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Asked by his wife whether he wants to have his bowling shoes laced over or laced under, Archie Bunker answers with a question: "What's the difference?" Being a reader of sublime simplicity, his wife replies by patiently explaining the difference between lacing over and lacing under, whatever this may be, but provokes only ire. "What's the difference?" did not ask for difference but means instead "I don't give a damn what the difference is." The same grammatical pattern engenders two meanings that are mutually exclusive: the literal meaning asks for the concept (difference) whose existence is denied by the figurative meaning. As long as we are talking about bowling shoes, the consequences are relatively trivial; Archie Bunker, who is a great believer in the authority of origins (as long, of course, as they are the right origins) muddles along in a world where literal and figurative meanings get in each other's way, though not without discomforts. But suppose that it is a *de*-bunker rather than a "Bunker", and a de-bunker of the arche (or origin), an archie Debunker such as Nietzsche or Jacques Derrida, for instance, who asks the question "What is the Difference"—and we cannot even tell from his grammar whether he "really" wants to know "what" difference is or is just telling us that we shouldn't even try to find out. Confronted with the question of the difference between grammar and rhetoric, grammar allows us to ask the question, but the sentence by means of which we ask it may deny the very possibility of asking. For what is the use of asking, I ask, when we cannot even authoritatively decide whether a question asks or doesn't ask?

—Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*

Opening Remarks

Difference. 1. The condition or degree of being unlike, dissimilar, or diverse; disparity, variation. 2. A specific point of disparity or unlikeness; an instance of variation. 3. *Archaic.* A distinct mark or peculiarity. 4. A disagreement; controversy; quarrel. 5. Discrimination; distinction. 6. Mathematics: a) the amount by which one quantity is greater or less than another. b) The amount that remains after one quantity is subtracted from another. Also called "remainder." (From Latin *differre*, to carry in different directions: *dis*, apart + *ferre*, to carry).

Critical. 1. Inclined to judge severely; given to censuring. 2. Characterized by careful and exact evaluation and judgment. 3. Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of critics or criticism. 4. Forming, or of the nature of, a crisis; crucial. 5. Fraught with danger or risk; perilous. (From Latin *criticus*, "decisive," from Greek *kritikos*, able to discern, critical, from *kritos*, separated, chosen, from *krinein*, to separate, choose.)

—*American Heritage Dictionary*

What, indeed, *is* the "difference" here?

This question can perhaps be approached by way of the relation between the two definitions I have quoted above. On the one hand, the two seemingly different words *critical* and *difference* are surprisingly alike; they both range from an objective, disinterested function of discrimination ("distinction," "careful and exact evaluation") to an argumentative or agonistic function of condemnation ("a disagreement or quarrel," "judging severely, censuring"). Both can have the urgency of a crisis or the tranquillity of a taxonomy, and both derive from words meaning the same thing: "to carry apart," "to separate." The difference between *difference* and *critical,* in other words, is not as clear and distinct as we might have been tempted to think.

On the other hand, within each definition, the historical process of drifting away from the Greek or Latin root has opened up within each

word a range of meanings that render it different from itself. Each of the two words can name either a dynamic, conflictual opposition or a static, descriptive distinction. And each can refer both to the fact of division and to the nature of the differends.

The problem of difference can thus be seen both as an uncertainty over separability and as a drifting apart within identity. And the very fact that it is impossible to know whether something constitutes description or disagreement, information or censure, is perhaps ultimately the most problematic and critical difference of all. For it is precisely in the nature of difference that it consist in the engendering of uncertainty not only over its nature but also over the danger or usefulness of its very propagation. What is often most fundamentally disagreed upon is whether a disagreement arises out of the complexities of fact or out of the impulses of power.

The essays collected in this volume have as their common focus the problem of this type of "difference" as it structures and undermines the act of reading. But it should already be clear that the meaning of the words *difference* and *reading* cannot be taken for granted. In each essay, they function as two unknowns in a textual equation whose unresolvability is matched only by its ability to engender more textuality.

In each essay, the text or its pattern of previous readings is seen to be setting up a network of differences into which the reader is lured with a promise of comprehension. The oppositions dealt with here, among others, are: masculine/feminine, literature/criticism (Chapter 1); sexuality/textuality (Chapter 2); prose/poetry, original/repetition (Chapter 3); poetry/theory, performative/constative, reference/self-reference (Chapter 4); clarity/obscurity, science/literature, syntax/semantics (Chapter 5); naive/ironic, murder/error, criminal/victim/judge (Chapter 6); and, finally, literature/psychoanalysis/philosophy, and all the binary and ternary oppositions this entails, including a discussion of the applicability of such numerical formulations to the ways in which difference intervenes in interpretation (Chapter 7).

Reading, here, proceeds by identifying and dismantling differences by means of other differences that cannot be fully identified or dismantled. The starting point is often a binary difference that is subsequently shown to be an illusion created by the workings of differences much harder to pin down. The differences *between* entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways

in which an entity differs from itself. But the way in which a text thus differs from itself is never simple: it has a certain rigorous, contradictory logic whose effects can, up to a certain point, be read. The "deconstruction" of a binary opposition is thus not an annihilation of all values or differences; it is an attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition. It is Baudelaire's prose poem, for example, that, in standing in binary opposition to the verse poem it rewrites, makes visible the way in which that verse poem already differed from what it had seemed to be. If, however, binary oppositions in this book thus play the role of the critical fall guy, it is not because one must try at all costs to go beyond them. The very impulse to "go beyond" is an impulse structured by a binary opposition between oneself and what one attempts to leave behind. Far from eliminating binary oppositions from the critical vocabulary, one can only show that binary difference does not function as one thinks it does and that certain subversions that seem to befall it in the critical narrative are logically prior to it and necessary in its very construction. Difference is a form of *work* to the extent that it *plays* beyond the control of any subject: it is, in fact, that without which no subject could ever be constituted.

In his essay entitled "La différance," Jacques Derrida emphasizes the inseparability of the spatial and temporal dynamics of difference. In coining the word *différance* with an *a*, he combines the two senses of the French verb *différer*—to differ and to defer (postpone)—into one designation for what both subverts and produces the illusion of presence, identity, and consciousness:

> Differance is what ensures that the movement of signification be possible only if each so-called "present" element, each element that appears on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself. . . . Some interval or gap must separate it from what is not itself in order for it to be itself, but that interval which constitutes it in the present must also by the same token divide the present in itself, thus cutting through . . . everything that can be thought out on the basis of the present . . . , singularly the "substance" or the "subject."[1]

As this quotation from Derrida makes clear, the present volume is also the record of one reader's struggles to come to grips with the problems posed by contemporary so-called deconstructive critical theory. Difference is, of course, at work within the very discourse of theory itself. Indeed, it is precisely contemporary theory that has made us so aware of this. Theoretical pronouncements therefore do not stand here as instruments to be used in mastering literary structures. On the contrary, it is through contact with literature that theoretical tools

are useful precisely to the extent that they thereby change and dissolve in the hands of the user. Theory is here often the straight man whose precarious rectitude and hidden risibility, passion, and pathos are precisely what literature has somehow already foreseen. For literature stages the modes of its own misreading, making visible the literarity of the heart of theory and rendering the effects of its project of understanding unpredictable. The rhetorical subversion of theory by its own discourse does not, however, prevent it from generating effects; indeed, it is precisely the way theory misses its target that produces incalculable and interesting effects elsewhere.[2]

If this volume has any overall preoccupation, it is perhaps the importance of the functioning of *what is not known* in literature or theory. Far from being a negative or nonexistent factor, what is not known is often the unseen motivating force behind the very deployment of meaning. The power of ignorance, blindness, uncertainty, or misreading is often all the more redoubtable for not being perceived as such. Literature, it seems to me, is the discourse most preoccupied with the unknown, but not in the sense in which such a statement is usually understood. The "unknown" is not what lies beyond the limits of knowledge, some unreachable, sacred, ineffable point toward which we vainly yearn. It lies, rather, in the oversights and slip-ups that structure our lives in the same way that an *X* makes it possible to articulate an algebraic equation. What literature often seems to tell us is the consequences of the way in which what is not known is not seen as unknown. It is not, in the final analysis, what you don't know that can or cannot hurt you. It is what you don't *know* you don't know that spins out and entangles "that perpetual error we call life."

PART ONE: SEXUALITY AND DIFFERENCE

3. Poetry and Its Double: Two *Invitations au voyage*

Poetic Cookery

> Mange-t-on dans *René*?
>
> —Balzac, *Falthurne*
>
> On mange beaucoup dans les romans de Flaubert.
>
> —Jean-Pierre Richard, *Littérature et Sensation*

The prose version of Baudelaire's *Invitation au voyage* appeared in 1857, two years after its well-known homonym in verse.[1] It did not, however, meet with the same success; already transported by the rhythmic precision and calm lyricism of the versified text, readers of the prose poem have always tended to decline its invitation. Their refusal, varying from regrets to indignation, generally takes the form of a comparison, devaluing the prose in favor of the verse. For example, the *Invitation* in prose, writes Jacques Crépet, "sounds infinitely less pure and less musical: it is weighed down by moral and practical considerations which drag it either toward the exposition of ideas or toward everyday reality."[2] And Suzanne Bernard, after juxtaposing the verse poem's refrain—

> Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
> Luxe, calme et volupté—
>
> [There, all is but order and beauty,
> Luxury, calm, and sensual pleasure.]

with the prose description of a "pays de Cocagne,"

> où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et douce à respirer; d'où le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus; où le bonheur est

> marié au silence; où la cuisine elle-même est poétique, grasse et excitante à la fois . . . ,
>
> [where luxury is pleased to mirror itself in order; where life is rich and sweet to breathe; where disorder, turmoil, and the unforeseen are excluded; where happiness is married to silence; where the cooking itself is poetic, rich and stimulating at once . . . ,]

exclaims, "What! all *that* was in Baudelaire's dream of voluptuous beauty! A quiet, comfortable life with 'rich and stimulating' food!"[3]

In the act of refusing the invitation into prose, these readers thus accept with a vengeance Baudelaire's invitation to compare. And their verdict is generally the same: what is wrong with the prose lies in what it adds to the imagery of the verse. The new elements are considered discordant, extraneous, and unpoetic. For these readers, then, every plus in the prose poem is a minus.

For a small minority of readers, on the other hand, it is the very heterogeneity of the prose poem's imagery which heightens its poetic effect: "In the *Invitation au voyage* . . . seduction and tenderness reach their peak in metaphors which unite abstract feelings with the most prosaic objects of the culinary arts."[4]

But however radical the divergence between these two ways of judging the prose poem, their agreement over the element, namely, cooking, to valorize or to condemn is striking. Considered either as a lapse in taste or as a new stylistic spice, the unexpected presence of these culinary images within a "poetic" text has always given rise to the same question, Can cooking really be poetic? This, however, is precisely the question the text does not allow us to ask, since it has already answered: Cooking itself is poetic. Rather than the status of the word *cooking,* it is the status of the word *poetic* that is at stake. What must be asked is thus not Can cooking be poetic? but What does *poetic* mean? Because the prose version of Baudelaire's *Invitation au voyage* gives an affirmative answer to the first question, it renews the urgency and uncertainty of the second.

If the text's own use of the word *poetic* in a culinary context is rejected by certain readers, it can only be in function of a conception of poetry derived from somewhere else. In Suzanne Bernard's case, this conception comes from certain statements made by Baudelaire in his article on Banville:

> The lyre gladly flees all the details on which the novel feasts. The lyric soul strides as wide as a synthesis; the mind of the novelist regales itself with analysis.[5]

For Bernard, then, *poetic* = *lyric,* and lyric poetry is no place for the

kitchen. Baudelaire's distinction between the lyrical and the novelistic parallels the distinction suggested by our two epigraphs between the "lyrical" prose of Chateaubriand and the "realistic" prose of Flaubert: the presence or absence of the act of eating in the two works illustrates the Baudelairian distinction between the presence or absence of "detail"; "eating" in a text thereby takes on the status of an index to the text's genre.

Bernard's inability to swallow the "rich, stimulating food" in the prose *Invitation* thus results not from a simple excess of detail but from a conflict of codes. Cooking, which is certainly foreign to the lyric tradition, here disturbs the coherence of the poetic code—but it does so in order to reveal that the "poetic" is itself nothing but a code. Baudelaire indeed investigates the way poetry functions *as* a code in the prose *Invitation,* as well as in many other prose poems. The fact that many readers find the genre of the *Petits poèmes en prose* problematic is due to what might be called a "code struggle" going on both between the verse and the prose poems and within the individual prose poems themselves.[6]

If the mention of cooking in the prose *Invitation* thus represents the intrusion of a novelistic or realistic code in a poetic context—and we still of course do not know what "poetic" means—what is it that, within this so-called code struggle, can be said to represent the "lyric" code? Let us take another look at Baudelaire's distinction.

> The lyre gladly flees all the details on which the novel feasts. The lyric soul strides as wide as a synthesis; the mind of the novelist regales itself with analysis.

Curiously enough, the close relation between novels, details, and food is suggested here not only in the meaning of Baudelaire's statement, but also in its very terms, in the figurative use of the verbs *feast* and *regale* (se régaler, se délecter) to describe the work of the novelist. And while the verbs associated with novels thus evoke a kind of metabolic incorporation, the verbs associated with lyricism are rather verbs of hyperbolic motion (*flee, stride*): the delights of dining give way, in the lyric, to the pleasures of traveling. The lyric, in other words, turns out to be nothing other than a kind of *voyage.*

The Rhetorical Voyage

> Il n'y a rien qu'on puisse appeler langage avant l'articulation, c'est-à-dire la différence locale. . . . La société, la langue, l'histoire, l'articulation . . . naissent . . . en même temps que la prohibition de l'inceste.
>
> —Derrida, *De la grammatologie*

It is clear that a major participant in the prose *Invitation*'s code struggle will be the text of the *Invitation* in verse, the lyric voyage par excellence in Baudelaire's work. Let us therefore begin by analyzing the nature of the lyrical invitation presented in that poem:

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!

[My child, my sister,/Dream of the sweetness/Of going there to live together!/ To love at leisure/To love and die/In the land that resembles you!]

In inviting his lady to the "land that resembles" her, the poem's speaker begins not with a description of the land but with an affirmation of its metaphorical status. What is being proposed to the woman is a place created in her own image, a place toward which she would stand in necessary and symmetrical relation, a place, in other words, that would serve as her mirror. And indeed, the word *mirror* does appear in the very center of the poem. The lyric voyage, then, is a voyage through the looking-glass, a voyage into the illusory "depths" ("les miroirs *profonds*" [emphasis mine here and passim]) of a reflection. Its desired end is the perfect metaphorical union of the *destinatrice* with the *destination*.

Grammatically, however, this seemingly transparent metaphorical specularity is not so simple. In speaking of the relation between the lady and the land as a relation of perfectly symmetrical duality, we have not taken into account the dialogical status of the metaphorical affirmation. But it is precisely at the point at which the speaker seems to describe the metaphor in terms of the most objectively referential, visual resemblance between lady and land that its mediation through a third focal point becomes explicit:

Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

[The watery suns/In these misty skies/*For my spirit have the very charm*/ Which is so mysterious/Of your treacherous eyes/Shining through their tears.]

The important common denominator between land and lady, between suns and eyes, is less their shared shining roundness than a common

effect produced on the "spirit" of the beholder. The rhetorical meeting point between the two terms (eyes and suns) is not simply that of a metaphorical resemblance but that of a metonymical third term, contiguous to both: the speaker's desire. Metaphor, in other words, is the effect, not the cause, of the metonymy of desire.

There is yet another problem in the seemingly transparent, referential grounding of the metaphor. For if metaphor consists, as Fontanier puts it, "in presenting one idea under the sign of another idea which is more striking or better known,"[7] what is it that here stands as the "better known" point of comparison, if not, paradoxically, a woman whose charms are mysterious and whose eyes are treacherous—a woman, in other words, who is quite unknown, and perhaps unknowable? The "you" that serves as the point of reference ("the land that resembles you") is itself the unknown in the equation. And the land where "all is but order and beauty, luxury, calm, and sensual pleasure" is not in reality a land that is just like the lady, but a description of what the speaker wishes the lady were like.

It is thus metaphor itself that has become an "Invitation to the Voyage," a process of seduction. And if, as the abbé du Bos puts it, poetry can be called "l'art d'émouvoir les hommes et de les amener où l'on veut" ("the art of moving men and leading them wherever one likes"), then this metaphorical seduction, this poetic voyage, does not consist of moving in space but of moving the desires of a person.

Let us examine the nature of this rhetorical operation more closely. In the opening invocation, "Mon enfant, ma soeur," familiarity coincides with familiality; the desired union between two contiguous beings ("vivre ensemble") is placed under the natural sign of genetic resemblance. The metonymic meeting between two separate subjects takes place within a metaphorical bond of biological likeness. And if such a union is by definition incestuous, then incest becomes, in rhetorical terms, the perfect convergence of metaphor and metonymy.

The same convergence can in fact be seen in the relation between the lady and the land; while a person's relation to place is by definition metonymic, that is, arbitrary and contingent, here it is said to be metaphorical, that is, motivated and symmetrical. Metaphor thus becomes a process both of writing—the writing of resemblance—and of erasing—the erasing of difference. And the difference it erases is not only that between person and place; it is nothing less than the difference between metaphor and metonymy as such. If the entire field of language is described as the space engendered by the two axes of metaphor and metonymy[8]—that is, by their separation—the rhetoric of Baudelaire's *Invitation au voyage* would thus seem to be situated

entirely at the intersection of the two axes, at the point which, in mathematical parlance, is called the *origin*.

Interestingly enough, the poem leads us toward this "origin" of language:

> Tout y parlerait
> A l'âme en secret
> Sa douce *langue natale.*
>
> [There, all would speak/To the soul in secret/Its sweet *native language.*]

This evocation of a first, original language makes of the voyage not a departure but a return, the erasing of the distance covered by a previous voyage, the elimination of the interval that separates the "soul" from its origin. Again, we rejoin Baudelaire's remarks about lyricism: "Any lyric poet, by his very nature, inevitably brings about a return toward the lost Eden."[9] Origin, Eden, incest: through the process of obliteration of all difference—spatial, temporal, linguistic, or intersubjective—the voyage seems to tend toward a primal fullness, immobile and undifferentiated, prior to movement, time, and law. This Edenic state of perfection indeed constitutes itself through the exclusion of imperfection, as its privative grammar indicates: "Tout *n'est que* . . ." Each one of the abstract nouns following the "All is but . . ." seems to name —all by itself—the totality of the "all"; paradoxically, the "all" is not equal to the sum of its parts; rather, it is the elimination of all partition.

Ultimately, however, this suppression of all difference, division, or distance can only result in a tautology without syntax, that is, in the abolition of language as an articulated space structured by differences. And just as the origin of a mathematical graph is the point at which all variables are equal to zero, this elimination of all variation or difference in language, this Edenic point of primal fullness, can only be a u-topia, a dimensionless point, a nonplace. The poetic "native language," the origin of signification, the convergence of metaphor and metonymy, in reality marks nothing less than the disappearance of language as such.

How then can we situate the language of this text with respect to the silence that is its origin and end? How does the text *say* the end of the voyage if the end of the voyage is an absence of text? Let us look at the poem's last stanza:

> Vois sur ces canaux
> Dormir ces vaisseaux
> Dont l'humeur est vagabonde;
> C'est pour assouvir
> Ton moindre désir
> Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
> —Les soleils couchants
> Revêtent les champs,
> Les canaux, la ville entière,
> D'hyacinthe et d'or;
> Le monde s'endort
> Dans une chaude lumière.
>
> [See on these canals/These ships sleeping/In vagabond spirit/It is to fulfill/Your least desire/That they come from the ends of the earth./—The setting suns/Clothe the fields,/The canals, the entire town,/In hyacinth and gold;/The world falls asleep/In a warm light.]

Are these ships, which "come from the ends of the earth" to "fulfill your least desire," in the process of leaving or arriving? In spite of the demonstratives ("*ces* canaux," "*ces* vaisseaux") and the present tenses ("ils viennent," "le monde s'endort"), the trip's end-point seems curiously missing. More curiously still, this eclipse of the end is inscribed as such in the text, by the use of a dash ("—Les soleils couchants"), which both opens up and deletes, within the very space of language, the locus of the end—of ecstasy or death. Indeed, the silence of the end is in no way an end; it is but a stroke of the pen, deferring for a moment what follows. If the poem's language is thus organized around its own disappearance, that disappearance turns out to be not an asymptotic limit external to the text—its end or origin—but its own necessary and inherent discontinuity, the very principle of its spacing, its articulation, and its rhythm.

Declining the Invitation

> Cette fois, on sent l'effort dans ce système allégorique—qui remplace le tableau lumineux et calme évoqué à la fin du poème en vers.
>
> —Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire à nos jours.*

As we have just seen, the lyrical invitation operates on two levels which are traditionally called *rhetorical:* the level of *persuasion* (seduction) and the level of *figure* (convergence of metaphor and metonymy). In both cases, the poem tends toward the transformation of all plurality and difference into unity and sameness. In contrast, the rhetoric of the prose *Invitation au voyage* is, from its very first sentence, quite different:

> Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on, que je rêve de visiter avec une vieille amie.
>
> [There is a superb country, a land of Cockaigne, they say, which I dream of visiting with an old friend.]

Contrary to the incestuous intimacy and shared dream of the verse poem, the prose poem begins not only without invocation but also without interlocution. The lady is not at first addressed directly by the text, but is inscribed within the text in the third person ("une vieille amie"): she has become, in Benveniste's terms, not a person but a non-person,[10] a grammatical instance designating her absence instead of her presence. This grammatical change in the invitation—which is thus no longer a real invitation—subverts the intimacy between "I" and "you" which, in the verse poem, had led to an Edenic "us" ("notre chambre") in which each could find in the other, transformed into the same, the essence of his own soul. Between the "I" and the "old friend," no direct seduction can take place: speaking *to* has become speaking *of*. The lady is depersonalized into a mere social role, the role of the "old friend," or, later, of the "chosen sister" ("soeur d'élection")—an expression that unmasks the entirely arbitrary, conventional character of the lyric invocation "my child, my sister." As a social stereotype, the lady in the prose poem changes from the unique object of an incestuous love to the locus of an infinite possibility of substitution.

In the same way, the usage of the third person subverts the originality and uniqueness of the speaker himself. The dream is announced from the very beginning as belonging to the language of others: "Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on . . . " The real author of this dream is not "I" but "they"; the dreamer dreams by hearsay, as part of the repertoire of social rites to which the sending of any invitation—or even any love poem—ultimately belongs.

Having thus begun by subverting the immediacy of the dialogue between the first and second persons by the constant intrusion of the third, the prose poem nevertheless goes on to make abundant use of the first and second person pronouns, which had in fact never appeared as grammatical subjects in the verse poem. Interlocution, which was absent from the opening lines of the prose poem, returns with a vengeance. It would thus seem that in conserving the I/you dialogue within a context that questions its very conditions of possibility, the prose poem is situating *its* dialogue not between the first and second persons, but between the function of person (*je, tu*) and the function of non-person (*elle, on*), between the lyric illusion of dialogic reciprocity and symmetry and the ironic asymmetry that disrupts and displaces that illusion.

While the prose poem thus puts in question the specular symmetry between the "I" and the "you," it nonetheless seems to accentuate and elaborate on the specular symmetry between the land and the lady:

> Un vrai pays de Cocagne . . . où tout vous ressemble . . . . Il est une contrée qui te ressemble . . . Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia . . .

> ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre *correspondance*?. . . Vivrons-nous jamais, passerons-nous jamais dans ce tableau qu'a peint mon esprit, ce tableau qui te ressemble? . . . Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c'est toi. C'est encore toi, ces grands fleuves et ces canaux tranquilles. . . . (Emphasis in original)
>
> [A veritable land of Cockaigne . . . where everything resembles you. . . . There is a land which resembles you . . . . Incomparable flower, rediscovered tulip, allegorical dahlia . . . wouldn't you be framed by your analogy, and couldn't you, to speak like the mystics, mirror yourself in your own *correspondence*? . . . Shall we ever live, shall we ever pass into this picture my mind has painted, this painting that resembles you? . . . These treasures, these furnishings, this luxury, this order, these perfumes, these miraculous flowers, are all you. So are these rivers and tranquil canals. . . .]

The notion of "correspondences" mentioned in the poem embodies a conception of metaphor which was in fact an artistic commonplace in Baudelaire's day. From Swedenborg to Madame de Staël, from Schelling to the abbé Constant, the idea of correspondences served not only to account for "analogies among the different elements of physical nature" but also to reveal "the supreme law of creation, the variety in unity and the unity in variety."[11] In other words, metaphor was a proof of the existence of God:

> All things in nature from the smallest to the largest are but so many correspondences, for the natural world exists and conserves itself through the spiritual world, and both of them through the Lord.[12]

In Baudelaire's prose poem, the planting of the "flower" in a land comparable to it, the land of its "own correspondence," seems designed to insure both the stability of the flower's identity (its likeness to itself) and the unity and order of the whole poetic universe. If this flower is said to be, paradoxically, an "*incomparable* flower," if it is defined, in other words, as at once incomparable and comparable, being both what founds and what transcends the poem's system of comparisons, then the flower is indeed, like God, what can be likened to everything without ceasing to be unique. Metaphor here turns out to be a process of obliteration of the inherent contradiction between substitution (the comparable) and the unique (the incomparable).

Baudelaire, however, refers to the notion of correspondences not only so as "to speak like the mystics" but also so as to speak like—and comment on—another Baudelaire, the Baudelaire who wrote a sonnet called *Correspondances*. In that sonnet, the word *comme* (like)—used seven times in fourteen lines—acts as a kind of "Archimedes' fulcrum"[13] to lift up the "ténébreuse et profonde unité" ("deep, dark unity") of

the world. Now, in our prose poem, the word *comme* occurs ten times, reaching an apotheosis in the following lines:

> Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je, où tout est riche, propre et luisant, *comme* une belle conscience, *comme* une magnifique batterie de cuisine, *comme* une splendide orfèvrerie, *comme* une bijouterie bariolée!
>
> [A veritable land of Cockaigne, I tell you, where all is rich, clean and shiny, *like* a clear conscience, *like* a magnificent set of cookware, *like* the splendid wares of a goldsmith, *like* a gaudy set of jewelry!]

But here, instead of conveying a "deep, dark unity," the word *comme*—bringing with it, as we have seen, a code struggle, a conflict of codes—conveys a nonunified, heterogeneous plurality. In pushing *ad absurdum* the possibility of comparison, the prose poem transforms the word *like* from a necessary link in the world's order to a mere linguistic reflex, conventional and arbitrary. This ironic proliferation of likenesses does not render comparison impossible, but it does put in question the validity of taking comparison as a sign of the ultimate unity of the world.

In the same way, the lady to whom "all" is compared has become such a miscellaneous collection of objects ("treasures," "furniture," "luxury," "perfumes," "rivers," "canals") that she is finally nothing but that to which *anything* can be compared: this "allegorical flower" is no longer the point of primal convergence, of metaphorical fusion, where metaphor and metonymy, signified and signifier, harmoniously unite, but the very locus of substitution and of dissemination, a mere linguistic constant in an infinitely extensible equation.

Just as this allegorical flower has been rhetorically emptied of any reliable identity through the mechanical proliferation of its likenesses, so too the lyrical "soul"—central to the verse poem's inner voyage ("tout y parlerait/A l'âme en secret/Sa douce langue natale")—here undergoes a parallel transformation. In affirming that "tu les conduis [mes pensées] doucement vers la mer qui est l'Infini, *tout en réfléchissant les profondeurs du ciel dans la limpidité de ta belle âme*" ("you lead my thoughts gently toward the sea which is the Infinite, while *reflecting the depths of the heavens in the limpidity of your beautiful soul*"), the poet has transformed the very "depths" of the soul into a mere specular illusion. The correspondence between heaven and earth has literally become a play of reflections, not between two depths or essences, but between two shining surfaces. The image of the shining surface is in fact ubiquitous in this poem:

> *Les miroirs*, les métaux, les étoffes, l'orfévrerie et la faience y jouent pour les yeux une symphonie muette . . . Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je, où *tout est riche, propre et luisant*, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine, comme une splendide orfévrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée!
>
> [The mirrors, the metals, the cloth, the gold, and the crockery play for the eyes a mute symphony . . .]

"Everything" in this imaginary land thus resembles a glistening mirror—including the "conscience" (consciousness, or conscience). Ironically, the "belle conscience" has here become, in a literal sense, what it is often called in a figurative sense: the seat of reflection.

But if everything has become a mirror, then the normal function of the mirror as a confirmation of identity has been uncannily subverted and infinitely *mise en abyme*. In the very terms in which he invites the lady to the land of her own correspondence and offers her an infinite reflection of her self, the poet in fact transforms that self into an empty hall of mirrors: if the lady can mirror herself in what resembles her ("ne pourrais-tu pas *te mirer* . . . dans ta propre correspondance?"), she is no longer seen *in* the mirror; she has become a mirror herself. And if the lady's "*propre* correspondance" (her "*own* correspondence") is simply a surface that is "*propre*" ("clean"), then the *propriétés* (properties) that are supposed to constitute identity are derived from mere *propreté* (cleanness). The two senses of the word *propre* have curiously become interchangeable.

But questions of property and propriety do not stop here. For if the conscience is as clean as a set of pots and pans, then it must itself be part of a general and daily housecleaning, in which dishwashing and brainwashing are somehow equivalent. This brings us to the strange presence of moral and economic considerations in the text of the prose *Invitation*.

Ethics, Economics, and Poetics

> Je veux parler de l'hérésie de *l'enseignement*, laquelle comprend comme corollaires inévitables l'hérésie de la *passion*, de la *vérité* et de la *morale*. . . . La poésie ne peut pas, sous peine de mort ou de défaillance, s'assimiler à la science ou à la morale; elle n'a pas la Vérité pour objet, elle n'a qu'Elle-même.
>
> Baudelaire, *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*

"Il est une contrée qui te ressemble, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille et *honnête*" ("There is a country which resembles you, where all is beautiful, rich, tranquil, and *honest*"). Appearing as it does in the midst of an echo of the verse poem's refrain, the word *honest* is doubly jolting: it breaks the repetition, and it introduces into the prose poem a

system of moral values totally foreign to the voluptuous amorality of the verse poem. Like cooking, honesty is the sign of the intrusion of a different code; it belongs to the literature of bourgeois morality against which Baudelaire often vituperated, and which seems to assert, as Baudelaire puts it, that "any honest man who knows how to please his wife is a sublime poet."[14] About Emile Augier's play *Gabrielle,* which received a prize for its morality, Baudelaire sneers:

> Listen to Gabrielle, virtuous Gabrielle, calculating with her virtuous husband how many years of virtuous avarice—with interest—it will take them to reach an income of ten or twenty thousand pounds. Five years, ten years . . . then, says this honest couple:
>
> WE CAN LIVE LIKE A WEALTHY PLAYBOY!
>
> . . . M. Augier . . . has spoken the language of shopkeepers . . . mistaking it for the language of virtue.[15]

But curiously enough, the language of commerce and avarice is also the language of the prose *Invitation:*

> Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je, où tout est *riche,* propre et luisant, comme une *belle conscience,* comme une magnifique *batterie de cuisine,* comme une splendide *orfèvrerie,* comme une *bijouterie* bariolée! Les *trésors* du monde y affluent, comme dans la maison d'un homme *laborieux* et qui a *bien mérité* du monde entier.
>
> . . . Ces énormes navires . . . tout chargés de *richesses* . . . ce sont mes pensées . . . . Tu les conduis doucement vers la mer qui est l'Infini . . . et quand, fatigués par la houle et *gorgés des produits de l'Orient,* ils rentrent au port natal, ce sont encore mes pensées *enrichies* qui reviennent de l'Infini vers toi.
>
> [A veritable land of Cockaigne, I tell you, where all is *rich,* clean, and shiny, like a *clear conscience,* like a magnificent *set of cookware,* like the splendid *wares of a goldsmith,* like a gaudy *set of jewelry!* The *treasures* of the earth abound there, as in the house of a *laborious* man to whom the whole world is *indebted* . . . . These enormous ships . . . loaded with *riches* . . . are my thoughts. . . . You lead them gently toward the sea which is the Infinite . . . and when, fatigued by the swell and *stuffed with products from the Orient,* they come back to their native port, they are still my thoughts, grown *richer,* which come back from the Infinite to you.]

This trip to the Orient seems more like a business affair than an affair of the heart. What is sought in this voyage is not love, but "riches." Honesty exists only to protect property; everything becomes a commodity, including the "clear conscience," as useful to the "laborious man" as his pots and pans. The land of Cockaigne is no longer a land of erotic fantasy, but an exploitable source of riches, a colony.

This unexpected appearance of "shopkeeper language" in a text of poetic imagination thus forces us to examine three fundamental notions that underlie the bourgeois system with which the prose poem allies

itself: the notion of value, the notion of work, and the notion of economy.

In the verse poem, the word *luxury* seemed to refer to some vague poetic quality called "Oriental splendor," having nothing to do with questions of production or exchange. But the source of the "treasures," which "abound" in the prosaic land of Cockaigne, is explicitly located in the working man's labor: "les trésors du monde y affluent, *comme dans la maison d'un homme laborieux* et qui a bien *mérité* du monde entier." If the imaginary country's value ("richesse," "luxe," "trésors," etc.) here results from a correspondence ("mérite") between work and wages, then the aesthetic notion of correspondences takes on an *economic* meaning.

This similarity between poetics and economics reaches a climax at the end of the prose poem, where the ships ("my thoughts") go out "loaded with riches" and come back "stuffed with Oriental goods." What the sonnet *Correspondances* calls the "transports of spirit and sense" are here literalized, making the metaphorical voyage (etymologically, *metaphor* literally means "transport") into a business trip. The prose poem thus reveals that "poeticity" has its own economy, that the equating of signifier with signified, of the lady with the land, functions in the same way as the equating of wage with labor, or of product with price.

It is, however, precisely in *opposition* to the economy of exchange that the prose poem situates its ultimate object of desire:

> Qu'ils cherchent, qu'ils cherchent encore, qu'ils reculent sans cesse les limites de leur bonheur, ces alchimistes de l'horticulture! Qu'ils proposent des prix de soixante et de cent mille florins pour qui résoudra leurs ambitieux problèmes! Moi, j'ai trouvé ma *tulipe noire* et mon *dahlia bleu!* (Emphasis in original)
>
> [Let them search, let them go on searching, let them push back forever the limits of their happiness, these alchemists of horticulture! Let them offer to pay sixty or a hundred thousand florins to anyone who can solve their ambitious problems! As for me, I have found my *black tulip* and my *blue dahlia!*]

It is this priceless, "incomparable" flower that, representing the highest poetic value, seems to locate the poetic universe somewhere beyond and above the economic sphere. This aesthetic transcendence of the structure of economic exchange is indeed a commonplace of traditional poetics:

> For a fine art must be free art in a double sense: i.e., not alone in a sense opposed to contract work, as not being a work the magnitude of which may be estimated, exacted, or paid for according to a definite standard, but free also in the sense that, while the mind, no doubt, occupies itself, still it does so

> without ulterior regard to any other end, and yet with a feeling of satisfaction and stimulation (independent of reward).[16]
>
> Whereas a unique content is required of prose, in poetry it is the unique form which is dominant and lasting. It is the sound, the rhythm, the physical relations among words . . . which predominates, at the expense of their capacity to be consumed as a definite, indisputable meaning.[17]

The economy of the work of art is thus organized around a signifying surplus that transcends the mere exchange between signifiers and signifieds, between tenors and vehicles. This excess, which engenders poetic value, constitutes, with respect to the system of exchange of equivalents, both its other and its *raison d'être*. For the exchange system—which has by no means disappeared, since it serves as a negative point of comparison for the production of poetic value—no longer exists in the service of the *comparable* (the "definite, indisputable meaning"), but, paradoxically, now functions in the service of the *incomparable*, the flower of poetry "Itself". "Poetry," writes Baudelaire, "cannot, under pain of death or decay, be assimilated with science or morality; it does not have truth as its object, it has only Itself."[18] This same idea perpetuates itself today in Jakobson's well-known definition of the poetic function: "The set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language."[19]

How can we understand this paradoxical relation between a system of metaphorical equivalence and the engendering of its own transcendence? Curiously, Marx describes in these same terms the relation between a system of direct exchange and the emergence of capitalism. Let us compare a number of parallel extracts from poetic and economic texts:

Marx: A particular kind of commodity acquires the character of *universal equivalent*, because all other commodities make it the material in which they uniformly express their value.[20]

Baudelaire: . . . tout vous ressemble, mon cher ange, . . . Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, *c'est toi.*

Marx: The commodity that figures as universal equivalent is . . . *excluded* from the relative value form. (P. 68) This equivalent *has no relative form of value in common* with other commodities. (P. 69)

Baudelaire: Fleur *incomparable* . . .

Marx: The simple circulation of commodities—selling in order to buy—is a means of carrying out a purpose unconnected with circulation, namely, the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants. The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, *an end in itself.* (P. 151)

Baudelaire: La poésie . . . n'a pas la Vérité pour objet, elle n'a qu'*Elle-même.*

Marx: The circulation of capital has therefore no *limits.* (P. 152)

Baudelaire: Ces énormes navires . . . tout chargés de *richesses* . . . ce sont mes pensées . . . . Tu les conduis doucement vers la mer qui est *l'Infini.*

Marx: The exact form of this process is therefore M-C-M′ [money-commodity-money+], where M′ = M+ Δ M = the original sum advanced, plus an increment. This increment or excess over the original value I call *"surplus-value."* The value originally advanced, therefore, not only remains intact while in circulation, but adds to itself a surplus-value or expands itself. It is this movement that converts it into capital. (P. 150, emphasis in original).

Baudelaire: . . . là-bas, où les heures *plus* lentes contiennent *plus* de pensées, où les horloges sonnent le bonheur avec une *plus* profonde et *plus* significative solennité. . . . ce sont mes pensées *enrichies* qui reviennent.

[There where the slower hours contain more thoughts, where the clocks toll

happiness with a more profound and more significant solemnity.]

The message spelled out by this collage of quotations is certainly not simple, but it incontestably suggests a resemblance between Poetry and Capital, through their common way of transcending a system of equivalences *in the very process of perpetuating it.* The circulation of language as poetry is strikingly similar to the circulation of money as capital, and the "poetic" could indeed be defined as *the surplus-value of language.*

In combining metaphors of commerce with a panegyric to the priceless, the prose poem thus succeeds both in thematizing the traditional opposition between the poetic and the economic and in subverting that very opposition by inscribing a capitalistic model behind the structure of poeticity. But if in the very act of proclaiming its opposition to and transcendence of the economy of exchange—which is taken as "economy" per se—poetry parallels the logic of capital, then poetry's blindness to its own resemblance with economic structures is hardly accidental. On the contrary, it would seem that this type of misapprehension and denial of its relation to other codes might be constitutive of poetry as such. In fact, it seems that the function of the prose poem is precisely to reveal what poetry is blind to about itself, not by in turn opposing the poetic as such, but by making its functioning more explicit.

The Sweet Native Language

> Telle est la puissance imaginaire des horticulteurs que, tout en regardant leur *spéculation* comme manquée à l'avance, ils ne pensèrent plus . . . qu'à cette grande tulipe noire réputée chimérique comme le cygne noir d'Horace et comme le merle blanc de la tradition française.
>
> —Alexandre Dumas père, *La Tulipe noire*

> Vous n'êtes rien, frêles beautés,
> Au *prix* des rêves enchantés
> Qui tourbillonnent dans sa tête.
> Nulle part il ne voit complète
> L'oeuvre de Dieu,
> Il rêve le dahlia bleu.
>
> —Pierre Dupont, *Le Dahlia bleu*

In the economy of the prose *Invitation,* the "you" with which all is equated, the "flower" at once incomparable and infinitely comparable, thus serves as the universal equivalent, and hence represents poetry "Itself." It is doubtless not by chance that poetry should here be represented by a flower: the poetic entity to which this prose poem

most directly refers is precisely a *Fleur du Mal.* Perhaps the true addressee of this poem is not a lady but a lyric: *L'Invitation au voyage* in verse. It is thus between two *texts* that the true dialogue of the prose poem situates itself.

But the textuality of this "allegorical flower" is not confined to its reference to a *Fleur du Mal.* For far from consisting simply of new or warmed-over Baudelairian rhetoric, this incomparable flower is also designated by the names of two other well-known literary works—Alexandre Dumas's *Black Tulip* and Pierre Dupont's *Blue Dahlia*—both of which had become, in Baudelaire's day, common clichés for an unattainable ideal. We thus find ourselves confronted with a paradox: this exceptional, incomparable flower ("qu'ils cherchent . . . j'ai trouvé"), this uniquely personal possession ("*Moi,* j'ai trouvé *ma* tulipe noire et *mon* dahlia bleu"), turns out to be, in truth, an impersonal linguistic commonplace, a perfectly ordinary find. What could be the function of this use of devalued language to express the highest poetic value? What is the relation between the exceptional and the common, the priceless and the devalued? In making of the incomparable a cliché, is Baudelaire not reversing his own system of poetic values? The use of these two commonplaces in a context that seems to call rather for some strikingly novel expression indeed runs counter to the cult of originality which has always underlain romantic poetry. Even as fine a critic as Georges Blin finds himself disconcerted by this flagrant descent to banality:

> There is an extraordinary gap between the banality of the contemporary references (to a popular novel and a poem) and, on the other hand, the lyricism, in blue and black, that for us, a century later, constitutes their mystery. What was the author's intention?[21]

But what the prose poem puts in question here is the very postulate of the unity of the subject presupposed by this notion of "author's intention." Italicized in the text, the *black tulip* and the *blue dahlia* designate not the apotheosis of the quest, but the unsettling of the authority of the quester. The typographical change is a change of voice, or rather an ungovernable pluralization of the "sources" of language. What, indeed, is a cliché, but an authorless quotation? The question is thus not, as Blin seems to phrase it, Who is speaking here, the *je* or the *on?* but rather, Can the act of speaking have *one* subject? Can the boundary line between *je* and *on* ever really be determined?

The "sweet native language" postulated by the verse poem is thus no longer the unique, primal language of a unique individual, but rather the authorless language of commonplaces and borrowed discourse,

through which man is born into language not as a speaking subject, but as a *spoken* subject.

In making explicit the process of stereotypization which underlies all language as both the result and the source of poetic discourse, Baudelaire's prose poem indeed predicts, in the same breath, its own valorization and its own devaluation:

> Un musicien a écrit l'*Invitation à la valse;* quel est celui qui composera l'*Invitation au voyage,* qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la soeur d'élection? (Emphasis in original)
>
> [A musician has written the *Invitation to the Waltz;* who will be the one to compose an *Invitation to the Voyage* that one can offer to the beloved woman, to the chosen sister?]

In citing its own title as a future offering to the beloved, the text here already refers to itself as a potential cliché, as a currency of seduction coined to participate in a stereotyped ritual of exchange. Through its own self-quotation, the *Invitation au voyage* reads itself, like the land of Cockaigne and the black tulip, as the linguistic property of *on*, not yet written but already part of historical repetition.

From the commonplace flower (black tulip, blue dahlia) to the commonplace land (the land of Cockaigne), from the "you" of the home port to the "you" of the exotic shore, the entire poetic voyage thus takes place within the familiar bounds of clichés: rhetorical displacement in effect never leaves the common place. This familiar commonplace (indeed, universally equivalent with *all*) is, however, at the same time strangely foreign; its appeal is that of an unfamiliar, "unknown land." But the "*nostalgia* for an *unknown* land" ("cette *nostalgie* du pays qu'on *ignore*") which motivates the voyage is not, paradoxically, an attraction to the absolutely new, but the fascination of an invitation to *return,* of a call to "come back":

> . . . de toutes choses, de tous les coins, des fissures des tiroirs et des plis des étoffes s'échappe un parfum singulier, un *revenez-y* de Sumatra, qui est comme l'âme de l'appartement.
>
> Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je . . . (Emphasis in original)
>
> [. . . from all things, from all corners, from the cracks in the drawers and from the folds in the fabrics springs a singular perfume, a *come back* from Sumatra, which is like the soul of the apartment.
>
> A veritable land of Cockaigne, I tell you . . .]

The invitation to return, whose source, as Baudelaire's italics indicate ("*revenez-y*"), is in another text—an Other text—marks the call of the familiar as unfamiliar. The voyage to the land "which one could

call the Orient of the Occident" ("qu'on pourrait appeler l'Orient de l'Occident") here becomes not the search for some faraway utopia, but the quest for what (dis)orients all return and all repetition, a quest, in other words, for what subverts the very *sense*—or direction—of the voyage. If u-topia (no-place) and the common-place are ultimately indistinguishable (as Dumas indeed suggests by comparing his utopian black tulip to the "white crow of the French tradition" and to the "black swan of Horace"), it can only be because the truly unreachable utopian place, the place which is par excellence unknowable, is not some faraway mysterious land, but the very place where *one is.*

Correction and Extension

> Ce qui était poème redevient prose, et les éléments inédits qui auraient dû renouveler le sujet, paraissent surajoutés intellectuellement.
>
> —Henri Brugmans, "*L'Invitation au voyage* de Baudelaire"

In contrast to the lyrical *Invitation,* which seeks to return to a "native" language and a state of primal, natural integrity anterior to social, temporal, and rhetorical differentiation, the prose poem, which reevaluates the devalued language of clichés, explicitly privileges artistic belatedness over natural firstness:

> Pays singular, supérieur aux autres, *comme l'Art l'est à la Nature,* où celle-ci est *réformée* par le rêve, où elle est *corrigée, embellie, refondue.*
>
> [A singular land, superior to the others, *as Art is superior to Nature,* where Nature is *revised* by dream, where it is *corrected, embellished, reworked.*]

It is tempting to consider this valorization of correction and revision as a description of the prose poem's own status with respect to the verse poem, which can easily be seen as the "Nature" that must be reformed, the "raw material" or pre-text to which the prose poem's "Art" is applied. Indeed, the importance of the process of revision and transformation is constantly thematized in the prose poem through the ubiquitous use of verbs of transformation: *illustrer, bâtir, décorer, allonger, colorer, tamiser, ouvrager, diviser, réformer, corriger, embellir, refondre, chercher, reculer, éloigner, peindre,* and even *cuisiner.*

But how does the work of transformation manifest itself concretely in the textual relations between the two *Invitations?*

Compared with the spare verticality of the verse poem, the well-filled paragraphs of the prose poem have always led readers to consider the prose as an expanded version of the "same poetic idea,"[22] translated into a freer, more verbose style. According to J. B. Ratermanis,

the prose poem is constructed "by the successive development of elements whose main points (and not more than that!) are provided by the verse poem; some of the associations they contain are simply made more explicit."[23] For Suzanne Bernard, "all of what was merely suggested or implicit in the verse poem is now taken up again, detailed and circumstantiated in the prose."[24] Whether these additions are then considered appropriate or foreign to the original idea, whether their presence is "jarring"[25] or raises the text's "seduction" to its "peak,"[26] the governing principle behind the prose poem's elaboration remains the same: it consists of repeating, developing, expanding, and making explicit the contents of the verse poem.

This conception of the prose poem as the amplification of a repeated poetic kernel seems to be confirmed by the structure of the prose *Invitation*; through the repeated return of certain opening lines ("Il est un pays . . . un pays de Cocagne . . . un vrai pays de Cocagne. . . . C'est là qu'il faut . . . Oui, c'est là qu'il faut . . ."etc.), the text takes shape by repeating and expanding upon its own starting points. Whereas verse is constructed out of the repetition of ends (rhymes), prose here develops by repeating its beginnings. The absence of any a priori limits to the extensibility of prose means that its measure can be taken only after the fact; in order to have reached an end, prose is only capable of marking a new beginning. It is perhaps this rhythm of returns and prolongations that conveys the impression that the prose poem is an amplified repetition of the verse poem, its "starting point." This impression is also supported by Baudelaire's description of his *Petits poèmes en prose* as still being "*Fleurs du Mal,* but with *much more* freedom, more detail, and more raillery."[27]

The common formula for the prose poem thus seems to read as follows: "It is still the same thing (as the verse), but with much more: prose = verse + *X*." However, should this formula be taken literally? Is the process of correction really mere addition, simple explicitation, pure secondary elaboration of the "same poetic idea"? What, in other words, is the status of what the prose poem is supposed to be repeating?

In order to investigate this question, let us compare the verse and prose versions of the "refrain":

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté

Un vrai pays de Cocagne, où tout est
beau, riche, tranquille, honnête; où
le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans
l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et
douce à respirer; d'où le désordre,
la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus;

où le bonheur est marié au silence;
où la cuisine elle-même est poétique,
grasse et excitante à la fois, où
tout vous ressemble, mon cher ange.

[There, all is but order and beauty,/
Luxury, calm, and sensual pleasure.]

[A veritable land of Cockaigne, where
all is beautiful, rich, tranquil, honest;
where luxury is pleased to mirror itself
in order; where life is rich and sweet to
breathe; where disorder, turmoil, and
the unforeseen are excluded; where
happiness is married to silence; where
the cooking itself is poetic, rich and
stimulating at once, where all resembles
you, my dear angel.]

We have already pointed out the dissonant effect produced by the sudden appearance of the word *honest* in the prose version. However, this inclusion of a bourgeois value in a poetic context is not a simple addition of a new value to the existing ones, but rather, a transformation of the very notion of value. The very dissonance between the positive values of esthetics and those of ethics makes explicit the negativity—the purely differential nature—of linguistic values. For while *tranquil* alone is more or less synonymous with the verse refrain's *calm,* this correspondence is suddenly broken by the contamination of the word *honest. Tranquillity* becomes retrospectively different from itself, evoking not the quiet harmony of an exotic landscape, but the safety of a proprietor secure in the civil order that guarantees both his freedom and his property. In the same way, while *order* and *luxury* had in the verse poem been separated by *beauty,* which gave them an esthetic coloring, their relation in the prose poem no longer has anything esthetic about it: luxury mirrors itself in the *law-and-order*[28] of institutionalized forces designed to protect and perpetuate it. And the word *sweet,* which in the verse poem conveyed a delicate tenderness ("Songe à la *douceur*"), here becomes a mere condiment, making life into a tasty consumer product ("la vie est grasse et *douce* à respirer"). What is added to the lyric vocabulary is not simply foreign to it; in the transformation produced by these additions, it is the repeated elements which become somehow foreign to themselves. In this struggle between codes, it thus becomes impossible to determine where one code ends and another begins. And if, as the critics would have it, the prose poem repeats the "same theme" as the verse poem, it is in order to question both the idea of *same* and the idea of *theme.*

This differential work of supplementation, in which the "same" becomes the "other," is explicitly described in the poem:

> Pays singulier, noyé dans les brumes de notre Nord, et qu'on pourrait appeler l'Orient de l'Occident, la Chine de l'Europe, tant la chaude et capricieuse fantaisie s'y est donné carrière, tant elle l'a patiemment et opiniâtrement illustré de ses savantes et délicates végétations.
>
> [A singular land, drowned in the mists of our North, and which could be called the Orient of the Occident, the China of Europe, so freely has warm, capricious fantasy acted on it, patiently and stubbornly illustrating it with knowing and delicate vegetations.]

This rhetorical transformation of the Occident into the Orient by the illustration of fantasy can easily be seen as the very image of the prose poem's "explicitation" of its versified original. Indeed, is not this singular land, which could be called "the Other of the Same," precisely what poetry has become? For it is not prose that is here opposed to poetry, but poetry that, reworked by prose, has separated from itself—not by becoming what it is not, but by making manifest its status as a pure linguistic value, constituted by its own difference from itself.

Correction and Castration

> Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons . . .
>
> —Baudelaire, *Dédicace aux Petits poèmes en prose*

Our examination of the validity of the formula ("prose = verse + *X*") that underlies the traditional analysis of this text has brought us to the point at which it is no longer possible to distinguish the "same" ("verse") from the "other"("*X*"). But even the most literal-minded attempt to divide the text of the prose poem into what is repeated and what is added soon reveals not only that this distinction is inoperative, but that the text of the verse poem has to a large extent materially disappeared. Let us compare, for example, the following extracts:

D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble! Aimer à loisir Aimer et mourir	C'est là qu'il faut aller vivre, c'est là qu'il faut aller mourir.
[To go there to live together!/To love at leisure,/To love and die]	[It is there that one must go to live, it is there that one must go to die.]

In the verse poem, the words *live* and *die* are mediated by the repetition of the word *love,* which gives them an erotic connotation. But in the prose, *live* and *die* are juxtaposed without any *love:* the voyage could just as well be solitary as amorous. This elimination of the word *love* from what is supposed to be a love poem may seem surprising. But if we add up everything the prose poem does *not* repeat, we find that

"charmes," "tes yeux," "larmes," "beauté," "volupté," "chambre," "assouvir," and "désir" have been eliminated along with "aimer" and "ensemble." What has disappeared in the passage from verse to prose is the very process of seduction.

The text of the verse poem has thus not simply been mounted in prose like a jewel in a new setting. Before being "repeated," the verse poem has had its main erotic moments amputated. This process of amputation is at work on a formal level as well: the transformation of verse into prose involves a similar elimination of the moments of intensity (rhythm, rhyme) which give poetry its seductive charm. It is not by chance that what the prose poem cuts out of the lyric is its eroticism. For this textual amputation, this suppression of the lyric's semantic and formal potency, corresponds quite literally to the moment of castration.

That castration is somehow constitutive of the prose poem is repeatedly suggested throughout the various texts of Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose,* where metaphors of violent blows and cuts indeed proliferate.[29] In *Perte d'Auréole* (*Loss of Halo*), in which Baudelaire specifically allegorizes the passage from poetry to prose, the amputation of the poet's halo—the "insignia" of his poetic power—necessarily precedes his entry into the "mauvais lieu" of mere prose. And the breaking up of versification itself is perhaps dramatized in the *Mauvais Vitrier:* the poet's gesture of smashing the panes of glass can be read as a play on the pun "briser les verres" ("smashing glass") = "briser les vers" ("smashing verse"). The passage from poetry to prose seems to involve an amputation of everything which, in poetry, is erected as unity, totality, immortality, and potency.

Exclusion/Inclusion: Poetry and Its Double

> Aimer une femme, passe encore, mais une statue, quelle sottise!
>
> —Flaubert, *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*

But what is the true nature of this potent poetic unity and totality, which is denatured and mutilated by the prose? What does the integrity of the lyric code—the "before" of the moment of castration—in fact comprise? The lyric seems to answer:

> Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
> Luxe, calme et volupté.

It is this harmonious "all," this image of indivisible totality, which becomes, in the prose,

> Un vrai pays de Cocagne, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille, honnête; où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et douce à respirer; d'où le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus; où le bonheur est marié au silence . . .

"All is but order and beauty;" "Where all is beautiful, rich, tranquil, honest": the evocation, in both cases, begins with the word *all.* And since it is precisely the notion of totality which is in question, since it is toward totality that poetry aspires—the subject's unity or the incestuous union in the perfect metaphorical return to the origin—an analysis of the function of the word *all* in the two texts may indeed turn out to be revealing.

We have already noted that, in the verse poem, this totality results not from infinite inclusiveness but rather from restrictive exclusiveness ("Tout *n'est que* . . ."). The list of abstractions which compose this totality ("ordre," "beauté," "luxe," "calme," "volupté") are superimposed upon each other like metaphorical mirrors of one unique poetic essence ("tout"). In the prose poem, on the other hand, the verb *être* is no longer limited a priori by a restrictive construction ("ne . . . que"), and, in the place of the paradigmatic series of equivalent abstractions, we find a syntagmatic list of descriptive adjectives and arbitrarily juxtaposed details subordinated to the adverb "où" ("where"). Thus consisting of an extensible collection of miscellaneous properties and fragmentary descriptions, the prosaic *all* is metonymic rather than metaphoric, inclusive rather than exclusive, circumstantial rather than essential. The passage from essence to attribute is a passage from totality to partition; while the poetic *all* is as such indivisible, the prose poem's *all* is divided into a series of attributes whose number can be indefinitely increased without being able to exhaust the meaning of *all,* the sum of which the enumeration indefinitely defers. In becoming, through its infinite extensibility, the conflictual locus of a struggle among heterogeneous and incompatible codes, the "tout est" of the prose does not thereby designate, however, another specific code that would as such be opposed to the poetic one ("realism," "prose," "ordinary language"); rather, the prose "tout est" allegorically represents the code of the non-totality of all codes. "All is," in other words, names not a totality but a *set,* a set of codes, that is, a set of sets. And just as modern set theory entails the fundamental paradox that "the set of all the sets in a universe is not a set," the "tout est" of the prose poem demonstrates that the code of all the codes in a semiological universe cannot, in turn, become a code.

Among the diverse attributes of the land of Cockaigne, the following is particularly significant: "le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu

sont exclus" ("disorder, turmoil, and the unforeseen *are excluded*"). Could this exclusion of disorder not be read as an explicitation of the implicit exclusivity in the verse poem's "tout n'est qu'ordre"? If so, then the prosaic transformation of the poetic abstractions ("order," "beauty," "luxury," "calm," "pleasure") into a series of descriptive properties—properties that introduce into the prose poem economic and social codes foreign to the poetic code—is not simply a secondary elaboration: it is an explicitation of what the abstractions were originally abstracted from, of that from which the verse poem's refrain refrained. The poetic code is thus not simply a set of elements considered "poetic" but also a process of exclusion and of negation, of active repression of whatever belongs to other codes. If, then, as Georges Blin puts it, Baudelaire's prose poems literally contain "*what is excluded* from *Les Fleurs du Mal,*"[30] their function is to make explicit not only *what* poetry excludes, but its very constitutive *act of excluding.*

That the act of excluding and cutting might in fact be constitutive of poetry as such is suggested not only by the "ne . . . que" syntax of the lyric *Invitation* but also by the insistence of exclusive formulations in Baudelaire's general remarks about poetry:

> La Poésie . . . *n'*a *pas* d'autre but *qu'*Elle-même . . . elle *n'*a *pas* la Vérité pour objet, elle *n'*a *qu'*Elle-même.
>
> [Poetry . . . has *no* end *other than* Itself . . . it does *not* have Truth as its object, it has *only* Itself.]

In viewing itself as the unmediated voice of the soul, as the original expression of subjectivity, poetry is blind both to its own status as a code, and to its relation to other codes, that is, to its own necessary mutilation produced by the very process of exclusion on which its sense of wholeness and uniqueness in fact depends. The forces of order which guard the poetic frontier are designed not only to repress, but to erase—wipe clean—the very traces of repression, the very traces of the cleaning operation. Only then can poetry—"propre et luisante comme une belle conscience"—seem to be "pure," that is, cut off from the process of its own production, from any history or context that is not Itself; cut off by what Jacques Derrida has called "a pure cut without negativity, a *without* without negativity and without meaning."[31]

This obliteration and forgetting of the process of production and the consequent overestimation of the object produced, this erection of a fixed, statufied form as proof against mutilation and incompleteness, is characteristic of what both Marx and Freud have called fetishism. Both as a monument set up against the horror of castration and as a seemingly "mystical"[32] product divorced from the work of its production,

poetry—the potency and seemingly inexhaustible wealth of language—indeed reifies itself into a sort of linguistic fetish. Fixed in its "pure," immortal form, erected against the "movement that displaces lines" ("le mouvement qui déplace les lignes"),[33] poetry, like Beauty in Baudelaire's well-known sonnet of that name, is nothing other than a "dream of stone" ("rêve de pierre"), the very image of death, castration, and repression which it is designed to block out and to occult.

If the prose poem thus consists of a textual act of subversion of the fetish, of the amputation of the lyric text, the verse poem in its turn, through its fundamental gesture of exclusion ("tout *n'est que* . . ."), was already constituted by a process of mutilation and occultation of another text, a heterogeneous cultural text strained by conflicts among codes—a text, indeed, that very much resembles the *Invitation au voyage* in prose.

Between the prose poem and the verse poem, in other words, the work of mutilation and correction operates indefinitely *in both directions.* Each of the two texts is the pre-text of the other; neither can claim priority over the other: the "raw material" is always already a mutilated text. This reciprocal correction is, however, not symmetrical: while it is the diverse heterogeneity of cultural codes which is excluded from the verse, the infinite inclusiveness of the prose extends as far as to include the very gesture of exclusion. But to include the exclusion of inclusiveness is to erase or put in question the very boundary between the inside and the outside, the very limits of poetic space. In doing so, the prose poem ultimately questions its own exteriority to poetry ("prose") as well as its interiority to it ("poem"). Internally external to the poetry it both repeats and estranges from itself, the prose poem becomes the place where castration and fetishization, valorization and devaluation, repression and subversion, simultaneously oppose each other and undermine their very opposition. Neither poetry's "other" nor its "same," the prose poem thus constitutes nothing less than poetry's *double:* its double space as the space of its own division, as its "other stage" where what has been repressed by poetry interminably returns in the uncanny figures of its strange familiarity, where poetry, the linguistic fetish, the "dream of stone"—whether a *Commendatore*'s statue or an implacable Venus with marble eyes[34]—suddenly begins to speak from out of the Other, from out of what is constituted by its very inability to determine its own limits.

Appendix

L'Invitation au voyage (Verse)

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Des meubles luisants,
Polis par les ans,
Décoreraient notre chambre;
Les plus rares fleurs
Mêlant leurs odeurs
Aux vagues senteurs de l'ambre,
Les riches plafonds,
Les miroirs profonds,
La splendeur orientale,
Tout y parlerait
A l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Dont l'humeur est vagabonde;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
—Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,

D'hyacinthe et d'or;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

L'Invitation au voyage (Prose)

Il est un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne, dit-on, que je rêve de visiter avec une vieille amie. Pays singulier, noyé dans les brumes de notre Nord, et qu'on pourrait appeler l'Orient de l'Occident, la Chine de l'Europe, tant la chaude et capricieuse fantaisie s'y est donné carrière, tant elle l'a patiemment et opiniâtrement illustré de ses savantes et délicates végétations.

Un vrai pays de Cocagne, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille, honnête; où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et douce à respirer; d'où le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus; où le bonheur est marié au silence; où la cuisine elle-même est poétique, grasse et excitante à la fois; où tout vous ressemble, mon cher ange.

Tu connais cette maladie fiévreuse qui s'empare de nous dans les froides misères, cette nostalgie du pays qu'on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité? Il est une contrée qui te ressemble, où tout est beau, riche, tranquille et honnête, où la fantaisie a bâti et décoré une Chine occidentale, où la vie est douce à respirer, où le bonheur est marié au silence. C'est là qu'il faut aller vivre, c'est là qu'il faut aller mourir!

Oui, c'est là qu'il faut aller respirer, rêver et allonger les heures par l'infini des sensations. Un musicien a écrit l'*Invitation à la valse;* quel est celui qui composera l'*Invitation au voyage,* qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la soeur d'élection?

Oui, c'est dans cette atmosphère qu'il ferait bon vivre,—là-bas, où les heures plus lentes contiennent plus de pensées, où les horloges sonnent le bonheur avec une plus profonde et plus significative solennité.

Sur des panneaux luisants, ou sur des cuirs dorés et d'une richesse sombre, vivent discrètement des peintures béates, calmes et profondes, comme les âmes des artistes qui les créèrent. Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes ou par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en nombreux compartiments. Les meubles sont vastes, curieux, bizarres, armés de serrures et de secrets comme des âmes raffinées. Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoffes, l'orfévrerie et la faience y jouent pour

les yeux une symphonie muette et mystérieuse; et de toutes choses, de tous les coins, des fissures des tiroirs et des plis des étoffes s'échappe un parfum singulier, un *revenez-y* de Sumatra, qui est comme l'âme de l'appartement.

Un vrai pays de Cocagne, te dis-je, où tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine, comme une splendide orfévrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée! Les trésors du monde y affluent, comme dans la maison d'un homme laborieux et qui a bien mérité du monde entier. Pays singulier, supérieur aux autres, comme l'Art l'est à la Nature, où celle-ci est réformée par le rêve, où elle est corrigée, embellie, refondue.

Qu'ils cherchent, qu'ils cherchent encore, qu'ils reculent sans cesse les limites de leur bonheur, ces alchimistes de l'horticulture! Qu'ils proposent des prix de soixante et de cent mille florins pour qui résoudra leurs ambitieux problèmes! Moi, j'ai trouvé ma *tulipe noire* et mon *dahlia bleu!*

Fleur incomparable, tulipe retrouvée, allégorique dahlia, c'est là, n'est-ce pas, dans ce beau pays si calme et si rêveur, qu'il faudrait aller vivre et fleurir? Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre *correspondance?*

Des rêves! toujours des rêves! et plus l'âme est ambitieuse et délicate, plus les rêves l'éloignent du possible. Chaque homme porte en lui sa dose d'opium naturel, incessament sécrétée et renouvelée, et, de la naissance à la mort, combien comptons-nous d'heures remplies par la jouissance positive, par l'action réussie et décidée? Vivrons-nous jamais, passerons-nous jamais dans ce tableau qu'a peint mon esprit, ce tableau qui te ressemble?

Ces trésors, ces meubles, ce luxe, cet ordre, ces parfums, ces fleurs miraculeuses, c'est toi. C'est encore toi, ces grands fleuves et ces canaux tranquilles. Ces énormes navires qu'ils charrient, tout chargés de richesses, et d'où montent les chants monotones de la manoeuvre, ce sont mes pensées qui dorment ou qui roulent sur ton sein. Tu les conduis doucement vers la mer qui est l'Infini, tout en réfléchissant les profondeurs du ciel dans la limpidité de ta belle âme;—et quand, fatigués par la houle et gorgés des produits de l'Orient, ils rentrent au port natal, ce sont encore mes pensées enrichies qui reviennent de l'infini vers toi.