

A small collection of Baudelaire translations

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In reverse order of publication

8 The Albatross (Translation of “L’albatros”)

Often, for entertainment, the sailors
Took hold of albatrosses, immense sea birds,
That lazily followed the course of the ship
As it lazily slid through bitter swells.

Hardly had the men set the birds on deck
Than these kings of the sky, awkward, pitiful,
And ashamed, let their huge wings droop
And drag by their sides like white oars.

The winged traveler became listless and maladroit,
Its great beauty transformed to comic ugliness.
One sailor troubles his beak with a short-stemmed pipe,
Another, with limping, mocks the crippled bird.

The poet is like the prince of the clouds
Who shadows thunder and at the archer laughs.
Exiled on land amid a jeering crowd,
His giant wings prevent him from walking.

7 The Lover’s Death (Translation of “La mort des amants”)

We will come to rest with gentle scents
On beds soft and deep, like tombs
With ledges full of exotic flowers
That bloomed for us alone under a bright heaven.

Luxuriating in their dying heat
Our hearts will be two great torches
Whose twinned light gleams
In the twinned mirrors of our souls.

And on a magical night of violet and roses
We will catch one another's eyes—
A last long sigh freighted with adieux.

And later an angel, faithful and joyous
Will open the shutters and reawaken
Time-darkened reflections, the dead light.

6 The Cracked Bell (Translation of “La cloche fêlée)

It is bittersweet, winter nights,
To sit by a fire that flares and smokes
And listen to old memories slowly awake
With the ringing of distant church bells.

Happy is the full-throated bell
Which, though old, remains fit and alert
And faithfully sounds the call to prayer
Like an old soldier still there at his post.

Myself, my soul is cracked, and when oppressed
Would like to fill the cold night with song,
But often its voice falters and groans,

Like a man wounded and forgotten,
Who under a pile of bodies and blood
Dies motionless, though straining.

5 Key moments from “Don Juan aux enfers”

Breasts hanging out of their open robes
Women writhed under the black sky, . . .

Trembling with grief, the chaste and hungry Elvira
Close by her treacherous seducer
Seemed to implore a final smile
Soft and bright as his first promises . . .

But Don Juan was calm, looking at the wake,
Alone with his sword, not stooping to see.

4 Evening Song (Translation of “L’harmonie du soir”)

Now on the rustling branches
Each flower offers up its incense
And sounds and sweet smells twirl the air;
A melancholy waltz, a heady laziness!

Each flower offers up its incense;
The violin trembles like a tormented heart;
A melancholy waltz, a heady laziness!
The sky a lonely altar, sad and lovely.

The violin trembles like a tormented heart;
A tender heart that hates the vast, empty night!
The sky a lonely altar, sad and lovely;
The sun gone down in motionless blood.

A tender heart that hates the vast, empty night
Gathers every trace of the sunlit past!
The sun gone down in motionless blood
While your memory, like a golden bowl, shines on

3 Invitation to a Voyage (Translation of “L’invitation au voyage”)

My dear child, my friend,

Just think what a pleasure it would be to go and live there together! To make love when and as we wished, to love and die in a country like you! With its wet suns and jumbled skies, for me it offers the mysterious charms that shine through your deceitful tears. A land of nothing but order and beauty, luxury, sensuality and peace.

Furniture brightly polished by the years would decorate our love nest, and the rarest flowers would mingle their fragrance with hints of amber, with ornate ceilings, deep mirrors, the splendors of the Orient. Everything there would whisper secrets to the soul in its sweet mother tongue of order and beauty, luxury, sensuality and peace.

See on the canals the sleeping boats dreaming of departures. From the ends of the earth they have come to satisfy your every desire. The twilight comes again and again to clothe fields, canals and town in hyacinth and gold. And the world dozes off under the hot sun of order and beauty, luxury, sensuality and peace.

2 The Abyss (Translation of “Le Gouffre”)

(via [link from Montaigbakhtinian.com](http://linkfromMontaigbakhtinian.com))

Pascal had his abyss always at his side. You might say it’s abyss all the way down—our actions, wishes, dreams, language. And on my skin, too—the hairs standing on end time and again when I feel fear on the wind.

Above and below, everywhere—in the depths, on the shore—the frightening, alluring space of silence . . . God with his wise finger draws on the floor of my nights a multifaceted, endless nightmare.

I am afraid of sleep the way people are afraid of big holes full of obscure horrors and leading who knows where. I see nothing but infinity everywhere I look, and my mind, haunted by a fear of heights, envies the senselessness of the void. Alas, eternally stuck inside numbers and beings!

1 A few segments of “L'héautontimorouménos”, using two approaches

(a)

I am the wound and the knife
The slap and the cheek
The spokes of the wheel
Victim and executioner

Vampire of my own heart
One of the great forsaken
Condemned to the hilarity of hell
But no longer able to smile

(b)

I will strike you without anger
Like Moses against the stone!
Without hate, like a butcher.
I will make you moan

And water my dead fires
With a fountain of suffering.
My hope-inflated desires
Ploughing your salty crying

Like a boat heading out to sea . . .

The End.