Baudelaire

AND THE POETICS OF MODERNITY

EDITED BY

Patricia A. Ward

with the assistance of
James S. Patty

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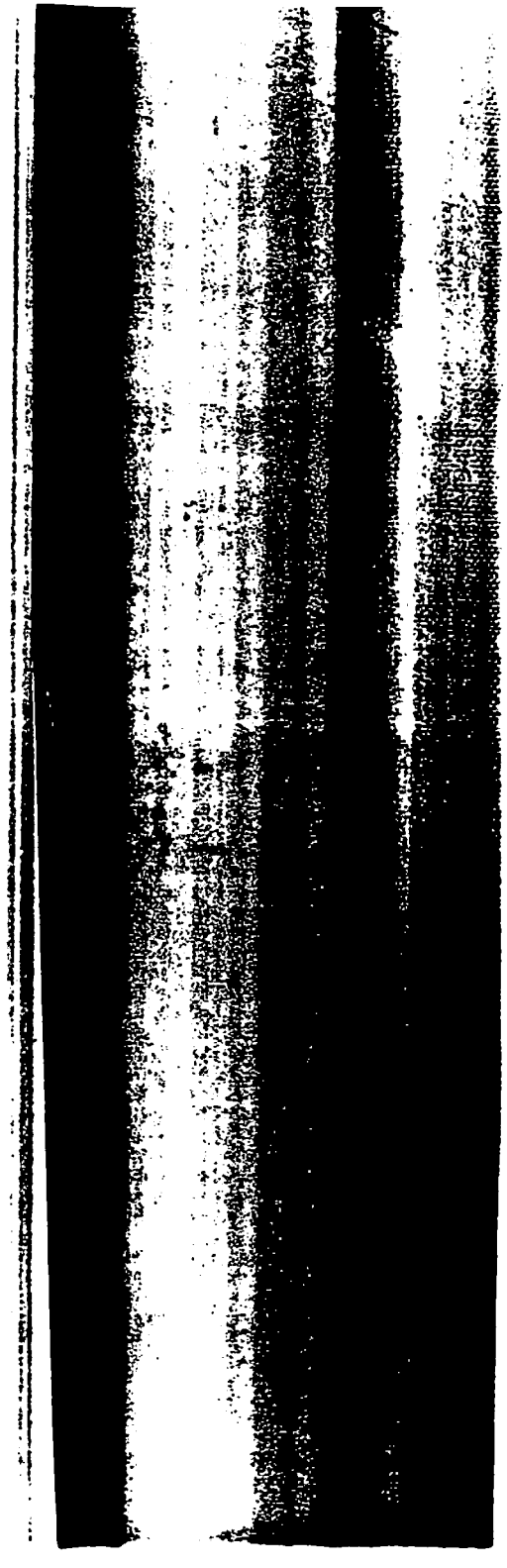
The Linguistic Turning of the Symbol

Baudelaire and His French Symbolist Heirs

William Franke

THE process of symbolization begins when one thing is used to stand for something else. A stone thrown into a pit for the purpose of counting whatever sort of objects may be considered a primitive symbol. A link is thereby forged between items that have nothing to do with each other in the nature of things, simply by virtue of the one's being made to take the place of the other. Some such model as this generally informs the notion of the symbol current in linguistics and semiotics and in a broad spectrum of empirical disciplines where phenomena of signification are studied scientifically. The aspect of the symbol that is stressed in these fields is its arbitrariness or conventionality and the fact that it is *not* the object it symbolizes, but just some substitute for it in the object's absence.[1]

For poets, and generally in aesthetic theory, the symbolic has quite a different meaning. The symbol distinguishes itself from other types of signs (or as against the sign altogether) by virtue of its making concretely present the thing it signifies. This function of presencing has consistently been described in the language of "participation," with the implication that the symbol is actually a part of the larger whole it represents—*pars pro toto*. In Coleridge's famous formulation, the symbol "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative."[2] Consequently, in aesthetics the idea of the symbol has tended to imply an intrinsic affinity with what is symbolized (to the point of *being* it, at least in part) and often the fundamental unity of all things—all things



being reflected in the symbol as in a microcosm or monad.[3] In addition to the monadology of Leibniz, Hegel's doctrine of the concrete universal and Kant's notion of an a priori intuition which is not "schematic" but rather "analogical" (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, sec. 59) supply some of the German idealistic underpinnings for this originally romantic conception of the symbol.[4] Another important source can be found in magic and totemism, as is signaled by the interest of symbolist poets from Baudelaire to Yeats and beyond, for example, to James Merrill, in the occult. In occult tradition and lore, the symbol participates in reality to the extent of being able effectively to transform it, typically through the manipulation of tokens, rather than remaining just an external representation devoid of any real efficacy and power over what it represents (Lévi-Strauss, "L'efficacité").

That the symbol is a part of the whole it represents (and by universal analogy this expands to include the whole universe), that it thereby makes present what it signifies, presenting it, precisely, *in part*, means also that the symbol may be said to signify not merely by virtue of convention but by its "nature." What it actually is in itself and not just what it may be arbitrarily used to stand for determines what the symbol signifies. To say a "sail" was seen on the horizon in order to mean that a ship was seen (Coleridge's own example) is in some sense a natural mode of expression. There is something not entirely arbitrary about using a sail to represent a ship. A ship is indeed in a certain manner present in a sail; it is present in part. And a sail *is*, approximately, a ship: that is, it is a piece of a ship.

The goal of giving access to nature beneath the level of social conventions of signification has been fairly constantly in view throughout the history of symbolic expression in poetry: it is epitomized by the myth of Orpheus as the singer-poet whose music tames beasts and even moves the inanimate elements. His mastery over the natural world indicates that his poetry is the very language of nature (Bays). The endeavor to return to a state in which language would signify by virtue of its being and intrinsic nature rather than by conventions socially imposed was a program already of the romantics. Hölderlin's "Nun, nun, müssen die Worte dafür, wie Blumen, entstehen" [Now, now, must words therefore like flowers originate] in "Brot und Wein" can be taken as emblematic of the need for rediscovering language as a natural thing. This is the ideal of a poetic language that would be literally things, in which the breach between sign and referent that characterizes (and curses) postlapsarian language would be repaired.[5]

The symbolist tradition from Hölderlin to Rilke activates this Orphic claim for poetry in a particularly intense and self-conscious, even at times self-ironic, way. The notion often holds a powerful attraction still for contemporary poets—as witness the undiminished fascination with Orpheus—however far they may be from considering it possible to realize.

The art of the symbol, accordingly, at least from the romantic period on, was supposed to make beings speak, or to provide by the symbol a channel that would make their natural speech audible. Baudelaire crystallized the idea that language should ideally be the natural speaking of things in some essential verses in "L'Invitation au voyage":

> Tout y parlerait
> À l'âme en secret
> Sa douce langue natale. (*OC* 1:53)
>
> [There everything would speak / To the soul in secret / Its sweet native language.]

These lapidary lines seem to envisage a language unmediated by arbitrary conventions and by meanings imposed by practical functions of communication, deaf to the things' own native voices. Things speaking to the soul in their own native language, attuned to its own inner being, communicate in virtue of what they are. What speaks in the symbol or in the space to which Baudelaire voyages in the poem is everything, *tout*, since by universal analogy any particular thing speaking its sweet native language—that is, the language of things—speaks for all beings and perhaps for being itself. Of course, Baudelaire is also, in decisive ways, fiercely negative on nature, loathing it as ugly and evil, yet his "*flowers* of evil" are nevertheless themselves produced by descent to precisely this soil in order to transform it into art. It is all the more necessary, therefore, to begin from these romantic doctrines in order to account for his transmutation, in effect a denaturalization, of the symbol.

In the symbolic universe, all things are interconnected, and all are immanent in each individual thing. This is to say that the world is composed of correspondences: its qualities "answer to one another," as Baudelaire puts it in "Correspondances" ("Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent"), just like the mutually defining elements of a language. Indeed, as the

linguistic metaphor of "answering" suggests, the things that make up the world, at least as it is reflected in poetry, *are* the elements of a language. Baudelaire was fond of describing all nature as a vocabulary for the artist's use ("La nature n'est qu'un dictionnaire").[6] However, although he evokes the romantic topos of the language of things—as again in "Elévation": "le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes" [the language of flowers and of mute things]—Baudelaire turns out ultimately to be more interested in recreating the whole order of things as a language and therefore as *not* natural. The implication is less that language should return to a state of nature and more nearly the reverse—that even nature might be subsumed into language.

Baudelaire's closed, symmetrical stanzaic forms and the interiorization of the world in the supposedly authentic dimension of "cœur" contribute to construing reality as a language where everything is differentially defined, so that all elements are ordered by internal relations into a self-enclosed system.[7] In "L'Invitation au voyage," "things" such as "les soleils mouillés" and "ces ciels brouillés" are not just kindred natural phenomena. They actually create each other in relation to one another—for example, by the reciprocity of their rhyming and the differential play of assonances and consonants—in the splendor in which they poetically exist, each as distilled out of the other and as fused together into one whole. The experience of reading a Baudelaire poem is (or at least can be) one of being carried away to a sphere where all things and sensations are transubstantiated by appearing within the structural wholes of the poem. The world is presented as essentially translated into a poetic idiom and as articulated in a harmony of purely formal, mutually defining values. Things sublated thus into a system of correspondences or relative differences have been turned essentially into language.

Romantics, and long before them writers of the Middle Ages, had conceived nature as language—that is, as a system of signs, or, metaphorically, a book. However, the creed that the experience of everything as one is a possibility engendered specifically by poetic language became operational first for the symbolists, and they recognized Baudelaire as having opened up this possibility. The sensuously symbolic power of his verse made it a superior, all-encompassing kind of "seeing" to which a veritable universe accrued. Hence Baudelaire could be hailed as *voyant* and a "vrai dieu" by Rimbaud. Baudelaire's essential achievement and legacy to

symbolism is to have convincingly created the experience of how everything (at least as sensed and felt by an individual) can be known in and as language. Feelings and perceptions themselves become an alphabet to be used according to the grammar of poetic art. Even when it is strongly evocative of a specific historical epoch and milieu, Baudelaire's poetry refers to these external phenomena only as essentially transfigured by their representation in and as poetic language: "Tout devient allégorie" [All becomes allegory]—"Le Cygne." Baudelaire tended to use *allégorie* interchangeably with the term *symbole* (for example, at the end of "Un voyage à Cythère"), since both serve equally well to indicate the linguistic transfiguration of the real.[8] In this perspective, which is the soul of symbolism, language is not just a reality but all reality, and perhaps suprareality as well.

Language tends to become identical with all it represents in Baudelaire's poetry: it is the part which concretely embodies and becomes symbolically identical with the whole. This is not to be confused with a metaphysical thesis that there is nothing but language.[9] It is rather a poetic experience of everything becoming accessible to be known symbolically—that is, as identical, on the model of part and whole, with the concrete, sensuous instance of the poem itself. A symbol is the presence of a unity that is not completely given as such to the senses but is present in language through the partial, or rather participatory, identity of symbol and symbolized. The poem as symbol is, at least in part, what it represents. This results directly from the drive toward identity at work in language as symbol. The symbol annexes to itself everything with which it comes into contact. It makes everything it touches over into itself. By virtue of its intense sensuality and almost hallucinatory inebriation, Baudelaire's language becomes the palpable presentation or incarnation of a whole (symbolic) universe.

The symbol proposes to participate in a larger reality, but for the symbolist this means, by a logic of supplementarity, that it ends up producing virtually, in the element of language, the reality it was supposed to symbolize. Its synthetic energy becomes the creative force that constitutes the world it symbolizes. For the symbol is invested with a force for becoming symbolically the whole that it is not literally, either by throwing things together into unity *(symballein)* or as the part of a token *(symbolon)* that represents, in the absence of the missing half, the whole of which it was originally part. The drive to identity at work in language as symbol is concentrated and heightened by the harmonious language of lyric based on

symmetries and correspondences—that is, on various forms of repetition of the same; for example, rhythm and rhyme. All such devices of the lyric imagination serve in the production of varieties of identity.

Identity that is forged by the very symbolic nature of language, brought out and enhanced by the form as well as the intent and meaning of Baudelaire's verse, surfaces as a totally obsessive trope in a poem like "L'Invitation au voyage." The *incipit*—"Mon enfant, ma sœur" [My child, my sister]—creates identity immediately by its grammar of apposition. This already suggests some collapse of natural boundaries of difference, a promiscuous mix of distinct kinds of kinship. All intimate relations seem to be embraced together in one, an incestuous intimacy disregarding essential differences between progeny and sibling and, implicitly, lover. The country to which the voyage is directed is itself at least partially or approximately identical with the beloved ("pays qui te ressemble"). The skyscapes and weather are for the poet-speaker but the reflection of the beloved's eyes and their stormy emotions. Even love and death collapse together in identity by conjunction: "Aimer à loisir, / Aimer et mourir" [To love at leisure, / To love and die], as loving here becomes at the same time a suspension of activity and a dying. This world of complete identity is expressed finally in the last stanza of the poem in that the ships traveling from the furthest limits of the earth nevertheless move wholly within the sphere of the beloved's desire: "C'est pour assouvir / Ton moindre désir / Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde" [It is to satisfy / Your least desire / That they come from the end of the world]. The external world here is totally at the service of, and has no determination or identity independently of, the innerness of desire. By thematizing the principle of identity in this way, the poem gives a lyric image of how language in fact operates in symbolist poetry—namely, by identifying itself concretely with what it represents and erasing the difference between representation and reality, the inner world and the outer.

The intrinsic relation of language and world in symbolism is grounded not only in the Neoplatonic trope of participation, but also, particularly for romantic theorists of the symbol like Coleridge, Goethe, and Hamann, in the language of revelation, *Offenbarung*, which intimates a prophetic precedent for symbolist poetics. In the biblical tradition of *Logos*, the Word of God creates all things and, consequently, all creatures are symbols bespeaking their Creator. Hence this paradigm, too, induces to construing language and world as communicating with, and indeed as intrinsic to one another,

at the most originary level. Baudelaire explicitly alludes to the Creator Word's becoming flesh ("Et verbum caro factum est") in his preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Whether Neoplatonically or biblically backgrounded, whether conceived in terms of participation or of creation as revelation, symbolist poetics are predicated on a peculiarly privileged relation of language and world. Indeed the absorption of all reality into language as *poiesis* may be taken to be the key premise of the entire symbolist vision. The consequences of this fundamental premise, however, turn out to be diverse and even contradictory. On the one hand, reality puts up no more resistance: all is simply fused into unity in an exquisite and unrestricted universal harmony forged in and by language. On the other hand, the collapse of all extralinguistic reality into language leaves language empty of real substance and consequently disoriented. Without being anchored to anything real beyond itself, language has trouble maintaining even its own unity and integrity.

The essential tension between these opposite sorts of consequences of its pan-linguisticism can, in fact, be detected in every aspect and dimension of symbolist art. Ineluctably, together with the presence of the object in and to the symbol, its immanence to language, comes also an emptying of all objective content. The symbol contains everything immediately within itself, but only at the price of becoming a pure ideality devoid of relation to anything beyond the purely linguistic sphere. Every supposedly external object of language collapses into just a linguistic artifact. This makes it possible ultimately to dissolve the presumed external sources of language, including subjectivity and all its attendant postulates, into material forces and drives conceived of as working and manifest immanently in language. And it is this direction in which symbolist poetry subsequent to Baudelaire and down to our own times decisively moves.

Baudelaire used his art of the symbol in order to discover the mysterious and profound unity ("une ténébreuse et profonde unité") of all things based on revelation by the word or on correspondences in a Neoplatonic order of being. But that this is peculiarly the poet's prerogative, a secret reserved for disclosure by the master of words, suggests that it is a unity that exists essentially in the order of language. As the purely linguistic status of the vision proclaimed in symbolist poetry becomes more overt, the synthesis Baudelaire's poetry celebrates shows itself to be not just a synthesis of what is supposed to be higher reality but equally, and paradoxically, an exclusion from and

avoidance of the real. Hence the "double aspect" of symbolism individuated by Paul de Man in his homologous essay "The Double Aspect of Symbolism."[10] It is because the poet in the solitude of his individual consciousness finds himself alienated from the world that he attempts, in vain according to de Man, to recover lost unity by means of his symbolic language.

Given this double aspect of symbolism, together with the aspiration toward an ideal life of unity goes a discomfiting and even shocking avowal of the ultimate truth of dissolution and death. It is only too clear that the ecstatic experiences so exuberantly enjoyed are dependent upon and even transpire within, wholly within, language. Language is the element in which the symbol lives and dies. It is a synthetic, unifying medium, but it is also in itself purely formal, empty of substance, a kind of dead artifact destined to be identified with the dead letter of writing. Consequently, its use to synthesize unity is inevitably artificial. The pure religion of art, practiced self-consciously as a calculated linguistic craft or alchemy, is constrained to exploit the very sorts of mechanical and material means that the symbolist artist otherwise affects to despise. Thus, to the extent that it is an act of faith, symbolism is almost inevitably in bad faith, for it is acutely aware of its own artifices and, in effect, of the contradiction of striving to *synthesize* unmediated experience of the whole harmonious unity of things.

This precarious posture of symbolist poetry is held intact by Baudelaire, buoyed up on the exuberance of his discovery of an almost all-powerful verbal magic. As the historical distance from this burst of creative inspiration lengthens, it becomes more difficult for the sheer passion of poetry to either make good or render irrelevant the self-deceptions that go into the making of the symbol. It is language that permits the total, unified knowledge sought by symbolists, yet language is also at the same time a false, or at least a fictive, element of such knowledge. What is "merely" linguistic is also in a sense nothing. The nothingness and death with which symbolist voices are so seductively obsessed has its remote motivations in this predicament. Irrepressibly, this sense of an encroaching emptying out and annihilation of reality by language asserts itself as a dominant mood throughout French symbolist poetry starting from Baudelaire's own poetry precipitated into the abyss *(le gouffre)* opened up by its own infinite expanse unlimited by any reality it cannot absorb. Indeed death comes to be figured as the very perfection sought, and the goal of knowledge by poetry's symbolic *gnosis* is represented as being reached precisely in death.

As Walter Benjamin perceived, Baudelaire's poetry presents a challenge to conceive language in its purity. In introducing his translation of *Tableaux parisiens,* he describes his attempt to translate the pure essence of language itself. Translation allows pure language "to shine upon the original more fully. It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another" (Benjamin 1969, 227). However, while insisting on the absoluteness of language, taking inspiration from Baudelaire's poetry, the last work of lyric poetry with European-wide significance ("Die 'Fleurs du mal' sind das letzte lyrische Werk gewesen, das eine europäische Wirkung getan hat"), Benjamin also encompasses the other, inseparable aspect of symbolism in analyzing Baudelaire's lyric art as a way of coping with shock, the most distinctive modern experience, as registered first in Baudelaire's poetry. Originally shocking experience can be confronted and digested by being assimilated into a total structure of meaning—that is, essentially as language, but a language scarred with the traces of trauma. Baudelaire's lyric production represents a highly conscious reworking in and as lyric language of lived stimuli that have left the psychic mechanism traumatized, and Benjamin deciphers beneath the smooth surface of the mellifluous verses the ruptures and impasses of Baudelaire's quintessential experience as inaugural of the modern. The apparent wholeness of language into which experience was lifted by symbolic lyric in fact shows through to another aspect of language, especially of prophetic or messianic language, as consisting essentially in ruptures and abrasions. Still on the basis of its sublation of reality into language, symbolism's language thus reveals quite a different, unsuspected face marked by materiality and fragmentation. Baudelaire's language read profoundly translates the breakdown that the modern age was witnessing, whereby the aura of things that connects them with their context and past by involuntary memory disintegrates ("Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire").

Benjamin's reflections confirm the two aspects of symbolism and adduce a sort of historical, material account of their derivation. But it is also possible to interpret how the drive toward unity and presence inherent in the symbol converts into disunity and rupture with the real by its own internal logic, by the very fulfillment of its own impulse to total unity and the consequent cutting asunder of the tension between reality and symbol, language and world. The grand symbolic vision of the identity of All leads not only to a total structure or monism of the universe: it entails equally a

shattering into autonomous fragments, since each individual element is wholly self-contained, indeed is in itself all-containing. The totally relational identity characteristic of language and therefore also of a linguistic universe turns into an equally total self-sufficiency of every particle, since each is endowed with an absolute identity already in itself, unconditioned by any external relations—all relations having become internal to it. In symbolism, everything has become language, but as a result language no longer mediates anything extra-linguistic. Without any real content, language becomes purely image or, as is suggested by other forms of symbolist art, purely musical incantation: it is unbounded, but is lacking in any rule or concept such as only an external limit could provide, and this leads eventually to language's being threatened even in its own internal cohesion.

The breakup of language and of everything in language was to be overtly pursued by Baudelaire's poetic successors, and it has been discovered retrospectively as subtext in Baudelaire himself by recent critics, especially in Benjamin's wake.[11] It can be understood as resulting ineluctably from the logic and dynamic of the symbol itself, with its absolute exigencies of identity, presence and immediacy, achieved no longer just by means of, but actually in and as, language. For once language has totally penetrated nature, leaving no remainder, nature is turned wholly into artifice. Nature can no longer supply the paradigm of organic unity after which language models itself in romanticism. Rather, everything becomes subject to the nature of language as an artificial synthesis with no substance in itself and therefore in a constant state of dissolution. When the universal identity forged by the symbol turns into an identity of all with language itself, the symbolic order of things is poised to collapse in upon itself, to implode in an uncontrolled proliferation of pure form. Baudelaire's transmission of the romantic doctrine of the symbol radicalizes and in effect reverses it, resulting in its no longer effecting union with all that is, but rather causing an alienation from nature and the real. Although he at times embraces the idea of a harmoniously ordered universe of natural correspondences, he lays the groundwork for its undoing in and by the symbol, which becomes the dynamite that explodes the universe eventually into Mallarmé's constellations of unmasterable chance. Precisely these disintegrative implications of the unrestricted identification of all with language have manifested themselves persistently in the course and direction of symbolist poetry in

its development ever since Baudelaire. (For sometimes contrasting views on this descent, see Charles Altieri.)

Baudelaire was a believer in the identificatory power of the symbol, and he remained the undisputed master of this creative faculty for the symbolist poets that followed him. Yet he did not believe in the all-embracing, benevolent Nature in which symbols were supposed to be embedded, and into which they beckoned invitingly, binding all things, including whoever could interpret them, together into one whole. For Baudelaire, this romantic dream had become a nightmare and, consequently, the symbol, in significant ways, sinister. Indeed, he was haunted by the symbol and its solicitations to communion with a Nature that he loathed. In "Obsession," Baudelaire recoils from nature, from its great forests which frighten him, as do cathedrals with their windy organs ("Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales; / Vous hurlez comme l'orgue"). He would like the night to be without stars, for their light speaks to him, and it is a known language, whereas he is in search rather of the empty, the black and naked, what is divested of signs and therefore devoid of significance:

> Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
> Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!
> Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu! (*OC* 1:75)
>
> [How you would please me, O night, without these stars / whose light speaks a known language! / For I seek the empty, the black and the naked!]

This constitutes an anguished palinode that effectively retracts the soul's enchantment with the sweet native language of things in "L'Invitation au voyage." Here Baudelaire is horrified of nature and its language, indeed of nature as language, and not because it is strange but because it is all too familiar. The "regards familiers" of "Correspondances" reappear in order to become terrifying. The forest is experienced as a cathedral whose significance is frightfully overdetermined, rather than as the mysteriously alluring temple of "Correspondances." Nature now is already fully codified: the cries of the woods that reply to one another out of their depths ("Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*") are already articulated as a church liturgy. They are natural rites in a manner reminiscent of "Correspondances," but now

precisely their symbolic force makes them a negative, indeed a nightmare experience.

Baudelaire is repelled not so directly by nature as by the significance of nature, which is a form of human culture, indeed a language. The ocean's waves, with their heaving and tumult, are execrable because they are already found by the mind within itself ("Je te hais, Océan! tes bonds et tes tumultes, / Mon esprit les retrouve en lui"), just as the defeated man's bitter laugh full of sobs and insults is found in the enormous laugh of the sea. Even night fails to be other, and darkness—"les ténèbres"—consists in canvasses ("des toiles") painted on, or to be painted on, by human signs. Nature offers no escape from the human, and the human has become just as abhorrent as the natural. The symbolic-linguistic mechanism that reduces everything to language is at the bottom of this viciously circular mirroring, since everything that can be reached through language is reduced to identity. All that is known is known through the identity of signs circulating in the linguistic system: it is all too familiar and too wretched, in effect a prison house of language from which there is no exit.

Of course, what Baudelaire loathes at bottom is himself, because that is what he sees at the bottom of Nature. He begins the desperate struggle to escape himself by crying out after the name of "the other" that is still the watchword of so much of French, left-bank culture today. What he is trying to escape is the viciously narcissistic self-reflexivity of the symbolist quest that is palpable in a poem like "La Chevelure," in which the poet imagines plunging his amorous head into the black ocean in which "the other" is enclosed:

> Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse
> Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé . . . (*OC* 1:26)

The "other" is sought in desperation in order to escape the self, but it is indeed already an other that is "enclosed" *(enfermé)*. It risks being confounded with the blackness of the self's own spleen. In the universe of total identity there is really no escaping the self. The seeker necessarily voyages endlessly in quest of *le nouveau* and *l'inconnu*. The absolute identity of everything is the truth of the symbol that Baudelaire found himself imprisoned by and from which he chafes to escape. All this he bequeathed to his poetic posterity.

Baudelaire adopts the symbol as a basic strategy but denaturalizes and also denatures it in the process. The universal identification of each with all that is characteristic of symbolic vision and the basis for the correspondences of things takes a peculiar turn when the identification of all things in the symbol is taken to be an identity of all with language. This is, in effect, what the symbolists explicitly do, rendering manifest the revolution in poetic language brought about *in nuce* by Baudelaire. It means that the identities of the symbolist vision, rather than being natural, indeed the deep structure or essence of nature, turn out to be purely artificial, indeed nothing but language. There is still an all-pervading logic of identity, but it takes on a very different significance, in important ways just the opposite of the significance it had in romanticism. The natural order of things is no longer reassuring and restorative, healing human breaches and diseases. The order of things is only linguistic and therefore only a reflection of the human world of cultural artifacts and in fact already infected with the sickness of the self.

Baudelaire pursues to its furthest limits the logic of identity inhering in the symbol. He identifies everything with everything else. But the result he obtains is not oneness with the mystery of nature and the universe (even though he leaves some traces of a suffering longing for an encounter with the Other or the Unknown), but rather an expansion of language so as to actually encompass everything, beyond simply serving as the instrument of establishing the symbolic identity of all being. It remains only for this linguistic mechanism to expose itself as such, and to collapse for lack of external support, in order to produce the brilliant artificial paradises and chance constellations of subsequent symbolism. Thus is set the program that symbolist poets, eminently Rimbaud and Mallarmé, were to follow. It is the linguistic turning and totalizing of the symbol achieved substantially by Baudelaire that constitutes the premise for the shattering even of language itself, no longer held intact by anything beyond it, that was to be pursued to its furthest extremes by later symbolist poets.

The identification of everything with language has remained an absolutely central preoccupation of French poetry and poetics in the twentieth century. It is at issue, for example, in the way Francis Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses* hovers between treating words as natural things and then again ruthlessly unmasking this fiction and fighting against language in the name of "la chose même," which escapes it. Yet, given the double aspect of the symbolism inaugurated by Baudelaire's poetry, whereby the breaking down

of language, which collapses from within, belongs together with the absorption by language of the world of things and its becoming itself a thing (acquiring thereby also the thing's vulnerability to amorcelation, dismemberment, and dissolution), even this sort of resistance to the idealizations inherent in language suggests in indirect ways how subsequent poets continue to remain Baudelaire's heirs. For although Baudelaire stands as the great poet of mysterious and profound unity in the symbol, in which domain "Tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté / Luxe, calme et volupté" [All is but order and beauty / Luxury, calm and voluptuousness], it is nevertheless possible to see how this complete freedom from discord and all external constraint contains the seeds of its own destruction—of the shattering of language as total system into infinite disunity and limitless dis-semination. This is the decisive creative innovation that makes Baudelaire's poetry so seminal for symbolist poetry in its widest ramifications.