered passengers] in recognition & thankfulness for the thoughtlessness that illumines, [sometimes as the] light of luck,

in their logical existence, like evil, — then they, I say, will be nothing but pitiless sages, sages that will condemn everything, apart from money, everything, even the *errors of the senses!* — Then, whatever resembles virtue, — said I, — whatever is not ardor for Plutus, will be deemed a great absurdity. Justice, if, at that fortunate period, it can still exist, will be prohibited to the citizens who cannot make a fortune. — Your wife, O Bourgeois! your [legitimate companion] chaste half, whose legitimacy seems poetry to you, now introducing into legality an irreproachable infamy, vigilant and loving guardian of thy strongbox, will no longer be the perfect ideal of the kept woman. Thy daughter, with [precocity] childish nubility, will dream in her cradle that she [will] sell herself for a million. And thou, O Bourgeois, — less [poetic] poet than thou art today, — thou shalt find no fault with it; you will regret nothing. For there are things in man that strengthen and prosper in proportion as others become more delicate and decline, and, thanks to the progress of that age, nothing will remain of the entrails but visceral! — That age is perhaps very near; who knows if it has not already come, and if the coarsening of our nature is not the sole obstacle that prevents us from evaluating the environment in which we breathe!

As for myself, who sometimes senses within myself the ridiculousness of a prophet, I know that I will never find therein the charity of a physician. Lost in this villainous world, jostled by crowds, I am like a weary man whose eyes see behind him, in the deep years, only disillusionment «and bitterness», & before him, only a storm that contains nothing new, neither knowledge, nor pain. The evening when this man has thieved [on the way] from destiny a few hours of pleasure, soothed by his digestion, oblivious — as far as possible — of the past, content with the present & resigned to the future, intoxicated by his sang-froid and his dandyism, proud of not being as base as those who pass by, he says to himself, while contemplating the smoke of his cigar: What does it matter to me where those consciences go? I believe I have drifted into what people in the trade call an hors-d'oeuvre. Nevertheless, I will leave these pages, — because I want to date my anger «sorrow».

Morally as physically, I have always had the sensation of the abyss, not only of the abyss of sleep, but the abyss of action, of dream, of memory, of desire, of regret, of remorse, of beauty, of number, etc.

I have cultivated my hysteria with rapture and terror. [Today] Now, I always have vertigo, and today, January 23,

1862, I have suffered a singular warning: I have felt the *wind of the wing of imbecility* pass over me.

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HYGIENE · CONDUCT · MORALITY

At every minute we are crushed by the idea and the sensation of time. And there are only two means of escaping this nightmare, — to forget it: Pleasure and Work. Pleasure consumes us. Work fortifies us. Let us choose.

The more we use one of these means, the more [we flee] the other inspires us with repugnance.

One can forget time only by using it.

[De Maistre & Edgar]

Everything is done little by little.

FLARES

De Maistre & Edgar Poe taught me to reason.

There is no long work but that which one dares not begin. It becomes a nightmare.

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PRECIOUS NOTES

Do every day what duty and prudence want.

If you work every day, life will be more bearable.

Work *six* days without relent.

To find subjects, γῶθι σεαυτόν ... (List of my tastes).

Always be a poet, even in prose. Grand style (nothing is more beautiful than the commonplace).

First begin, and then make use of logic & analysis. Every hypothesis wants its conclusion.

Find the daily frenzy.

MY HEART LAID BARE

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To be a useful man always seemed to me something quite hideous.

I have no convictions, as the people of my century understand, because I have no ambition.

There is no foundation in myself for a conviction.

There is a certain cowardice, or rather, a certain feebleness, as among honest people.

The brigands alone are convinced, — of what? — that they must succeed. Therefore, they succeed.

Why should I succeed, since I don't even want to try?

One can found glorious empires on crime, and noble religions on imposture.

Nevertheless, I have some convictions, in a higher sense, and which can not be understood by the people of my time.

What I think of the vote and the right of election. Of the rights of man.

That which is vile in any function.

A Dandy does nothing.

Can you imagine a Dandy speaking to the people, except to scorn them?

There exist but three respectable beings:

The priest, the warrior, the poet. To know, to kill, & to create.

The other men are talliable and corvéable, made for the stable, that is, for exercising what one calls *professions*.

Portrait of the Literary Rabble.

Doctor Estaminétus Crapulosus Pédantissimus. His portrait made in the manner of Praxiteles.

His pipe.

His opinions.

His Hegelianism.

His filth.

His ideas on art.

His bile.

His jealousy.

A pretty picture of modern youth.

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Theology.

What is the fall?

If it is unity become duality, it is God who has fallen.

In other words, would not creation be the fall of God?

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To be added to military metaphors:

Poets of combat.

Avant-garde litterateurs.

The use of military metaphors denotes non-militant spirits, but ones made for discipline, that is, for conformity, spirits born domestic, Belgian spirits, who can think only in crowds.

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POLITICS

In sum, in view of history and in view of the people of France, the great glory of Napoléon III [had been] will have been to prove that the first to arrive can, by seizing the telegraph and the National Printing Office, govern a great nation.

Those who believe that such things can be accomplished without the permission of the people are imbeciles, — and those who believe that glory can only be supported by virtue are imbeciles!

Dictators are the servants of the people, — nothing more, — a foolish part elsewhere, — and glory is [the result] [the accom.] the result of the adaptation of a spirit with national stupidity.

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What is love?

The need for self-abandonment.

Man is a worshipping animal.

To worship is to sacrifice and prostitute oneself.

Therefore all love is prostitution.

[45A]

The most prostituted being is the being *par excellence*, it is God, since he is the supreme friend of every individual, since he is the common, inexhaustible reservoir of love.

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The poet, the priest, and the soldier are the only great men among men:

the man who sings, the man who blesses, and the man who sacrifices and who sacrifices himself.

The rest are made for the whip.

Let us defy the people, common sense, the heart, inspiration, and evidence.

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Being a great man and a saint *for oneself*, there is the only important thing.

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Music.

Of slavery.

Of the women of the world.

Of prostitutes.

Of magistrates.

Of sacraments.

The man of letters is the enemy of the world.

Of bureaucrats.

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Why is the spectacle of the sea so infinitely *e* so eternally pleasing?

Because the sea evokes both the idea of immensity and of movement. Six or seven leagues represent for man the radius of the infinite. There's a diminutive infinity. Of what importance if it suffices to suggest the idea of the total infinite? Twelve or fourteen leagues (on the diameter), twelve or fourteen of liquid in motion suffice to give the highest idea of beauty that is offered to man in his transitory dwelling.

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Theory of true civilization.

It rests not in gas, nor in steam, nor in table-turning.

It rests in the attenuation of the traces of original sin.

Nomads, shepherds, hunters, agriculturists, and even cannibals, *all* may be superior, in energy, in personal dignity, to our races of the West.

We perhaps shall be destroyed.

Theocracy & Communism.

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The more man cultivates the arts, the less he gets hard.

There is a growing divorce of feeling between the spirit and the brute.

The brute alone is hard, and fucking is the lyricism of the people.

To fuck is to aspire to enter someone else, and the artist never leaves himself.

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As a child, I felt in my heart two contradictory feelings: the horror of life & the ecstasy of life.

It is indeed the reality of a nervous sloth.

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Nations have great men only in spite of themselves.

Perhaps even virtue is injurious to the talents of pariahs.

FRAGMENTS & NOTES

To apply to joy, to *the sensation of living*, the idea of the hyperacuity of the senses, applied by Poe to pain. To effect a creation through the pure logic of the contrary. The path is already traced out, against nature.

No remorse or regrets.

What does it matter to suffer much, when one has enjoyed much?

It is a law, a balance.

Find the moral algebra of this saying.

Various refrains.

The drunkard. — Do not forget that intoxication is the

negation of time, like every violent state of the spirit, & that, consequently, all the results of the loss of time must pass before the eyes of the drunkard, without destroying in him the habit of returning to the morrow to his conversion, until the complete perversion of all feelings & the final catastrophe.

Biblical Sortilege. — The drunkard spying on and studying the drunkard.

The perfect man: the supreme of the appropriate, the caravan, the sentinel.

Of the power of the philter & magic in love as well as the evil eye.

Divine essence of the vicious circle (Flares).

