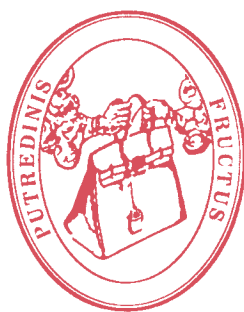


PROVERBS  
OF A  
SHE-DANDY

BY  
LISA ROBERTSON



PARIS / VANCOUVER  
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LIBRAIRES-ÉDITEURS

—  
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## TO THE READER

(The figure of the menopausal dandy revealed herself to me when I was writing on the margins of the Situationist tract *The Poverty of Student Life*. ‘The menopause of the mind’ was the derisive and banal phrase that was deployed by the Situationist International, in reference to the university’s organized ignorance. It was the year of my menopause. My reaction was swift. I typed into the Google Doc at 4 AM, ‘menopause turns females into dandies. Some of our organs become purely self-referential. They have no further potential for family or spectacle or state: they’re outside every economy. So now their meaning is confected in relation to convivial and autonomous pleasure only. Now they can be in the present fully. I’m assuming the mind is an organ or a kind of wandering gland in this description. The hormones the ovaries used to make are now made by all the parts of the body, so that every tissue, every limb and fold continuously invents its own mode of transformation. The entire body becomes a fungible thinking whose purpose it is only to express its own communicability, for the pleasure, the intensity, the integrity of it...’

I discovered the most interesting coincidence when I later began to research—Charles Baudelaire was born in 1821, the same year the word ‘menopause’ was coined by the Parisian doctor Charles de Gardanne, in his book *De la Ménopause ou de l’âge critique des femmes*. It was also in 1821 that the English word ‘dandy’ first entered literary use in France, with Charles-Louis Lesur in his *Annuaire historique universel*, an annual collation of administrative, financial, meteorological and diplomatic documents, with a chronicle of events and notes contributing to the history of arts and letters. Stendhal was to help to popularize the term, in his 1822 book, *De l’Amour*. But even in English the term was new, its first recorded use, in 1816, coinciding with the ur-dandy Beau Brummell’s debtor’s exile in France. The word’s origin is obscure—perhaps it’s from the border-region term ‘jack-a-dandy’, perhaps it’s from the Hindi word for ‘boatman’. Thomas Carlyle, in his 1835 tract on the philosophy of the dandy, *Sartor Resartus*, defines it like this:

*A dandy is a Clotheswearing Man, a Man whose trade, office, and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely; so as others dress to live, he lives to dress.*

Baudelaire’s own dandiacal tendencies ran to the wearing of rose-coloured gloves—alone, this accessory detail was simply very stylish for a young man of the time, but Baudelaire, according to his friend the photographer Nadar, was to be seen strolling in his neighbourhood wearing his rose gloves with a blue workman’s smock, a blood red cravat and a magenta chenille boa, of the sort that the minor actresses of the city apparently affected.

And what does the menopausal woman wear? In the *Fleurs du mal* poem 'Les Petites Vieilles', her petticoat shredded and her dress threadbare, she clutches to her side nonetheless a small purse or reticule embroidered with flowers, or with rebuses, allegorical images that represented gallant proverbs or phrases. This touchingly outmoded and elegant detail of her otherwise impecunious dress had been extracted by the poet from his collection of historical fashion illustrations, to which he referred for his Figaro essay *The Painter of Modern Life*. Given Baudelaire's penchant for fanciful accessorization in his own dress, it appears that the old women he was known to follow in the streets of Paris, out of an empathetic curiosity, a familial allegiance in temperament, as he put it in 'Les Petites Vieilles', influenced his own sartorial choices. But here I want to say that Baudelaire's appropriation and redefinition of the term 'dandy' differed in its essentials from the standard meaning. Beyond the elegant foppery of Beau Brummell, beyond even the vestal allegory of Carlyle, Baudelaire's dandy subtly emanated a spiritual reserve, an inner aristocracy—that same reserve he described in 'Les Veuves' as the stoical pride of the old woman like 'an old bachelor [...] the masculine character of her ways added a mysterious bite to their austerity'. In Baudelaire the menopausal flâneur and the dandy share a descriptive vocabulary. It is her mysterious austerity that is the instructive trait for the new dandy that emerges from the Baudelairean text. In celebration of these correspondences I lay in the bath all morning, reading excerpts from *The Painter of Modern Life*. This is the text where, in a long exploration of the work of draftsman and journalistic engraver of everyday life Constantin Guys, the poet presents the core of his transformed theory of dandyism. Independence of character, leisure, absolute simplicity, an inner, spiritual aristocracy, an 'ardent need to make of himself something original'—all of these self-fashioning gestures were nonetheless contained within the external limits of social propriety. A dandy was not a rebel, not punk. He pertained to the spiritual aestheticization of limits. In a sense Baudelairean dandyism could be seen as a constraint-based practice on the self. The distinctive stance of the Baudelairean dandy is the subtraction of all utility and all ambition from everyday life. Although he may be rich, money is never the dandy's goal, nor is political or social power of any kind; leisure is the key dandiacal element. Love is permitted, but not typically in its conjugal, domestic form. The dandy recoils from all use value, all production, all reproduction, and indeed from the very notion of productivity. The dandiacal code, Baudelaire says, is very ancient; the dandy is stoical.

From time to time as I read I added more hot water to the already deep bath, swirling it in with my left hand, while my right hand held the brittle paperback out of danger. It became more and more certain, as I skimmed and relaxed, that in Baudelaire's work, the poems' descriptions of old women closely share a rhetoric with the description of the dandy in *The Painter of Modern Life*. These two drifting beings systematically submitted their rigorous autonomy to the passive construction of an unproductive agency that seized the city's spatialization of an image of leisure as its material support.

Menopause, Gardanne said in 1821, is the loss of the signs of female reproductive ability. 'Huge dangers', he warned, 'precede, accompany, follow the cessation of this function'. The illustration on the cover of his book shows a broken ceramic pitcher. Gardanne was at the forefront of what now would be called the 'medicalization of menopause', which is to say, its treatment as an ailment, both physical and psychosomatic, of the female body. In this medical model, a woman's most important value being reproductive, menopause marks the end of that value, functionally and almost more importantly, aesthetically; medicine then provides temporary placebos for that perceived loss, recuperating the aging woman back into the predominant sexual aesthetics for a time. Baudelaire himself described this melancholic condition in the second text of *Paris Spleen*, 'An Old Woman's Despair'. 'She went and wept in a corner, saying to herself, "Ah, for the likes of us miserable old hags, the day is gone when we could please... we even terrify the children we long to love."' The banality and extreme familiarity of this ideology of abject embodiment doesn't diminish its ongoing psychological and cultural force.

Gardanne knew nothing of hormones—they were not 'discovered' until the early 20<sup>th</sup> c, with the isolation of insulin. Oestrogen was not isolated until 1943, in time for the return of soldiers to their families, and the post-war return of women to domestic roles. In the 19<sup>th</sup> c the medical approaches to menopausal experience pertained to a theory

of unblocking, as if the woman in question were suffering a kind of inner stagnation—George Sand, for example, was systematically lanced and bled by her doctor, to rid her of a persistent suffocating sensation, she told her sister in a letter. Windy climates could be advised, or light labour, to unblock the humours—gardening, wood sawing, walks and housework. It was suggested also that overheated salons should be avoided. So the menopausal condition was a blocked condition, rather than one of substantive lack. Now we consider that the menopausal body lacks oestrogen and accordingly pharmaceutical horse urine ‘replaces’ it; in the 19<sup>th</sup> c this female body lacked inner movement. Looking at the inverse of these historical assessments of female aging can provide a negative picture of what a woman is in a given era: currently a woman is a body containing oestrogen; in the 19<sup>th</sup> c a woman was a body containing inner flows and movements—the residual imagination perhaps, of the ancient idea of the migrant uterus. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> c, some menopausal definitions and therapies had been more cultural, having to do with a reassessment of the social and intellectual roles of women. After menopause the female was manlike, so could take on masculine practices. In 1803 the historian of medicine Moreau de la Sarthe proposed that:

*If, for the Scythians, to whom historians have attributed wisdom, men who lost their virility were obligated to take on the clothing and habits of women, why shouldn't women, when the ability to conceive is finished, join the class of men in some ways, and so enjoy the same privileges, apply themselves to the liberal professions and to literary work, which often would give them a means of livelihood and consolation?*

So the historical movement of the concept of femininity, from social and cultural roles, to inner mobility and flux, to the possession of oestrogen, can be mapped on to a history of the treatments for the end of that femininity, in the menopausal body. The 19<sup>th</sup>-c invention of menopause as a deficit of femininity, treatable by medical means, must be seen in the more general context of the post- revolutionary privatization and enclosure of women's lives and roles within the family, a condition that accompanied the generalization of industrial capitalism. If in the bourgeois ideology the female body was constrained to represent reproductive value, indeed, functioning as a kind of money (that other value in flux), once freed of this signifiatory role as she entered *l'âge critique*, which was the then-common term, more familiar than the new medical appellation, her ruinous social presence problematized the very necessity of productivity. In this sense, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-c capitalist city the image of the menopausal female enacts an urban destabilization along with that of the prostitute or courtesan, and these are two differently sexualized female guises that Baudelaire used to activate a sublime femininity in his symbolic vocabulary. Actresses and widows are similarly invoked in the poems as figures whose mysterious autonomy not only excites the poet's empathy, but whose marginal existences outside the economy of domestic enclosure crucially animate the urban landscape, inciting an aesthetic of sensual decadence, ruinousness. These variously feminized bodies share with the dandy the sublime trait of a spiritualized and stoical superiority. The elderly woman sitting on a park bench listening to a military band is ‘erect again, proud’, ‘her eye opened from time to time like the eye of an old eagle; / Her marble brow was made for laurels!’ She is among those who, like the dandy, pertaining to more ancient codes of conduct, are stoic, without complaint. Those gallant proverbs symbolized on the old lady's embroidered purse in ‘Les Petites Vieilles’—what did they say? Here then, in the luxury of my bath, permitting the Baudelairean correspondences between dandy and old woman to drift beyond the margins of his poems and essays, I will activate the figure of menopause as the new dandiacal body.)

PROVERBS  
OF A  
SHE-DANDY

**SHE WILL CONSIDER THE CONCEPT OF MENOPAUSE  
AND ITS PATHOLOGICAL CODE AS ONE OF THE  
COVERT PRODUCTS OF MODERNITY.**

GERMS, CHANCE, PASSION, TIME, FAT, OBSCURITY,  
OUTDATED GARMENTS, HORMONES, WORRY,  
FRAYED CLOTH, SILENCE AND POLITICS ASSIST IN  
HER IDEAL DEREGULATION OF THE HYPOSTATIC  
MYSTICISMS OF GENDER.

SUCH DREARINESS, SUCH OBLIGATION,  
SUCH MOOT DIGNITY, SUCH BAD MYTHOLOGY  
IN THE HYPOSTASIS!



SO, BEING AN IDEALIST, SHE HAS CAUSED  
HER MENOPAUSE, SURGICALLY, PSYCHICALLY,  
CHEMICALLY, OR BY PATIENTLY WAITING. IT IS  
HER OWN. THE STATE HAS NO MENOPAUSE, ONLY  
PRODUCTIVITY AND LOSS.

**SHE HAS ENTERED AN UNDOCUMENTED  
CORPORALITY. EXCELLENT. NOW THE  
SCINTILLATING RESEARCH CAN BEGIN.**

**IF SHE IS AN IMAGE, SHE IS THE IMAGE OF  
EVERYTHING THE STATE EVADES. IF SHE IS  
MELANCHOLIC, IT IS THE MELANCHOLY OF  
A HIGHLY DISCIPLINED CONSTITUTIONAL  
INTERIORITY.**

**HER HUMOUR IS INK.**

THE EROTOLOGY OF HER IMAGE BEGINS WITH  
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF VALUE – OR RATHER,  
VALUE’S DERELICTION. SHE DOESN’T NEED  
ANYTHING YOU HAVE TO OFFER. IN THIS SENSE,  
SHE IS ALREADY BAUDELAIREAN. HER CLERICAL-  
STYLE TUNIC WAS COMMISSIONED AS ARE HER  
TEXTS. SARTOR RESARTUS IS HER PILLOWBOOK.

SHE DEMONSTRATES WITH HER STANCE,  
HER SKEWED ACCESSORIES, HER SPIRITUAL  
FORTITUDE, HER OCCUPATION OF THE PARK  
BENCH, THAT THE ONLY REAL WORTHINESS IS  
IN THE THEATRICAL AUGMENTATION OF THE  
IGNORED HUMAN FRAGILITY.

**THAT SHE EXISTS AND MOVES IN THE CITY  
IS AN AFFRONT TO THE WILL OF CAPITAL.  
COUNTLESS CLINICS ARE DEDICATED TO  
PREVENTING HER APPEARANCE.**

**SHE IS THE DANDIACAL AVANT-GARDE.  
OBSOLESCENCE IS EMBROIDERED ON HER  
PURSE. SHE EMBODIES THE AESTHETIC LAW OF  
CONSTRAINT.**



WHAT WALTER BENJAMIN SAID OF BAUDELAIRE  
SHE WILL CLAIM AS HER SLOGAN ALSO: 'PERHAPS  
THIS IS BAUDELAIRE'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT,  
AND CERTAINLY IT IS ONE OF WHICH HE IS  
CONSCIOUS: TO HAVE BECOME SO QUICKLY  
OBSOLETE, WHILE REMAINING SO DURABLE'.

HER OBSOLESCENCE IS INDISPENSABLE TO  
HER WORK WITH RESISTANCE. SHE WILL HAVE  
BECOME THE PHILOSOPHER OF HER OWN RUIN,  
WHICH IS ALSO THE RUINOUSNESS OF CAPITAL.  
BY ENTERING THE THEATRE OF THE STREET  
EACH DAY AND DISPLAYING THE DIGNITY OF HER  
IRRELEVANCE, SHE ALTERS THE INTERPRETATION  
OF NECESSITY.

**SHE IS THE MASTERPIECE OF THE ANCIENT  
SUPERIORITY OF THE IMPRODUCTIVE. SHE  
NEITHER BEGETS NOR WORKS, BUT DRIFTS.**

THE DANDY ASPIRES TO BE SUBLIME,  
CONTINUOUSLY; BUT LIKE A WEST- MOVING SUN,  
SHE HAS EFFORTLESSLY ENTERED INTO THE  
MENOPAUSAL SUBLIME, SETTING A PERENNIAL  
EXAMPLE FOR THE DANDIACAL CODE, WHATEVER  
IT IS YET TO BECOME.

**GREGARIOUSLY SHE EMBODIES THE BASIC INTENT  
OF BAUDELAIREANISM: 'THE EXPLORATION OF  
THE LAST REALM OF INVENTIVENESS IN THE  
REALM OF FEELING'.**

UNLIKE ALMOST ANY OTHER ADULT HUMAN BODY,  
HERS NOW POSSESSES EXTRA ORGANS, ORGANS  
THAT HAVE ECLIPSED ALL USE VALUE. SHE WILL  
DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH HER INNER WEALTH,  
WHICH IS ENTIRELY AUTONOMOUS.

THESE INNER DECORATIONS ARE FOR HER OWN PLEASURE. BY REMAINING VISIBLE IN THE CITY SHE DEMONSTRATES FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO PERCEIVE THAT IN TRUTH, WEALTH PERTAINS TO LYRIC EXPENDITURE.

WEALTH IS THE AUTONOMOUS EXPERIENCE OF  
ONE'S OWN PLEASURE, A FLAWED PLEASURE  
INNATE TO EMBODIMENT. MOVING EXTREMELY  
SLOWLY ON THE BOULEVARD, IN THE PARK,  
AT THE NEWS STAND, IN THE BOOKSHOP,  
SHE DISPLAYS HER RESISTANCE TO ALL  
APPROPRIATION SAVE THE POEM'S.



AS SHE DRIFTS, SHE HUMS A LITTLE TUNE.  
WHAT IS THAT TUNE.

-

# TWO POEMS

BY

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

TRANSLATED

BY

LISA ROBERTSON

# HAGS

For Victor Hugo

In the sinuous folds of old capitals,  
Where everything, even horror, turns into enticement,  
Obeying my fated bad luck I go looking  
For queer entities, broken-down and seductive.

These disintegrating monsters long ago were women  
Like Eponine or Laïs! Worn out monsters, hump-backed  
Or crippled, let's love them! They have souls still  
Beneath their tattered underpants, their frigid fabrics.

These things lurk, scourged by sinful kisses,  
Quivering at the passing fracas of streetcars  
And hugging to their side, as if it were a relic,  
A little purse embroidered with flowers, or a proverb;

They toddle just like puppets;  
They drag themselves along like lame beasts,  
Bobbing, not wanting to bob, their sparse rattles  
Where a pitiless spirit sucks. Yet broken down

As they are, these things have eyes that pierce like gimlets,  
Shining like those holes where water pools at night;  
They have the divine eyes of an astonished  
Girl who laughs at everything that shimmers.

—Have you noticed that many coffins of hags  
Are almost as small as that of a child?  
All-wise death puts in these similar caskets  
The emblem of a special, captivating taste,

And when I catch sight of some pathetic specter  
Making its way through the seething catalogue of Paris,  
It always seems to me that this frail thing  
Is treading carefully towards a new cradle;

At least, while pondering geometry  
I don't need to calculate, at the sight of those grating limbs,  
How many times the worker must vary  
The form of the box where they put all the corpses.

—Those eyes are the wells of a thousand tears,  
Spangled crucibles of cool metal...  
Those mysterious eyes bear irresistible seductions  
For he who was suckled by dry lucklessness!

II

Defunct Vestal enamoured of dance-clubs;  
Priestess of Theatrics, so long! Her name's  
Whispered in graves; expired starlet  
Whose little flowering throve in Tivoli long ago,

They all intoxicate me! Look, of those brittle hags  
Some, whilst producing a kind of honey from an ache,  
Have said to the martyr who was granting them her little  
Wings: lusty Hippogriff, take me right to heaven!

One hag, torn by war from her birthplace,  
Another, whose husband glutted her with blows,  
Another, a Madonna pierced through by her own child,  
They could have made a seaway of their tears!

III

Mmm! Well, I've followed those hags!  
Among them, one, as sunset  
Bloodied the sky with ruby wounds,  
Pensive, sat down on a distant bench,

To hear one of those brassy concerts  
That soldiers sometimes flood through our parks;  
They, in those gilded evenings that bring you back to life  
Pour a sort of heroism into the heart of citizens.

She, erect again, proud, and feeling the beat,  
Eagerly degusted that lively and martial song;  
Her eye opened from time to time like the eye of an old eagle;  
Her marble brow was made for laurels!

IV

So you trudge, stoical and without complaint,  
Through the chaos of slums  
You mothers whose hearts bleed, callgirls or saints,  
Long ago your names were spoken all over.

You were favoured, you were proud!  
Now no one knows you! A crass drunkard  
Insults you in passing with a derisory leer;  
A punk, some vile scoundrel, prances at your heels.

Ashamed to exist, shades shriveled,  
Fearful and hunched, you hug to walls;  
And nothing ever greets you, weird fates!  
Mankind's garbage, ripe for eternity!

But me, me who tenderly overlooks from a distance  
With anxious gaze fixed on your uncertain steps  
As though I were your father, o my marvel!  
I sip clandestine pleasures on the sly:

I see your novice passion curving upwards  
Soberly or luminously, I live your lost days;  
My heart multiplied bursts with your many vices!  
My soul luxuriates in your virtues!

Ruins! My family! Minds congeneric!  
Each night solemnly I bid you farewell!  
Where will you be tomorrow O Eves, octogenarian,  
Upon whom weighs God's appalling stamp?

—

## WIDOWS

Vauvenargues says that in public parks there are alleys haunted mainly by disappointed ambition, by unlucky inventors, by stillborn fame, by broken hearts, by all those turbulent, blocked souls in whom percolate the final gasps of a storm, who shrink back from the insolent glances of the cheerful and the idle. These shady sanctuaries are the meeting places of life's wounded.

It's above all towards those places that the poet and the philosopher love to conduct their voracious speculations. There's certain fodder there. For if there's one site they scorn, as I just insinuated, it's certainly the pleasure ground of the rich. Such a turbulent vacuum bears nothing that attracts them. On the contrary, they feel irresistibly attracted to everything weak, ruined, saddened, orphaned.

The experienced eye never errors. In those set or dejected features, in those eyes sunken and haggard, or glinting with the final sparks of the struggle, in those deep and plentiful lines, in that gait so slow or so jerky, right away the observer reads countless legends of betrayed love, of unrecognized devotion, of unrewarded exertions, of hunger and of cold, humbly, silently endured.

Have you sometimes noticed widows on those solitary benches, poor widows? Whether they're wearing mourning or not, it's easy to recognize them. Yet there's always something missing in the mourning of the poor, an absence of harmony that makes it more distressing. Their grief is forced to be skimpy with sorrow. The rich wear theirs like a full tux.

Which is the saddest, the most saddening widow— the one who can't share her daydreams with the kid she trails from her hand, or the one who is entirely alone? I don't know... Once it occurred to me to follow a grieving old lady of this kind, for hours on end; she was stony, upright, attired in a worn-out little shawl, bearing the pride of a stoic with her entire being.

She was obviously sentenced by absolute solitude to the habits of an old bachelor, and the masculine character of her ways added a mysterious bite to their austerity. I don't know how she lunched, or in what wretched café. I followed her to a reading room, and for a long time I watched while she searched in the papers, with darting eyes long ago burned by tears, for news of a deeply personal significance.

Finally, in the afternoon, beneath a delightful autumn sky, one of those skies from which flocks of regrets and memories descend, she sat down out of the way in a garden, far from the crowd, to listen to one of those concerts of marching music that gratifies the Parisian masses.

This was undoubtedly the little vice of this innocent old lady (or of this refined old lady), the hard-won consolation of those long days without friend, without small talk, without delight, without confidante, which God dropped down on her, for many years, perhaps three hundred and sixty-five times per year!

And another one:

I can never prevent myself from casting an eye, if not totally sympathetic at least

curious, on the flock of outcasts that crowd around the edges of a public concert. The orchestra belts out party songs throughout the night, songs of triumph or of pleasure. Dresses trail, shimmering; glances mingle; the idle, tired from doing nothing, dawdle around, pretending to languidly appreciate the music. Here, only the rich, the happy; nothing that doesn't exude and inspire insouciance and the pleasure of life; nothing but the sight of the hurly-burly out there pressing up against the fence, freely stealing, at the whim of the breeze, a waft of music, and watching the sparkling blaze inside.

It's always an interesting thing, this reflection of the happiness of the rich in the depths of the poor's eyes. But that day, among these people dressed in blue smocks and cheap cotton prints, I noticed a being whose nobility made a striking contrast to all the surrounding coarseness.

It was a tall woman, stately, and so worthy in her whole manner that I had no recollection of having seen the likes of her in any album of aristocratic beauties of the past. An aura of lofty virtue emanated from her entire person. Her face, sad and thin, was in perfect accord with the high mourning of her attire. She too, like the common people with whom she mingled without noticing, watched that radiant society with a keen eye, and she listened while gently nodding her head.

What a remarkable sight! 'Definitely, I said to myself, that poverty of hers, if it's poverty, would not bend to sordid penny-pinching; such a dignified face is evidence of that. Then why does she willingly stay in a setting where she stands out so strikingly?'

But drawing nearer to her with curiosity, I guessed the reason, I think. The tall widow held by the hand a child, like her, dressed in black: however modest the entry fee, the sum would be enough perhaps to purchase some necessity for the little thing, or better still, a treat, a toy.

And she will go home by foot, meditating and dreaming, alone, always alone; for the child is rowdy, self-centered, with no kindness and no patience; and, unlike a pure animal, a cat or a dog say, he can't even be the confidant of her solitary grief.

—

'Hags' is a translation of 'Les Petites Vieilles', one of 18 poems added by Baudelaire in 1861 to the second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, in a new section called *Tableaux parisiens*. *Tableaux* is conventionally translated as 'scenes' or 'pictures', but my battered little mid-19<sup>th</sup>-c French-English pocket dictionary gives as one meaning the English word 'catalogue'; I choose this more arcane field of meaning, since the newer poems offer a vivid catalogue of the marginal Parisians ostracized by Haussmann's gentrification and clearances of the old city: old women, prostitutes, beggars, gamblers, factory workers, the disabled... *Les Fleurs du mal* had been first published in 1857, and was immediately and successfully brought to trial on charges of 'contempt for laws which uphold religion and morality', a charge which debilitatingly fined the author as well as the publisher Auguste Poulet-Malassis, and stipulated that six offending poems must be removed from the book. This publication ban remained in place until 1949. Baudelaire's addition of the new poems in the following censored edition was an extremely graphic rebuke to his work's judges; the poet, a committed reader of everything gothic and baroque, but also of the great social satirists of the 18<sup>th</sup> c (Swift for example, but also Hogarth), as well as friend and colleague to the glorious caricaturists of the 19<sup>th</sup> c (Daumier, Nadar, Grandville) scorned the sanitization of the city, and of language and the imaginary. One way to insist on the spiritual necessity of vulgarity and excess is to redouble its effect. The poems are fieldnotes for a visceral refusal of capital and its criminalizations of poverty, sexual deviance, and the corporality of alterity. Djuna Barnes' 1915 *Book of Repulsive Women* would be a companion in this grotesque resistance.

'Widows' ('Les Veuves') is the 13<sup>th</sup> of 50 texts from Baudelaire's 1862 volume of prose poems, *Le Spleen de Paris*, which begins with a foreigner and a hag, and ends, in the cynical tradition, with dogs. Influenced by the *Essays* of Montaigne, and Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, and composed during the writing of *The Painter of Modern Life*, which was to be published the following year, *Paris Spleen*, like the critical work, specifically forged a new style and form that could stand in vigorous relationship to changing experiences of urban life and its many subcultures. This tendency has been thoroughly explored by Walter Benjamin, in his various texts on Baudelaire. Here I want to bring attention to the strong and direct relationships between the verses of the earlier volume, and the prose poems. The same mysterious widow appears in 'Hags' and 'Widows'; where in the *Fleurs du mal* poem she stands just to the side of a ribald catalogue of obscenely sexualized old women, in *Paris Spleen* Baudelaire gives us a more nuanced and stoical sense of her movement through various kinds of public space in the city. Reading room, café, boulevard, park and bandstand become her theatre. This recycling of images through the slightly shifted settings of multiple texts, or indeed serially within the same text, is one way Baudelaire builds up the dense veracity of his modern city and its types; also the patterned reiteration of phrasing and figures functions as a form of consciousness, where partial echo, obsessive return, and idealizing re-imagination play in erotic fugue. The motif of echo acts citationally as well; Luc



de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues, cited in the first line of the poem, was an early 18<sup>th</sup>-c moral philosopher whose highly condensed aphoristic prose, in the tradition of Pascal, appealed to the moral stylist in Baudelaire. The poems in *Paris Spleen* showed the way towards a moral abundance as prolix in its social inclusivity, as it was lapidary in its literary expression.

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## AUTHORS

### Charles Baudelaire

Financially delinquent son and heir of a defrocked priest, estranged stepson of a military general, bankrupt freelancer of art prose, fastidiously ornate poet accused and tried for obscenity, Charles Baudelaire was born in Paris in 1821, and died 46 years later in the same city, after an apoplectic attack in Belgium, where he had temporarily fled to escape financial embarrassment. Struck in all likelihood by the degenerative syphilis he had contracted in his briefly profligate youth, Baudelaire, who his friend Nadar referred to as 'the virgin poet', lastly fell before the carved wooden confessional screen of the 'sinister and gallant' Baroque church of Saint-Loup, a church he had likened to 'a terrible and delicious catafalque...embroidered in black, pink and silver'. For the final year of his otherwise aphasic decline, in a Parisian hydrotherapy clinic, accompanied by his 1844 portrait, painted by his friend Emile Deroy, a copy of Goya's portrait of the Duchess of Alba, a canvas by Manet, and by his beloved mother Caroline Baudelaire Aupick, his last words, uttered repeatedly, were *sacré nom*.

### Lisa Robertson

Born in Toronto in 1961 within the disappearing middle class, raised by a succession of mongrel dogs, a feminist's feminist, an experimentalist's experimentalist, serially ignoring, coveting and rejecting institutional stability, poet and essayist Lisa Robertson arrived on the west coast in 1979, attended SFU in the mid-80s, and has been an itinerant freelancer since the mid-90s, when an aggressive wave of gentrification forced her to close her bookshop in the downtown east side. For a decade she formed the Office for Soft Architecture, carrying out urban researches in Vancouver and Paris. In 2003 she moved to France, closed the office to commissions, and undertook the study of the linguistics of rhythm. Her poetry has been translated to French, Swedish, Catalan, Spanish, Galician, German, Lithuanian, Dutch and Portuguese. She lives in a small village that is effectively an economic desert, in a doomed attempt to flee capital, and she is currently working on the 12<sup>TH</sup>-C troubadour poets and their versed ethics of abundance.

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Lisa Robertson

*Proverbs of a She-Dandy* is published on the occasion of the exhibition *GLUT*, taking place at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, between January 12 and April 8, 2018. As the first in the *Beginning with the Seventies* series of exhibitions, *GLUT* celebrates the excessive abundance of the archive, and is concerned with language, depictions of the woman reader as an artistic genre and the potential of reading as performed resistance.

I am grateful to Lisa Robertson for her remarkable translations of the two poems by Charles Baudelaire and for the She-Dandy's rousing Proverbs that are contained within this edition. Her mordant pleasure in entering the scintillating research of 'an undocumented corporality' bolsters us all—as we also aspire to be 'an affront to the will of capital'. May these bemused axioms circulate freely in the archive until they are fittingly banned.

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Lorna Brown

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