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Jakobson, age twenty-three, summer 1920, Prague

Baudelaire's "Les Chats"

With Claude Lévi-Strauss

- 1 Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
- 2 Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
- 3 Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
- 4 Qui comme eux sont frileux et comme eux sédentaires.
- 5 Amis de la science et de la volupté,
- 6 Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres;
- 7 L'Érèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres,
- 8 S'ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté.
- 9 Ils prennent en songeant les nobles attitudes
- 10 Des grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes,
- 11 Qui semblent s'endormir dans un rêve sans fin;
- 12 Leurs reins féconds sont pleins d'étincelles magiques,
- 13 Et des parcelles d'or, ainsi qu'un sable fin,
- 14 Étoilent vaguement leurs prunelles mystiques.

Fervent lovers and austere scholars
 Love equally, in their ripe season,
 Powerful and gentle cats, the pride of the house,
 Who like them are sensitive to cold and like them
 sedentary.

Friends of learning and of voluptuousness,
 They seek silence and the horror of the shadows;
 Erebus would have taken them as his gloomy coursers,
 If they were able to incline their pride to servitude.
 They assume in dozing the majestic poses
 Of grand sphinxes reclining in the depths of solitudes
 Who seem to be asleep in a dream without end;
 Their fertile loins are full of magic sparks,
 And particles of gold, like fine grains of sand,
 Vaguely fleck their mystic pupils with stars.

If one can give credence to the feuilleton "Le Chat Trot" by Champfleury, where this sonnet of Baudelaire was first published (*Le Corsaire*, November 14, 1847), it must already have been written by March 1840, and—contrary to the claims of certain exegetes—the early text in *Le Corsaire* and that in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) correspond word for word.

In the organization of the rhymes, the poet follows the scheme: aBBa CddC eefgEg (upper-case letters being used to denote the lines ending in masculine rhymes and lower-case letters for the lines ending in feminine rhymes). This chain of rhymes is divided into three strophic units, namely, two quatrains and one sestet composed of two tercets, which form a certain whole since the disposition of the rhymes within this sestet is controlled in sonnets, as Grammont has shown, "by the same rules as in any strophe of six lines."¹

The rhyme scheme of the sonnet in question is the corollary of three dissimilative rules:

1. Two plain (couplet) rhymes cannot follow one another.
2. If two contiguous lines belong to different rhymes, one of them must be feminine and the other masculine.
3. At the end of contiguous stanzas feminine lines and masculine lines alternate: ⁴*sédentaires*—⁸*fierté*—¹⁴*mystiques*.

Following the classical pattern, the so-called feminine rhymes always end in a mute syllable and the masculine rhymes in a fully sounded syllable. The difference between the two classes of rhymes persists equally in the current pronunciation which suppresses the "mute *e*" of the final syllable, the last fully sounded vowel being followed by consonants in all the feminine rhymes of the sonnet (*austères*—*sédentaires*, *ténèbres*—*funèbres*, *attitudes*—*solitudes*, *magiques*—*mystiques*), whereas all its masculine rhymes end in a vowel (*saison*—*maison*, *volupté*—*fierté*, *fin*—*fin*). The relation between the classification of rhymes and the choice of grammatical categories emphasizes the importance of the role played by grammar as well as by rhyme in the structure of this sonnet.

All the lines end with nominal forms, either substantive (8) or adjectival (6). All the substantives are feminine. The final noun is plural in the eight lines with a feminine rhyme, which are all longer, either by a syllable in the traditional manner or by a postvocalic consonant in present-day pronunciation, whereas the shorter lines, those with a masculine rhyme, end in all six cases with a singular noun.

In the two quatrains, the masculine rhymes are constituted by sub-

stantives and the feminine rhymes by adjectives, with the exception of the key word *ténébreux*, which rhymes with *funébres*. We shall return later to the whole question of the relationship between these two particular lines. As far as the tercets are concerned, the three lines of the first tercet all end with substantives, and those of the second with adjectives. Thus the rhyme which links the two tercets—the only instance in this poem of a homonymous rhyme (11, *sans fin*—13, *sable fin*)—places a masculine adjective in opposition to a feminine substantive—and it is the only adjective, and the only example of the masculine gender, among the masculine rhymes in the sonnet.

The sonnet is made up of three complex sentences delimited by periods, that is, each of the two quatrains and the sestet. These three sentences display an arithmetical progression according to the number of independent clause and of the finite verbal forms: (1) one single finite (*aiment*); (2) two finites (*cherchent, eût pris*); (3) three finites (*prennent, sont, étoient*). On the other hand, the subordinate clause in each of the three sentences has but one finite: (1) *qui . . . sont*; (2) *s'ils pouvaient*; (3) *qui semblent*.

This ternary division of the sonnet implies an antinomy between both two-rhyme sentences and the final three-rhyme sentence. It is counterbalanced by a dichotomy which divides the work into two coupled stanzas, that is, into two pairs of quatrains and two pairs of tercets. This binary principle, supported in turn by the grammatical organization of the text, also implies an antinomy, this time between the two initial subdivisions or stanzas of four lines and the two last stanzas of three lines. It is on the tension between these two modes of arrangement and between their symmetrical and dissymmetrical constituents that the composition of the whole work is based.

There is a clear-cut syntactical parallel between the pair of quatrains on the one hand and the pair of tercets on the other. Both the first quatrain and the first tercet consist of two clauses, of which the second is relative, and introduced in both cases by the same pronoun, *qui*. This clause comprises the last line of its stanza and is dependent on a masculine plural substantive, which serves as accessory in the principal clause (3 *Les chats*, 10 *Des . . . sphinx*). The second quatrain (and equally the second tercet) contains two coordinate clauses, of which the last, complex in its turn, comprises the two final lines of the stanza (7–8 and 13–14) and includes a subordinate clause which is linked to the main clause by a conjunction. In the quatrain this clause is conditional

(8 *S'ils pouvaient*); that of the tercet is comparative (13 *ainsi qu'un*). The first is postpositive, whereas the second, incomplete, is an interpolated clause.

In the 1847 *Le Corsaire* text, the punctuation of the sonnet corresponds to this division. The first tercet ends with a period, as does the first quatrain. In the second tercet and in the second quatrain, the last two lines are preceded by a semicolon.

The semantic aspect of the grammatical subjects reinforces this parallelism between the two quatrains on the one hand and the two tercets on the other:

(I) Quatrains	(II) Tercets
(1) First	(1) First
(2) Second	(2) Second

The subjects of the first quatrain and of the first tercet designate only animate beings, whereas one of the two subjects of the second quatrain and all the grammatical subjects of the second tercet are inanimate substantives: 7 *L'Érèbe*, 12 *Leurs reins*, 13 *des parcelles*, 13 *un sable*. In addition to these so-called horizontal correspondences, there is a correspondence that could be called vertical, one which opposes the totality of the two quatrains to the totality of the two tercets. While all the direct objects in the two tercets are inanimate substantives (9 *les nobles attitudes*, 14 *leurs prunelles*), the sole direct object of the first quatrain is an animate substantive (3 *les chats*). The objects of the first quatrain include, in addition to the inanimate substantives (6 *le silence et l'horreur*), the pronoun *les* which refers to *les chats* of the preceding sentence. If we look at the relationship between subject and object, the sonnet presents two correspondences which could be called diagonal. One descending diagonal links the two exterior stanzas (the first quatrain and the last tercet) and puts them in opposition to an ascending diagonal which links the two interior stanzas. In the exterior stanzas subject and object form part of the same semantic category: animate in the first quatrain (*amoureux, sanants—chats*) and inanimate in the second tercet (*reins, parcelles—prunelles*). Conversely, in the interior stanzas, object and subject are in opposing categories: in the first tercet the inanimate object is opposed to the animate subject (*s'ils [chats]—attitudes*), whereas in the second quatrain the same relationship (*s'ils [chats]—silence, horreur*) alternates with that of the animate object and inanimate subject (*Érèbe—les [chats]*).

Thus, each of the four stanzas retains its own individuality: the animate class, which is common to both subject and object in the first quatrain, is peculiar to the subject only in the first tercet; in the second quatrain this class characterizes either subject or object, whereas in the second tercet, neither the one nor the other.

There are several striking correspondences in the grammatical structure both of the beginning and of the end of the sonnet. At the end as well as at the beginning, but nowhere else, there are two subjects with only one predicate and only one direct object. Each of these subjects, as well as their objects, has a modifier (*Les amoureux fervents, les savants austères*—*Les chats puissants et doux; des parcelles d'or, un sable fin*—*leurs prunelles mystiques*). The two predicates, the first and last in the sonnet, are the only ones accompanied by adverbs, both of them derived from adjectives and linked to one another by a deep rhyme: *3. Aiment également*—*14. Étoilent vaguement*. The second and penultimate predicates are the only ones that comprise a copula and a predicative adjective, the latter being emphasized in both cases by an internal rhyme: *4. Qui comme eux sont frileux*; *12. Leurs reins féconds sont pleins*. Generally speaking, only the two exterior stanzas are rich in adjectives: nine in the quatrain and five in the tercet; whereas the two interior stanzas have only three adjectives in all (*funèbres, nobles, grands*).

As we have already noted, it is only at the beginning and at the end of the poem that the subjects are of the same class as the objects: each one belongs to the animate class in the first quatrain and to the inanimate in the second tercet. Animate beings, their functions and their activities, dominate the initial stanza. The first line contains nothing but adjectives. Of these, the two substantival forms which act as subjects—*les amoureux* and *les savants*—display verbal roots: the text is inaugurated by “those who love” and by “those who know.” In the last line of the poem, the opposite occurs: the transitive verb *étoilent*, which serves as a predicate, is derived from a substantive. The latter is related to the series of inanimate and concrete appellatives which dominate this tercet and distinguish it from the three anterior stanzas. A clear homophony can be heard between this verb and the members of the series in question: *l'érésèl*—*le de parsel*—*l'etwæl*. Finally, the subordinate clauses contained in the last lines of these two medial stanzas each include an adverbial infinitive, these two object-complements being the only infinitives in the entire poem: *8. S'ils pouvaient . . . incliner*; *11. Qui semblent s'endormir*.

As we have seen, neither the dichotomous partition of the sonnet nor the division into three stanzas results in an equilibrium of the isometric constituents. But if one were to divide the fourteen lines into two equal parts, the seventh line would end the first half of the poem, and the eighth line would mark the beginning of the second half. It is, therefore, significant that just these two middle lines stand out most obviously in their grammatical makeup from the rest of the poem. Actually, in more than one respect, the poem falls into three parts: in this case into the middle pair of lines and two isometric groups, that is to say, the six lines which precede this pair and the six which follow it. Hence there emerges a kind of couplet inserted between two sestets.

All personal verb forms and pronouns and all the subjects of verbal clauses are plural throughout the sonnet, except in line 7, *L'Érèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres*, which contains the only proper noun in the poem and is the only instance of both the finite verb and its subject being in the singular. Furthermore, it is the only line in which the possessive pronoun (*ses*) refers to a singular. Only the third person is used in the sonnet. The only verbal tense used is the present, except in lines 7 and 8, where the poet envisages an imaginary action (*7. eût pris*) arising out of an unreal premise (*8. S'ils pouvaient*).

The sonnet shows a pronounced tendency to provide every verb and every substantive with a modifier. Each verbal form is accompanied by a governed modifier (substantive, pronoun, infinitive) or by a predicative adjective. All transitive verbs govern only substantives (*2-3. Aiment . . . Les chats; 6. cherchent le silence et l'horreur; 9. prennent . . . les . . . attitudes; 14. Étoilent . . . leurs prunelles*). The pronoun which serves as the object in the seventh line is the sole deviation: *les eût pris*.

With the exception of adnominal adjuncts which are never accompanied by any modifier in the sonnet, the substantives (including the substantivized adjectives) are always modified by attributes (for example, *3. chats puissants et doux*) or by adjuncts (*5. Amis de la science et de la volupté*); line 7 again provides the only exception *L'Érèbe les eût pris*.

All five attributes in the first quatrain (*1. fervents, 1. austères, 2. mère, 3. puissants, 3. doux*) and all six in the two tercets (*9. nobles, 10. grands, 12. féconds, 12. magiques, 13. fin, 14. mystiques*) are qualitative epithets, whereas the second quatrain has no adjectives other than the determinative attribute in the seventh line (*coursiers funèbres*). It is also this line which inverts the animate/inanimate order underlying the relation between subject and object in the other lines of this quatrain and

which is, in fact, the only one in the entire sonnet to adopt this inanimate/animate order.

Several striking peculiarities clearly distinguish line 7 only, or the last two lines of the second quatrain, from the rest of the sonnet. However, it must be noted that the tendency for the medial distich to stand out agrees with the principle of an asymmetrical trichotomy, which puts the whole of the second quatrain in opposition to the first quatrain on the one hand and in opposition to the final sestet on the other, thus creating a kind of central strophe distinct in several respects from the marginal strophic units. We have already shown that only in line 7 are subject and predicate in the singular, but this observation can be extended: only in the second quatrain do we find either subject or object in the singular and whereas in line 7 the singularity of the subject (*L'Érêbe*) is opposed to the plurality of the object (*les*), the adjoining lines invert this relation, having a plural subject and a singular object (*Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur*; *S'ils pouvaient . . . incliner leur fierté*).

In the other stanzas, both object and subject are plural (*1-3 les amoureux . . . et les savants . . . Aiment . . . Les chats*; *Ils prennent . . . les attitudes*; *13-14 Et des parcelles . . . Étoilent . . . leurs prunelles*). It is notable that in the second quatrain singularity of subject and object coincides with the inanimate and plurality with the animate class. The importance of grammatical number to Baudelaire becomes particularly noteworthy by virtue of the role it plays in opposition relations in the rhymes of the sonnet.

It must be added that the rhymes in the second quatrain are distinguishable by their structure from all other rhymes in the poem. The feminine rhyme *ténèbres—funèbres* in the second quatrain is the only one which brings together two different parts of speech. Moreover, all the rhymes in the sonnet, except those in the quatrain in question, comprise one or more identical phonemes, either immediately preceding or some distance in front of the stressed syllable, usually reinforced by a supportive consonant: *1 savants austères—4 sédentaires*, *2 mère maison—3 maison*, *9 attitudes—solitudes*, *11 un rêve sans fin—13 un sable fin*, *12 étincelles magiques—14 prunelles mystiques*. In the second quatrain, neither the pair *5 volupté—8 fertè*, nor *6 ténèbres—7 funèbres*, offer any correspondence in the syllable anterior to the rhyme itself. On the other hand, the final words in the seventh and eighth lines are alliterative, *7 funèbres—8 fertè*, and the sixth and fifth lines are linked by the repetition of the final syllable of *5 volupté* in *6 ténèbres* and by the inter-

nal rhyme *science—silence*, which reinforces the affinity between the two lines. Thus the rhymes themselves exhibit a certain relaxation of the ties between the two halves of the second quatrain.

A salient role in the phonic texture of the sonnet is played by the nasal vowels. These phonemes, "as though veiled by nasality," as Grammont aptly puts it,² occur very frequently in the first quatrain (9 nasals, from 2 to 3 per line) but most particularly in the final sestet (22 nasals with increasing frequency throughout the first tercet, *93—104—116*: *Qui semblent s'endormir dans un rêve sans fin*; and with decreasing frequency throughout the second tercet, *125—133—141*). In contrast, the second quatrain contains only three: one per line, excepting the seventh, the sole line in the sonnet without a nasal vowel; this quatrain is also the only stanza where the masculine rhyme does not contain a nasal vowel. Then, again, it is in the second quatrain that the role of phonic dominant passes from vowels to consonantal phonemes, in particular to liquids. The second quatrain is the only one which shows an excessive number of these liquid phonemes, 24 in all, as compared to 15 in the first quatrain, 11 in the first tercet, and 14 in the second. The total number of /r/'s is slightly lower than the number of /l/'s (31 versus 33), but the seventh line, which has only two /l/'s, contains five /r/'s, that is to say, more than any other line in the sonnet: *L'Érêbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres*. According to Grammont, it is by opposition to /r/ that /l/ "gives the impression of a sound that is neither grating, rasping, nor rough but, on the contrary, that glides and flows, that is limpid."³ The abrupt nature of every /r/, and particularly the French /r/, in comparison with the glissando of the /l/ is clearly illustrated in Durand's accoustical analysis of the two liquids.⁴ The agglomeration of the /r/'s eloquently echoes the delusive association of the cats with Erebus, followed by the antithetic ascent of the empirical felines to their miraculous transfigurations.

The first six lines of the sonnet are linked by a characteristic reiteration: a symmetrical pair of coordinate phrases linked by the same conjunction *et*: *1 Les amoureux ferrents et les savants austères*; *3 Les chats puissants et doux*; *4 Qui comme eux sont frileux et comme eux sédentaires*; *5 Amis de la science et de la volupté*. The binarism of the determinants thus forms a chiasmus with the binarism of the determined in the next line—*6 le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres*—which puts an end to these binary constructions. This construction, common to all the lines of this "sestet," does not recur in the remainder of the poem. The juxtapositions without a conjunction are a variation of

²*Aiment également, dans leur mâre saison* (parallel circumstantial complements); ³*Les chats . . . orgueil* (a substantive in apposition to another).

These pairs of coordinate phrases and their rhymes (not only those which are exterior and underline the semantic links such as ¹*astères—sédentaires*, ²*saison—maison*, but also and especially the internal rhymes) serve to draw the lines of this introduction closer together: ¹*amoureux—comme eux—frileux—comme eux*; ⁴*comme eux*; ¹*fervents—savants—également—dans—puissants*; ⁵*science—silence*. Thus all the adjectives characterizing the persons in the first quatrain are rhyme words, with the one exception ³*doux*. A double etymological figure links the openings of three of the lines, ¹*Les amoureux—Aiment—Amis*, in accordance with the unity of this crypto-stanza of six lines, which starts and ends with a couplet, each of whose first hemistichs rhyme: ¹*fervents—également*; ⁵*science—silence*.

Les chats, who are the direct object of the clause comprising the first three lines of the sonnet, become the implicit subject of the clauses in the following three lines (⁴*Qui comme eux sont frileux*; ⁶*Ils cherchent le silence*), revealing the outline of a division of this quasi-sestet into two quasi-tercets. The middle "distich" recapitulates the metamorphosis of the cats: from an implicit object (⁷*L'Érêbe les eût pris*) into an equally implicit grammatical subject (⁸*S'ils pouvaient*). In this respect the eighth line coincides with the following sentence (⁹*Ils prennent*).

In general, the postpositive subordinate clauses form a kind of transition between the subordinating clause and the sentence which follows it. Thus, the implicit subject "chats" of the ninth and tenth lines changes into a reference to the metaphor "sphinx" in the relative clause of the eleventh line (*Qui semblent s'endormir dans un rêve sans fin*) and, as a result, links this line to the tropes serving as grammatical subjects in the final tercet. The indefinite article, entirely alien to the first ten lines with their fourteen definite articles, is the only one admitted in the four concluding lines of the sonnet.

Thus, thanks to the ambiguous references in the two relative clauses, in the eleventh and the fourth lines, the four concluding lines allow us to glimpse at the contour of an imaginary quatrain which somehow corresponds to the initial quatrain of the sonnet. On the other hand, the final tercet has a formal structure which seems reflected in the first three lines of the sonnet.

Animate subjects are never expressed by substantives, but either by substantivized adjectives, in the first line of the sonnet (*Les amoureux*,

les savants), or by personal and relative pronouns, in the further clauses. Human beings appear only in the first clause, in the form of a double subject supported by substantivized verbal adjectives.

The cats, named in the title of the sonnet, are called by name only once in the text, as the direct object in the first clause: ¹*Les amoureux . . . et les savants . . . Aiment . . . Les chats*. Not only is the word *chats* avoided in the further lines of the poem, but even the initial hushing phoneme /ʃ/ recurs only in a single word: ⁶*/ilserʃe/*. It denotes, with reduplication, the first reported action of the felines. This voiceless sibilant, linked to the name of the poem's heroes, is carefully avoided throughout the remainder of the sonnet.

From the third line, the cats become an implicit subject, which proves to be the last animate subject in the sonnet. The substantive *chats*, in the roles of subject, object, and adnominal adjunct, is replaced by the anaphoric pronouns ^{6,8,9}*ils*, ⁷*les*, ^{8,12,14}*leur(s)*, and it is only to *les chats* that the substantive pronouns *ils* and *les* refer. These accessory (adverbial) forms occur solely in the two interior stanzas, that is, in the second quatrain and in the first tercet. The corresponding autonomous form ⁴*eux* is used twice in the initial quatrain and refers only to the human characters of the sonnet, whereas no substantive pronouns occur in the final tercet.

The two subjects of the initial clause of the sonnet have one single predicate and one single object. Thus ¹*Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères* end up ²*dans leur mâre saison* by finding their identity in an intermediary being, an animal which encompasses the antinomic traits of two human but mutually opposed conditions. The two human categories, sensual/intellectual, oppose each other, and the mediation is achieved by means of the cats. Hence the role of subject is latently assumed by the cats, who are at one and the same time scholars and lovers.

The two quatrains objectively present the personage of the cat, whereas the two tercets carry out his transfiguration. However, the second quatrain differs fundamentally from the first and, in general, from all the other stanzas. The equivocal formulation, *ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres*, gives rise to a misunderstanding summed up in the seventh line of the sonnet and denounced in the following line. The aberrant character of this quatrain, especially the perplexity of its last half, and more particularly of line 7, is thoroughly marked by the peculiarities of its grammatical and phonic texture. The semantic affinity between *L'Érêbe* ("dark region bordering on

Hell," metonymic substitute for "the powers of darkness" and particularly for Erebus, "brother of Night") and the cats' predilection for *Plourreur des ténèbres*, corroborated by the phonic similarity between /tenebrə/ and /erebəl/, all but harness the cats, heroes of the poem, to the grisly task of *coursiers funèbres*. Does the line which insinuates that *L'Érèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers* raise a question of frustrated desire or one of false recognition? The meaning of this passage, long puzzled over by the critics,⁵ remains purposely ambiguous.

Each of the quatrains, as well as each of the tercets, tries to give the cats a new identity. While the first quatrain linked the cats to two types of human condition, thanks to their pride they succeed in rejecting the new identity put forward in the second quatrain, which would associate them with an animal condition: that of coursers placed in a mythological context. It is the only identification that is rejected in the course of the whole poem. The grammatical composition of this passage, which contrasts expressly with that of the other stanzas, betrays its peculiar character: unreal conditional, lack of qualitative attributes, and an inanimate singular subject devoid of any modifier and governing an animate plural object.

Allusive oxymorons unite the stanzas. *8 S'ils "pouvaient" au service incliner leur fierté*—but they cannot do so (*ils ne "peuvent" pas*) because they are truly *3 puissants*. They cannot be passively taken (*7 pris*) to play an active role, and hence they themselves actively take (*9 prennent*) a passive role because they are obstinately *sédentaires*.

Leur fierté predestines them for the *9 nobles attitudes* *10 Des grands sphinx*. The *10 sphinx allongés* and the cats that mime them *9 en songeant* are united by a paronomastic link between the only two participial forms in the sonnet: /āsōʒā/ and /alōʒe/. The cats seem to identify themselves with the sphinxes, who in their turn *11 semblent s'endormir*, but the illusory comparison, assimilating the sedentary cats (and by implication all who are *4 comme eux*), to the immobility of the supernatural beings, achieves the status of a metamorphosis. The cats and the human beings who are identified with them are reunited in the mythical beasts with human heads and animal bodies. Thus the rejected identification appears to be replaced by a new, equally mythological identification.

En songeant, the cats manage to identify themselves with the *10 grands sphinx*. A chain of paronomasias, linked to these key words and combining nasal vowels with continuant dentals and labials, reinforces the metamorphosis: *9 en songeant /āsō. /—10 grands sphinx*

/...āsē. /—*10 fond /fō /—11 semblent /sā... /—11 s'endormir /sā... /—11 dans un /āzōē /—11 sans fin /sāfē /*. The acute nasal /ē/ and the other phonemes of the word *10 sphinx /sɛks/* recur in the last tercet: *12 reins /ē /—12 pleins /ē /—13 étincelles /... És... /—13 ainsi /ēs /—13 qu'un sable /kōs... /—13 fin /fē /*.

We read in the first quatrain: *3 Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison*. Does this mean that the cats, proud of their home, are the incarnation of that pride, or that the house, proud of its feline inhabitants, tries, like Erebus, to domesticate them? Whichever it may be, the *3 maison* which circumscribes the cats in the first quatrain is transformed into a spacious desert, *10 fond des solitudes*. And the fear of cold, bringing together the cats, *4 frileux*, and the lovers, *11 fervents* (note the paronomasia /fervā—/frilø/), is dispelled by the appropriate climate of the austere solitudes (as austere as the scholars) of the desert (torrid like the fervent lovers) which surrounds the sphinxes. On the temporal level, the *2 mâre saison*, which rhymed with *3 la maison* in the first quatrain and approached it in meaning, has a clear counterpart in the first tercet. These two visibly parallel groups of words (*2 dans leur mâre saison* and *11 dans un rêve sans fin*) mutually oppose each other, the one evoking numbered days and the other, eternity. No constructions with *dans* or with any other adverbial preposition occur elsewhere in the sonnet.

The miraculous quality of the cats pervades the two tercets. The metamorphosis unfolds right to the end of the sonnet. In the first tercet the image of the sphinxes stretched out in the desert already vacillates between the creature and its simulacrum, and in the following tercet the animate beings disappear behind particles of matter. Synecdoche substitutes for the cat-sphinxes various parts of their bodies: *12 leurs reins* (the loins of the cats), *14 leurs prunelles* (the pupils of their eyes). In the final tercet, the implicit subject of the interior stanzas again becomes an accessory part of the sentence. The cats appear first as an implicit adjunct of the subject—*12 Leurs reins féconds sont pleins*—then, in the poem's last clause, they function as a mere implicit adjunct of the object: *14 Étoilent vaguement leurs prunelles*. Thus the cats appear to be linked to the object of the transitive verb in the last clause of the sonnet and to the subject in the penultimate, antecedent clause, thereby establishing a double correspondence on the one hand with the cats as direct object in the first clause of the sonnet and, on the other, with the cats as subject of its second clause.

Whereas at the beginning of the sonnet both subject and object were of the animate class, the two similar parts of the final clause both belong to the inanimate class. In general, all the substantives in the last tercet are concrete nouns of the same class: ¹²reins, ¹²étincelles, ¹³parcelles, ¹³or, ¹³sable, ¹⁴prunelles, while in all previous stanzas the inanimate appellatives, except for the adnominal ones, were abstract nouns: ²saison, ³orgueil, ⁵silence, ⁶horreur, ⁸servage, ⁸ferté, ⁹attitudes, ¹¹rêve. The inanimate feminine gender, common to the subject and to the object of the final clause—¹³⁻¹⁴des parcelles d'or... Étoilent... leurs prunelles—counterbalances the subject and object of the initial clause, which both belong to the animate masculine gender—¹⁻³Les amoureux... et les savants... Aiment... Les chats. Parcelles in line 13 is the only feminine subject in the whole sonnet, and it contrasts with the masculine *sable fin* at the end of the same line, which in turn is the only example of the masculine gender among the sonnet's masculine rhymes. In the last tercet, the ultimate particles of matter serve in turns as object and subject. A new identification, the last within the sonnet, associates these incandescent particles with *sable fin* and transforms them into stars.

The remarkable rhyme which links the two tercets is the only homonymous rhyme in the whole sonnet and the only one among its masculine rhymes which juxtaposes different parts of speech. There is also a certain syntactic symmetry between the two rhyme words, since both end subordinate clauses, one of which is complete and the other, elliptical. The correspondence, far from being confined to the final syllable, closely brings the whole of both lines together: ¹¹/sābla sādor mir dānzē revē sā fē/¹³/parēlā dor ēsi kē sāblā fē/. It is not by chance that precisely the rhyme that links the two tercets evokes *un sable fin*, thus taking the desert motif up again, in the same position as *un rêve sans fin* of the *grands sphinx* appears in the first tercet.

La maison, which circumscribes the cats in the first quatrain, is abolished in the first tercet with its realm of desert solitudes, true unfolded house of the cat-sphinxes. In its turn, this "nonhouse" yields to the cosmic innumerability of the cats (these, like all the personae of the sonnet, are treated as *pluralia tantum*). They become, so to speak, the house of the nonhouse, since within the irises of their eyes they enclose the sand of the deserts and the light of the stars.

The epilogue takes up again the initial theme of lovers and scholars united in *Les chats puissants et doux*. The first line of the second tercet seems to answer the first line of the second quatrain; the cats being

⁵Amis... de la volupté, ¹²Leurs reins féconds sont pleins. One is tempted to believe that this has to do with the procreative force, but Baudelaire's works easily invite ambiguous solutions. Is it a matter of a power particular to the loins or of electric sparks in the animal's fur? Whatever it may be, it is a "magic" power that is attributed to them. But the second quatrain opened with two collateral adjuncts: ⁵Amis de la science et de la volupté, and the final tercet alludes not only to the ¹amoureux férreux but to the ¹savants mystères as well.

In the last tercet, the rhyming suffixes emphasize the strong semantic link between the ¹²étincelles, ¹³parcelles d'or and ¹⁴prunelles of the cat-sphinxes on the one hand and, on the other, between the sparks ¹²Magiques emanating from the animal and its pupils ¹⁴Myriques illuminated by an inner light and open to a hidden meaning. This is the only rhyme in the sonnet which is stripped of its supporting consonant, as if to lay bare the equivalence of the morphemes, and the alliteration of the initial /m/'s ties the two adjectives even closer together. ⁶L'horreur des ténèbres vanishes before this double luminance, which is reflected on the phonic level by the predominance of phonemes of light timbre (acute tonality) among the nasal vowels of the final stanza (6 front versus 3 back vowels), whereas there was a far greater number of nasal vowels of grave tonality in the preceding stanzas (9 versus 0 in the first quatrain, 2 versus 1 in the second, and 10 versus 3 in the first tercet).

Due to the preponderance of synecdochic tropes at the end of the sonnet, where parts of the animal are substituted for the whole and, on the other hand, the animal itself is substituted for the universe of which it is a part, the images seek, as if by design, to lose themselves in imprecision. The definite article gives way to the indefinite article and the adverb which accompanies the verbal metaphor—¹⁴Étoilent vaguement—brilliantly reflects the poetics of the epilogue. The conformity between the tercets and the corresponding quatrains (horizontal parallelism) is striking. The narrow limits of space (³maison) and of time (²maire saison) imposed in the first quatrain are opposed in the first tercet by the removal or suppression of boundaries (¹⁰fond des solitudes, ¹¹rêve sans fin). Similarly, in the second tercet, the magic of the light radiating from the cats triumphs over ⁶L'horreur des ténèbres, which nearly wrought such deception in the second quatrain.

Now, in drawing together the parts of our analysis, we shall try to show how all these different levels blend, complement each other, or combine to give the poem the value of an absolute object.

To begin with, the divisions of the text: Several can be distinguished which are perfectly clear, as much from the grammatical point of view as from the semantic relations between different parts of the poem. As we have already pointed out, there is a primary division corresponding to the three parts, each of which ends with a period, namely, the two quatrains and the ensemble of the two tercets. The first quatrain presents, in the form of an objective and static picture, a factual situation or one that purports to be so. The second quatrain attributes to the cats a purpose that is interpreted by the powers of Erebus, and to the powers of Erebus, a purpose in regard to the cats, which the latter reject. Thus, in these two sections, the cats are seen from without, first through the passivity to which lovers and scholars are especially susceptible and, second, through the activity perceived by the powers of Erebus. By contrast, in the last part of the sonnet this opposition is overcome by acknowledging a passivity actively assumed by the cats, no longer interpreted from without but from within.

A second division enabled us to oppose the ensemble of the two tercets to the ensemble of the two quatrains, at the same time revealing a close connection between the first quatrain and the first tercet and between the second quatrain and the second tercet. As a matter of fact:

1. The ensemble of the two quatrains is opposed to the ensemble of the two tercets in the sense that the latter dispenses with the point of view of the observer (*amoureux, savants, powers of Erebus*) and places the being of the cats outside all spatial and temporal limits.

2. The first quatrain introduces these spatial-temporal limits (*maison, saison*), and the first tercet abolishes them (*au fond des solitudes, rêve sans fin*).

3. The second quatrain defines the cats in terms of the darkness in which they place themselves, the second tercet in terms of the light they radiate (*étincelles, étoiles*).

Finally, a third division is superimposed upon the preceding one by regrouping, this time in chiasmus, the initial quatrain and the final tercet on the one hand and, on the other, the interior stanzas: the second quatrain and the first tercet. In the former couple, the independent clauses assign to the cats the role of syntactical modifiers, whereas from the outset the latter two stanzas assign to the cats the function of subject.

These phenomena of formal distribution obviously have a semantic foundation. The point of departure of the first quatrain is furnished by

the proximity, within the same house, of the cats with the scholars or lovers. A double resemblance arises out of this contiguity (*comme eux, comme eux*). Similarly, a relation of contiguity in the final tercet also evolves to the point of resemblance, but whereas, in the first quatrain, the metonymical relation of the feline and human inhabitants of the house underlies their metaphorical relation, in the final tercet this situation is interiorized: the link of contiguity rests upon the syncdoche rather than upon the metonymy proper. The parts of the cat's body (*reins, prunelles*) provide a metaphorical evocation of the astral, cosmic cat, with a concomitant transition from precision to vagueness (*égalité—vaguement*). The analogy between the interior stanzas is based on connections of equivalence, the one turned down in the second quatrain (cats and *coursiers fumèbres*), the other accepted in the first tercet (cats and *grands sphinx*). In the former case, this leads to a rejection of contiguity (between the cats and *l'Érèbe*) and, in the latter case, to the settlement of the cats *au fond des solitudes*. Contrary to the former case, the transition is made from a relation of equivalence, a reinforced form of resemblance (thus a metaphorical move), to relations of contiguity (thus metonymical), either negative or positive.

Up to this point, the poem has appeared to consist of systems of equivalences which fit inside one another and which offer, in their totality, the appearance of a closed system. There is, however, yet another way of looking at it, whereby the poem takes on the appearance of an open system in dynamic progression from beginning to end.

In the first part of this study we elucidated a division of the poem into two sestets separated by a distich whose structure contrasted vigorously with the rest. In the course of our recapitulation, we provisionally set this division to one side, because we felt that, unlike the others, it marks the stages of a progression from the order of the real (the first sestet) to that of the surreal (the second sestet). This transition operates via the distich, which by the accumulation of semantic and formal devices lures the reader for a brief moment into a doubly unreal uni-

1 to 6	7 and 8	9 to 14
	extrinsic	intrinsic
empirical		mythological
real	unreal	surreal

verse, since, while sharing with the first sestet the standpoint of exterritoriality, it anticipates the mythological tone of the second sestet. By this sudden oscillation both of tone and of theme, the distich fulfils a function somewhat resembling that of modulation in a musical composition.

The purpose of this modulation is to resolve the opposition, implicit or explicit from the beginning of the poem, between the metaphorical and metonymical procedures. The solution provided by the final sestet is achieved by transferring this opposition to the very heart of the metonymy, while expressing it by metaphorical means. In effect, each of the tercets puts forward an inverse image of the cats. In the first tercet, the cats originally enclosed in the house are, so to speak, extravasated from it in order to expand spatially and temporally in the infinite deserts and the dream without end. The movement is from the inside to the outside, from cats in seclusion to cats at liberty. In the second tercet, the breaking down of barriers is interiorized by the cats' attaining cosmic proportions, since they conceal in certain parts of their bodies (*reins* and *prunelles*) the sands of the desert and the stars of the sky. In both cases the transformation occurs via metaphorical devices, but there is no thorough equilibrium between the two transformations: the first still owes something to semblance (*prement . . . les . . . attitudes . . . qui semblent s'endormir*) and to dream (*en songeant . . . dans un rêve*), whereas in the second case the transformation is declared and affirmed as truly achieved (*sont pleins . . . Écoulent*). In the first the cats close their eyes to sleep, in the second they keep them open.

Nevertheless, these ample metaphors of the final sestet simply transpose to the scale of the universe an opposition that was already implicitly formulated in the first line of the poem. Around the "lovers" and "scholar" terms are assembled which unite them respectively in a contracted or dilated relation: the man in love is joined to the woman as the scholar is to the universe; two types of conjunction, the one close and the other remote.⁶ It is the same rapport that the final transfigurations evoke: dilation of the cats in time and space—contraction of time and space within the beings of the cats. But, here again, just as noted earlier, the symmetry between the two formulas is not complete. The latter contains within it a collection of all the oppositions: the *reins féconds* recall the *volupté* of the *amoureux*, as do the *prunelles* the *science* of the *savants*; *magiques* refers to the active fervor of the one, *mystiques* to the contemplative attitude of the other.

Two final points: The fact that all the grammatical subjects in the sonnet (with the exception of the proper noun *l'Érèbe*) are plural, and that all feminine rhymes are formed with plurals (including the substantive *solitudes*), is curiously illuminated by a few passages from Baudelaire's *Foules* which, moreover, seem to throw light upon the whole of the sonnet: "Multitude, solitude: terms equal and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet . . . The poet enjoys that incomparable privilege, that he can, at will, be both himself and another . . . What men call love is very small, very restricted and very weak compared to that ineffable orgy, that blessed prostitution of the soul which gives itself in its entirety, its poetry and charity, to the unforeseen which emerges, to the unknown one who passes."⁷

In the poet's sonnet, the cats are initially qualified as *puissants et doux* and in the final line their pupils are likened to the stars. Crépet and Blin⁸ compare this to a line in Sainte-Beuve: "l'astre puissant et doux" (1829) and find the same epithets in a poem by Brizeux (1832) in which women are thus apostrophized: "Êtres deux fois doués! Êtres puissants et doux!"

This would confirm, were there any need to do so, that for Baudelaire the image of the cat is closely linked to that of the woman, as is shown explicitly in two other poems entitled "Le Chat" and pertaining to the same collection. Thus the sonnet—"Viens, mon beau chat, sur mon cœur amoureux"—contains the revealing line: "Je vois ma femme en esprit." The second of these poems—"Dans ma cervelle se promène . . . Un beau chat, fort, doux"—squarely asks the question: "est-il fée, est-il dieu?" This motif of vacillation between male and female is subjoined in "Les Chats," where it shows through from beneath intentional ambiguities (*Les amoureux . . . Aiment . . . Les chats puissants et doux; Leurs reins féconds*). Michel Butor notes with reason that for Baudelaire "these two aspects: femininity and supervirility, far from being mutually exclusive, are in fact bound together."⁹ All the characters in the sonnet are of masculine gender, but *les chats* and their alter ego, *les grands sphinx*, share an androgynous nature. This very ambiguity is emphasized throughout the sonnet by the paradoxical choice of feminine substantives for so-called masculine rhymes.¹⁰ The cats, by their mediation, permit the removal of woman from the initial assemblage formed by lovers and scholars. "Le poète des Chats," liberated from love "bien petit, bien restreint," meets face to face and perhaps even blends with the universe, delivered from the scholar's austerity.