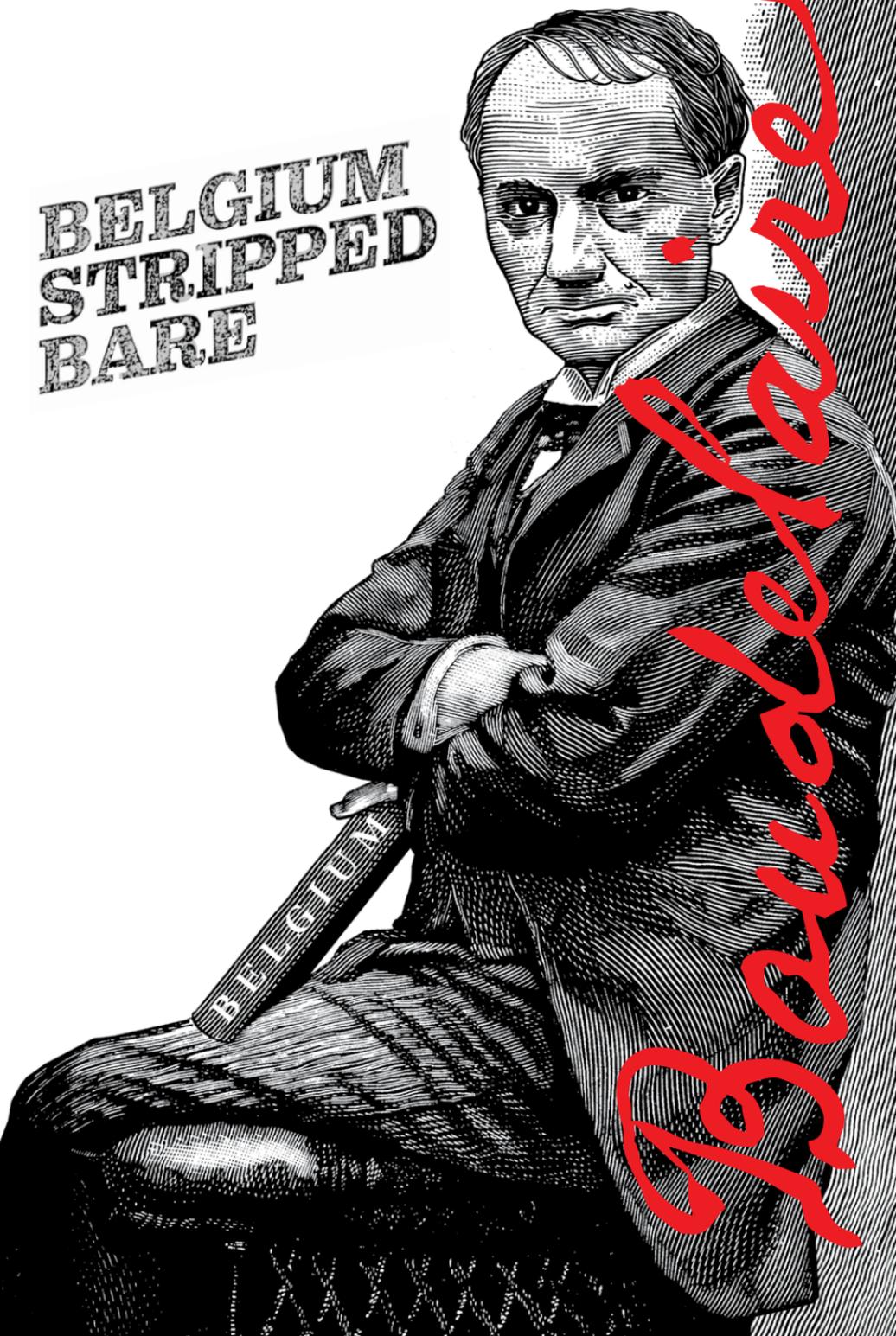


**BELGIUM
STRIPPED
BARE**







Charles
Baudelaire

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STRIPPED
BARE**

Translated with an introduction by
Rainer J. Hanshe



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Translation *La Belgique déshabillée*

© 2018 Rainer J. Hanshe

Translated from Charles Baudelaire,

Fusées – Mon cœur mis à nu – La

Belgique déshabillée suivi d'Aménités

Belgicae, édition d'André

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Tercentenary Letter to *Figaro*

THE SPLEEN OF BELGIUM!

Correspondances, Razzias, & Self-Flagellation

In early 1864, as Baudelaire continued to suffer difficulties with publishing his writing, he was in severe financial straits and plagued by ill health, including recurrent outbreaks of syphilis, cardiac arrests, and violent attacks of neuralgia. Two years prior, even though they were already optioned by Poulet-Malassis, his principal publisher, Baudelaire sold the rights to the publication of several of his works, including a second edition of *Les fleurs du Mal*, in order to ward off his pursuing creditors but, like the ventures of many gamblers, the poet's wager did not end favorably. If intoxication is a number, this exceedingly negative one is not, and what Baudelaire called his *guignon*, the evil spirit of misfortune and disaster, continued to plague him. Shortly thereafter, on November 12, 1862, Poulet-Malassis was arrested and incarcerated in the Clichy debtors' prison for owing his printer, Poupart-Davyl, 14,000 francs,¹ then transferred to the more severe Madelonnettes Prison, where De Sade and Chamfort were confined during the French Revolution.

1. One of Baudelaire's close friends, photographer Félix Nadar, was also incarcerated in the same debtors' prison and wrote an anonymous article (signed F.-T. Molin) about his internment titled "Clichy in 1850." One thrust of Nadar's essay is how some debtors are driven mad by the conditions and that the prison only demoralizes and dishonors its inhabitants. See *Le National* (February 8–23, 1851) and *Le Voleur* (March 25, 1851).

When Poulet-Malassis was declared bankrupt, it necessitated the sale of his entire catalogue, which included several of Baudelaire's works,² thereby effectively silencing the poet's voice through his no longer being in print. After serving five months in jail, Poulet-Malassis was condemned by the court, a judgment he would seek to appeal.³ Control of Baudelaire's inheritance still remained in the hands of Narcisse-Désiré Ancelle, his family lawyer, too, with Baudelaire receiving only 200 francs a month on which to live (the equivalent of around \$40); if he needed additional funds, it entailed a humiliating series of entreaties and genuflections, but they often yielded nothing. With this desultory situation before him, in late 1861, the poet bid for a seat in the prestigious Académie Française. Knowing very well that it was an aristocratic bourgeois institution that would surely not elect a poet of his ill repute, if Baudelaire's pursuit of the candidacy were a provocation, it was also equally genuine. The writer felt that he deserved the seat, and as a gambler, what was there to risk, save for suffering possible humiliation? There was something in him that relished wounds, or wanted to test whether his *guignon* would continue, or the spell finally be broken. The chance of possibly striking pay dirt compels the gambler to bet the devil his head, even if the odds of winning are improbable.

2. *Les fleurs du Mal* and *Les Paradis artificiels*, both of which were remaindered at 1 franc (\$0.19) a copy.
3. Little is known of this trial and judgment since the judicial records were burned during the Paris Commune in 1871.

If awarded the candidacy, it would result in Baudelaire being deemed one of the prestigious 40 ‘immortals’ of the Académie Française and his gaining financial security once and for all. With the condemnation of *Les fleurs du Mal* shadowing him, and his general reputation as an immoralist and provocateur, both Lamartine and de Vigny (themselves immortals) warned him that the results would most probably be demoralizing. When de Vigny urged him to retract his appeal, Baudelaire mentioned that, on Saint-Beuve’s advice, he had already officially declared his candidature. Eventually, in early 1862, following an ambivalent article by Saint-Beuve, who, if saluting Baudelaire, cast him as a figure of the margins and purveyor of the bizarre, stupefied on hashish, opium, and other drugs, the poet acquiesced after de Vigny finally dissuaded him against further pursuing his appeal. That grand escape route from debt thereby evaporated in Baudelaire’s hands.⁴ He had repeated bouts of vertigo as well, noting in *My Heart Laid Bare* that he “suffered a strange warning” after one such incident: “I felt the *wind of the wing of imbecility* pass over me.”⁵ Some months after that abyssal premonition, on April 14, 1862, Claude-Alphonse Baudelaire, the poet’s half-brother, died from the effects of a cerebral hemorrhage compounded by a hemiplegic stroke. Although he had not seen him for twenty years, his half-brother’s demise seemingly provoked

4. For more details, see Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire* (1989) 291–99.

5. *My Heart Laid Bare*, tr. by Rainer J. Hanshe (2017) §86.

in the poet the fear of his own possible early death. Gambles not yielding fortune, the body in the midst of disintegration, the word vanishing into oblivion, the horizon for Baudelaire was growing ever more tenebrous. Spleen, *oui*; ideal, *non*.

When Poulet-Malassis' bid for a pardon was rejected in late April of 1863, he was ordered to serve one more month in Madelonnettes Prison. Once out of jail, he suggested to Baudelaire that they head to Belgium, that less censorious and more liberal country, where they could perhaps flourish, and Baudelaire would be free to pursue his artistic endeavors without condemnation or retaliation. Despite his own reputation as an immoralist, Baudelaire's taste was contrary to that of his publisher; nonetheless, he decided to join him in Belgium and planned to give lectures on art, write for the review *L'Indépendance belge*, and try to gain favor with Lacroix and Verboeckhoven, the publishers of Victor Hugo, in hope that they would publish *Les Paradis artificiels* and at least two volumes of critical essays (*Curiosités esthétiques* and *Opinions littéraires*). Since Hugo and Baudelaire were acquaintances, Baudelaire asked the esteemed writer to intercede on his behalf, making him certain that the results would be positive, and his fortune would finally change.

In mid-September, Poulet-Malassis would depart Paris & take up residence in Ixelles. Two months later, Baudelaire surrendered in perpetuity the entirety of the greatest source of his income, his prized translations of his doppelganger Edgar Allan Poe, to yet another publisher, Michel Lévy. Expecting something in the vicinity of 30,000 francs for his

translations, instead, Baudelaire was offered the paltry sum of 2,000 francs (around \$375) for a decade plus of work.⁶ Yet, even that pittance would never reach the poet's hands but immediately go to those of his creditors. One cannot help but think here of that satiric but pained self-portrait of Baudelaire's wherein he depicted himself before a winged sack of money — fortune, he seemed to predict, would remain perpetually beyond his grasp, like fruit before the hands of Tantalus. Such were the dark & desperate circumstances surrounding Baudelaire's journey to Belgium.

On April 24, 1864, Baudelaire departed for Brussels with something of a massive shipwreck in his wake. Rather quickly, the darkness would only intensify, if not grow truly nefarious, and the wreckage become ever more terrible, then ultimately fatal. All of Baudelaire's envisaged projects would come to nil, and his spiral into spiritual vertigo would begin. "I came to find peace," he later told a friend, "a chance to work, to escape the pressures of Paris life. [...]"

6. Consider two contrasting examples to see how slighted Baudelaire was: 1) Victor Hugo received 120,000 francs from his Belgian publisher for two books, *Les Chansons des rues et des bois* and *Les Travailleurs de la mer*; and 2) Jules Janin received \$2,000 a year from the *Journal des Débats* for his weekly report, \$1,200 from *Indépendance belge* for his column, and \$1,500–\$2,000 from new editions of his old works, or from new publications or contributions to magazines. His total income was reported as being between \$6,000–\$8,000 per year. The figures (in dollars) about Janin are taken from the *American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular*, Vol. 5 (1865), 70.

Besides, I am sick, sick.”⁷ And in a letter to painter Édouard Manet, Baudelaire tells his friend that the “Belgians are fools, liars, and thieves. I’ve been the victim of the most shameless swindle. Here deceit is the rule and brings no dishonor.” He explains further that he is “considered to be an associate of the French police by people here. Don’t ever believe what people say about the good nature of the Belgians. Ruse, defiance, false affability, crudeness, treachery — now all that you *can* believe.”⁸ Outcast in Paris, pariah in Brussels. The poet’s *guignon* did not relent.

Are those statements, as a number of Baudelaire’s letters from that period and his notes for his projected Belgian book, the paranoid ravings of someone in the final throes of syphilitic madness, as they are often characterized? Are they the cynical, dyspeptic ranting of a sickly misanthrope, a person whose mind has been ravaged by decades of indulging in opium, wine, and hashish, as Saint-Beuve believed? Or is there some validity and truth to Baudelaire’s observations? Are they in fact the keen, lucid, measured perceptions of a clear thinking and sober-minded *flâneur*?

1864 was the year of the tercentenary of Shakespeare’s birth and jubilees were to be held for it in numerous cities around the world. In an article in *Le Moniteur Universel*, Théophile Gautier outlined the Parisian jubilee & everything

7. Alex De Jonge, *Baudelaire: Prince of Clouds* (1976) 209.

8. May 27, 1864 letter. See *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude*, tr. & ed. by Rosemary Lloyd (1986) 203.

it would entail, which included a procession along the grand boulevards of Paris, performances, and a celebratory banquet culminating with the publication of Victor Hugo's new book *William Shakespeare*. A French Shakespeare Committee was being formed and Hugo was to be elected its Honorary President, as engineered by his family & coterie of acolytes. Still an exile and archenemy of Louis-Napoléon,⁹ the occasion was an opportunity for the political refugee to enter the Parisian if not world stage again, albeit as a royal specter. Part of the Parisian jubilee included Hugo being represented by an empty throne draped in black fabric and beheld as a kind of omnipotent king (the idea was that of Hugo's wife). Considering his political disposition, the gesture was not perceived as a mere literary coronation: Hugo was being touted as a leader no less than the current emperor, and so, far more than just the self-elected inheritor of Shakespeare's mantle. Since the event was to occur at the Grand Hôtel, a building personally supervised by Louis-Napoléon, the entire affair led to an uproar within the emperor's circle, which perceived

9. Hugo had been in exile since December 11, 1851 when, along with a host of other radicals considered a danger to the French nation, he was expelled by Louis-Napoléon "from French territory, from Algeria, and from the colonies, for reasons of general security..." *Constitutionnel* (January 11, 1852). Quoted in William VanderWolk's *Victor Hugo in Exile* (2006) 67. Recall that Devil's Island was opened in 1852 and some of its first prisoners included nearly 250 republicans who opposed Napoléon's *coup d'état*. Hugo, if not possibly Baudelaire, could very well have ended up there.

it as a symbolic attack on the government. One could also see the empty, funereally draped throne as an invocation of the emperor's assassination, or at least of his being deposed. In *Napoléon le petit*, Hugo did depict the emperor as a criminal for violating the constitution and thus someone who should be dethroned.

What pray tell does all that have to do with Baudelaire? Ten days before leaving for Belgium, the *poète maudit* wrote an anonymous letter of nearly 2000 words to *Figaro's* editor-in-chief, condemning the entire spectacle, subtly explicating the self-serving politicization of Shakespeare's legacy. Hugo is one of the primary targets of Baudelaire's article and he first underscores the subversive nature of the jubilee by referring to Hugo's participation in the 1848 revolution and the alliance made between his literary school and democracy, an alliance Baudelaire characterizes as adulterous, monstrous, and bizarre. Thereafter, the attacker says, "Olympio" (a sarcastic nickname for Hugo) renounced the doctrine of art for art's sake to take up the doctrine of art as revolutionary propaganda. The jubilee is then described as nothing more than a blatant publicity stunt meant to "incite the success of V. Hugo's book on Shakespeare" which, "like all of V. Hugo's books, is full of beauties & stupidities," and that it "may once again vex his most sincere admirers [...]." ¹⁰ Considering that Hugo

10. "Anniversaire de la naissance de Shakespeare," *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, Vol. XI, ed. by Jacques Crépet (1939) 217–222. Tr. by RJH. All further quotes of the *Figaro* letter hail from this source.

and Baudelaire were, if not close friends, certainly frequent correspondents and sometimes acquaintances, Baudelaire's gesture was peculiar, if not strangely self-destructive. There is also considerable irony in his decision to raise the matter with *Figaro* since two articles they published condemning certain poems of his most probably led to the trial of *Les fleurs du Mal*.¹¹ Perhaps he figured, if *Figaro's* articles led to his condemnation, then Hugo too would be condemned & he would usurp the royal scepter.

Aside from Olympe, one of Baudelaire's other targets was Jules Favre, an opposition deputy and lawyer who was being appointed to the Shakespeare Committee despite his not being a man of letters. It was Favre's appointment that seemed to most incense Baudelaire, if not be a direct insult, since the poet refers to himself in the third person in his letter, stating that "M. Charles Baudelaire, whose taste for Saxon literature is well known, had been forgotten." Clearly outraged, the poet, essayist, and translator of English literature sarcastically notes that Favre is "sufficiently cultivated to understand the beauties of Shakespeare, & as such, he can attend; but if he has two *liards* of common sense, and if he wishes not to compromise the old poet, he has only to refuse the absurd honor conferred on him. Jules Favre in a Shakespearean committee! This is more grotesque than a Dufaure at the Academy!" Baudelaire ultimately castigates the whole

11. See Pichois, *op. cit.*, 223–24.

event as “a great stupidity” and “monstrous hypocrisy” and urges it be denounced.

The letter was explosive, with repercussions sounding not only in France, but elsewhere, including England, whose own proceedings in honor of the Bard were eclipsed by Hugo’s plot. It was less Gautier’s informative article and more Baudelaire’s incisive interpretation of it that ignited the backlash. Since Leon-Napoléon’s regime considered Hugo and his cohorts to be subversives, as Marie-Clémence Régner notes, “Baudelaire’s letter set off an alarm among members of the government. The ‘*conseil des ministres*’ consequently decided to ban the French and English banquets at the Grand Hôtel.”¹² To the emperor’s cabinet, the event was seen as an illicit political assembly. While the ban had financial consequences for Hugo’s faction, if not himself, it also had governmental repercussions. Diplomatic relations between the French and the English were disturbed by the ban since the English Ambassador had consented to participate in the Parisian event. *The New York Times* reported that “Nothing that the Emperor has done for a long time has made him more unpopular with the English Parisians, and it seems unaccountable that he should have taken this step just after Lord Clarendon’s visit, and the announced restoration of the *entente cordiale*.”¹³ Since the Republican opposition petitioned

12. Marie-Clémence Régner, “Shakespeare’s 1864 Jubilee in France,” *Shakespeare Jubilees: 1769–2014*, ed. by Christa Johnson & Dieter Mehl, 120.

13. “The Shakespeare Tercentenary,” *The New York Times* (May 8, 1864) 2.

to overturn the ban, which “contradicted Louis-Napoléon’s will to liberalize his politics and to maintain peaceful relations with the Republication opposition,”¹⁴ it lent their cause ever-greater legitimacy, with support coming from England and elsewhere, including Stratford-upon-Avon, where the French flag was set at half-mast.

A seemingly innocuous Shakespeare jubilee became an event of international intrigue, took on a cast of revolt, and reinforced the fact that Hugo, who a few years earlier had refused the general amnesty (for the second time) issued by the Second Empire, was a continuing threat to the French state. Whilst organized opposition to Napoléon III intensified, Belgium was pressured to extradite any fomenters. As Graham Robb notes, “Belgian Parliament responded by tightening controls on foreigners.” During this episode, “Hugo was accused by the Belgian Foreign Minister of ‘corrupting the young,’” “copies of *Les Misérables* were burned publicly in Spain &”, in June 1864, Pope Pius IX anticipated the choice of posterity by adding *Les Misérables*, *Madame Bovary*, and all the novels of Stendhal and Balzac to the Index Prohibitorum.”¹⁵ Baudelaire’s role in instigating the skirmish is apparent enough, even if the international repercussions that unfolded from it were far from his intention, nor willed by him. One week after penning his destructive screed,

14. Regnier, *op. cit.*, 120.

15. Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo: A Biography*, 401–02.

he wrote to the painter Arthur Stevens, telling his friend, a Belgian, that he wanted to see the publisher Lacroix, "to whom *perhaps* (!) Victor Hugo wrote a word for me."¹⁶ That *perhaps* and parenthetical exclamation could not be more darkly pregnant. While Hugo did supposedly write to his publisher on behalf of the poet in December of the preceding year, knowing even then that Baudelaire was virtually his enemy, with the advent of the Shakespeare affair, Hugo, if not his cohorts, imaginably brought the potential relation between Baudelaire and Lacroix to a halt. If outrage can lead to a book being a *succès de scandale*, it isn't always the case. Less an analysis of Shakespeare and his plays and more a pamphlet for Hugo's political pronouncements, the book was a critical failure and roundly ridiculed in France, with Hugo being deemed a self-aggrandizing lunatic. His publishers must have been furious with Baudelaire. As Poulet-Malassis later wrote, Lacroix "never on any account wanted to meet Baudelaire, and always behaved toward him in the most stupidly vulgar fashion. Baudelaire detested him, and had every reason to do so."¹⁷ As sympathetic to Baudelaire as one might be, it is easy to understand why his actions incurred contempt.

The rumors that Baudelaire was a spy reporting on Republican exiles in Brussels on behalf of the French police occurred swiftly after the Shakespeare fiasco, & Baudelaire

16. Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, II (1975) 356.

17. September 8, 1867 letter. See Pichois, *op. cit.*, 322.

BELGIUM STRIPPED BARE

2. I. BEGINNING

Possible titles.

“One must, whatever Danton may say, carry one’s country on the soles of one’s shoes.”

— France appears to be barbarous, when looking from [very] close up: but go to Belgium, and you will be less severe.

— The Thanks that Joubert gave to God.

— Great merit of making a book on Belgium. To be entertaining when speaking of boredom; instructive when speaking of nothing; <to> build on the point of a needle; <to> dance on a loose rope: <to> swim in an [asphaltite] <asphaltite> lake, or in [dorman] dormant water.

To make a sketch of Belgium there is also this advantage: that we make a caricature of the follies of France.

Conspiracy of flatterers against Belgium. Belgium has taken all those compliments seriously.

— Twenty years ago, we were singing the praises of America in this country.

— Why [we do not say] < the French are not telling > the truth about Belgium — [because they don't dare admit that they've been duped] < because, as Frenchmen, they cannot admit that they have been duped. >

— Voltaire's verses on Belgium.

3. TITLES

Grotesque Belgium
The Real Belgium
Belgium Entirely Naked
Belgium Stripped Bare

A Joke of a Capital
A Grotesque Capital
The Capital of Apes
A Capital of Apes

4. BEGINNING

Danton. The Carp and the Rabbit. *America and Belgium*. I wish I had the abilities of ... so many writers of whom I was always jealous. <A certain style,

not the style of Hugo the Belgian author >. Such is my *Lambert*.

Make a Devilish book.

Make an entertaining book on a boring theme.

— (The Cabotins)

The loose rope and the asphaltite lake.

A little poem about Amina Boschetti.¹

A poor man who sees objects of luxury, a sad man who breathes [the odors] of his childhood in the odors of the Church, [so I was] thus I was before Amina.

Amina's arms & legs. The prejudice of thin sylphs.
A joyful feat of strength. Polite gossip — Éliisa Guerri. The Gin.

Talent in the Desert.

It is said that Amina is saddened.

She smiles among a people who cannot smile.
She flits among a people where each woman could, with a single elephantine paw, crush a thousand eggs.

5. BEGINNING

France is, undoubtedly, a very barbarous country.
Belgium also.

Civilization may have taken refuge in some small
as of yet undiscovered tribe.

Let us beware of the Parisians' dangerous capac-
ity for generalization.

We have <perhaps> spoken too badly of France.
One must always carry one's country on the soles
of one's shoes. It's a disinfectant.

There is fear here of becoming stupid. [Slowness]
Atmosphere of somnolence. Universal slowness. (The
Fast Train is its symbol.)

The offspring of the Carp & the Rabbit.
The French [prefer] <love best> to deceive
[rather] rather than to confess that they have been
deceived. French vanity.

6. BRUSSELS
BEGINNING

Information, useless for the informed.

The aim of a satyrique piece is to kill two birds with one stone. To make a sketch of Belgium, there is [this first], in addition, the advantage of making a caricature of France.

7. BEGINNING

France observed from a distance.

Loathsome books.

[Letters] (Parisian studies by a non-diplomat.)

8. BEGINNING

Shall we say that the world has become uninhabitable to me — ?

9. CONSPIRACY OF FLATTERERS AGAINST BELGIUM

[Press clipping of some fragments from an article published in *Revue britannique* under the title: "Belgian Industry and its Progress."

Belgium has become a subject of observation for those "who are interested in the great social questions of our time and the high aims of political economy. Foreign publicists have commented both on the institutions and on the natural aptitudes that have made the Belgian people so prosperous." Everywhere in Europe, Belgium is offered as an example. And *Revue britannique* was pleased "to echo such deserved praises."]

10. BEGINNING

Make an entertaining work on a thankless subject.
Belgium and the United States, Children spoiled
by gazettes.

11. *Epigraph*

Cooper

12. *My Heart Laid Bare*

Notes on *Belgium*

(not categorized) Spleen of Paris

Stances of Deffré,²

Guide.

13. *Belgium*

[Nullity] Conversational impotence. — I don't like the Belgians. — Why? — Because they don't know French. — Sir, says the Belgian, there are the Hottentots. — Sir, the Hottentots are very far away, and you are very close; besides, I've been told, to be completely honest, that the Hottentots have long been damned. — Why? for not knowing French? — Yes, sir.

14. PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE BELGIANS

[The eye]

The frightened, bulbous, stupid, fixed eye. Apparent dishonesty, simply due to slowness of vision.

Belgians who turn around while walking, and who finally fall to the ground.

Shape of the jaws.

Heaviness of the tongue.

Whistling.

Slow and clumsy pronunciation.

15. BRUSSELS

General impressions

Human physiognomy

The Belgian eye: fat, enormous, staring, insolent (to foreigners).

Innocent eye of a people who cannot see everything in the blink of an eye.

A character [from C] from *Cyrano* says to another: You're so fat that we couldn't beat the entirety of you in a day.

Everything is so [large] vast for the Belgian eye that he needs time to look at it.

The Belgian eye has the innocent insolence of the microscope.

16. *The bon mot in Belgium*

In this country, the *bon mot* (for example: yet another Frenchman who has come to discover Belgium), generally borrowed from a French vaudevilliste, has a tough life. [Five thousand] One hundred thousand people can use it ten times a day without wearing it out. Such as a piece of musk that keeps its perfume without losing any of its mass. Such as the brandied cherry hanging from the ceiling by a string and licked by a multitude of children but which remains

<long> intact. There is, however, the difference that a smarter child sometimes swallows it, while thousands of Belgians never catch the whole *bon mot*, <or rather swallow it, <without digesting it,> vomit it up, repeat it, & swallow it again without disgust, before vomiting it up again with equal indifference.> Happy people! an economical people, moderate in its pleasures! Happy people whose organic constitution is such that it can never [permit] a *débauchery of spirit!*

17.

Spleen of Paris.
 Odd conversation.
 Let's not offend the Manes.³
 The rosary.

Belgian Civilization.

The Belgian is very civilized.

He wears pants, an overcoat, and carries an umbrella, like other men. He gets soused and fucks like the people from beyond Quiévrain. He pretends to have the pox, to resemble [the French] a Frenchman. He knows how to use a fork. He is a liar, <ruthless,> he is cunning, he is very civilized.

The Amateur of Fine Arts in Belgium.

He listened to me very well, quietly, like an automaton.

[Collected] < Solemn > ; then suddenly, with a diplomatic tone,

emerging from a long and surprising state of being drowsy,

which all Belgians share with cows,

with the blink of a provincial merchant,

he says to me: "I believe, *moreover*, that David is on the rise!"

18. BELGIUM

POLITICAL CUSTOMS

"There are, strictly speaking, only two great parties here: the Catholics & the drunkards."

(French Revolutionary brochure whose title escapes me.)

19. BELGIUM

POLITICAL CUSTOMS

[*The Companion of Dumouriez*]⁴

"The 5th class (the masses), which uses only beer, brandy, rye, and the solitary amusement of the pipe, has very slow moral fluctuations. Hence the passive character and high opinion of the priests, to which

it seems to have granted the exclusive right to think in its place. This seemed so true to me that, after a careful analysis, I saw in it (this people) just two powerful forces for its actions. Those forces are the coin and the host. This people is gentle and submissive; but excited in the name of heaven, or thrust into political metamorphosis, without being taken in by itself. Its fury and its <known> energy can grow to such a degree of intensity that it would become a Bull.”

P. Gadolle

The fortune assured by the union of Belgium with France, a very topical idea. 1794 (?) in Guffroy.⁵

20. BELGIUM

BEGINNING

This sad city where I am,
It is the abode of ignorance,
Of torpidity, of boredom,
Of stupid indifference,
An old country where obedience,
Deprived of spirit, is fat with faith.

Voltaire, in Brussels, 1722⁶

The last three words are too much.

21. BEGINNING

[The Prayer of Joubert]

The Gratitude of Joubert.

Should I thank God for having made me French
and not Belgian?

22. 2. BRUSSELS

— Physiognomy of the Street.

— First impressions.

— They say that each city, [and that ea] that each country has its own smell. Paris, it's said, smells of sour cabbage. Cape Town smells of sheep. The Orient of musk and carrion.

Brussels smells of black soap. The rooms smell of the black soap with which they [are] have been washed. The beds smell of black soap, which causes insomnia during the first few days. The sidewalks smell of black soap.

— Universal blandness of life. Cigars, vegetables, flowers, cooking, hairstyles, eyes. Everything seems bland, sad, sleepy. Human physiognomy: vague, somber, sleepy <horrible fear of becoming stupid>. The dogs alone are alive. <The Negroes of Belgium.>

— Brussels is much noisier than Paris because of the cobblestones, the fragility and the sonority

of the houses, <the narrowness of the streets,> the accent of the people, the pervasive tactlessness, [& finally] the national whistling & the barking of dogs.

— [No] Few sidewalks <or interrupted sidewalks>.

— Terrible cobblestones. — No life in the Street. — Lots of balconies, no one on the balconies. — A city without a river. — No display cases in front of the shops. — *Flânerie* <, so dear to imaginative people,> is impossible.

— Innumerable lorgnettes [on the nose] <. The why —>. — Abundance of Hunchbacks.

— The Belgian face, indistinct, shapeless; bizarre structure of the jaws, menacing stupidity.

— The Belgian gait, crazy & heavy. [Those] They look over their shoulders as they walk.

<The Spies, a sign of boredom, curiosity intensified by frustration, by distrust & inhospitality.>

23. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS. Brussels

The smells of cities. Paris, it's said, smells of sour cabbage. Cape Town smells of sheep. The orient of musk & carrion. Frankfurt ... ? Brussels smells of black soap.

Laundry. Insomnia caused by the black soap.

Few fragrances.

Not so much stew.

Universal blandness of cigars, vegetables, flowers
(spring in arrears, the rainy, heavy, and soft heat of
summer), eyes, hair, gaze.

The animals seem sad and sleepy.

Human physiognomy is heavy, puffed up.

Heads like large yellow rabbits, yellowish eyelashes.

They resemble dreaming sheep.

Pronunciation heavy, slurred. The syllables don't
emerge from the throat.

The pepper here becomes cucumber.

A chapter on dogs, where the vitality absent
elsewhere seems to have taken refuge.

Leashed dogs. (Phrase from Dubois.)

24. BRUSSELS. Physiognomy of the Street

The washing of sidewalks, even when it rains & pours. National mania. I saw young girls scrubbing a small area of pavement with a little rag for hours on end.

Sign of imitation, [and sign] and mark above all of a Race not very particular in regards to its choice of amusements.

25. BRUSSELS. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS
CUSTOMS

<Dogs>, the negroes of Belgium.

The sadness of animals. Dogs are no more caressed than women. It's impossible to make them play & to make them frisky. They are then astonished like a prostitute to whom we say: Miss.

But what ardor for work!

I saw a big, mighty man lying in his cart & being dragged up a hill by his dog.

Truly the dictatorship of the savage in a savage land where the male does nothing.

AROUND BRUSSELS

Sparsely populated woods.

Very few songbirds.

26. *Brussels*

First impressions

Brussels, a much noisier city than Paris. — Why?

1. *cobblestones* execrable, destroying the wheels of carriages.

2. *awkwardness, brutality, tactlessness* of the people, causing all kinds of accidents.

(About this awkwardness of the people, don't forget the way that the Belgians walk, — looking at it from

another side. — The circuitous paths a civilized man takes to try to avoid bumping into a [bel] Belgian. — A Belgian does not walk, he tumbles.)

3. Universal whistling.

4. Shriill, bawling, foolish character. Howls of the Belgian beast.

Paris, infinitely larger & busier, produces only a vast & vague, velvety buzzing, so to speak.

27. Streets of BRUSSELS

Why Brussels is so noisy:

— special sonority of the cobblestones.

— fragility and vibration of the houses.

— tactlessness of laborers and coachmen.

— [the raucous, drawling voice, the Belgian accent]

< the shouting voices of Flemish brutality >.

— the barking of dogs.

— the universal whistle.

BOARDING SCHOOL CHILDREN

Whenever the Belgians [who] <that they> are having fun or are thinking, they [are] always resemble boarding school children — men, women, boys, little girls. —

Even women piss only in a group. They go for a pissing, as Béroalde says.⁷

APPENDIX

April 14, 1864

To the Editor in Chief of *Figaro*

Sir,

It's happened to me more than once that I've read *Figaro* & felt scandalized by the uninhibited plundering which, unfortunately, forms a part of the talent of your collaborators. To be honest, that kind of "insurrectionist" literature that we call the "little newspaper" is not very entertaining for me and almost always shocks my instincts of justice and modesty. However, whenever a great stupidity, a monstrous hypocrisy, one of those that our century produces with inexhaustible abundance stands before me, I immediately understand the usefulness of the "little newspaper." Thus, you see, I give myself over to near harm, with good grace.

That's why I thought it appropriate to denounce one of those outrageous remarks, one of those absurdities, before it makes its final explosion.

April 23 is the date when Finland itself is said to celebrate the three-hundred-year anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. I do not know if Finland has any mysterious interest in celebrating a poet who is not native born, if she has the desire to make some malicious toast about the English poet-comedian.

I understand, strictly speaking, that the *litterateurs* of Europe as a whole wish to join together in a common outpouring of admiration for a poet whose grandeur (like that of several other great poets) makes him cosmopolitan; however, we might note in passing that, while it is reasonable to celebrate poets from all countries, it would be even more accurate for everyone to celebrate, first of all, his own. Every religion has its saints, and I note with difficulty that so far there has been little concern here to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Chateaubriand or Balzac. Their glory, I will say, is still too young. But that of Rabelais?

Thus that is something accepted. We suppose that, driven by spontaneous recognition, all the *litterateurs* of Europe want to honor the memory of Shakespeare with perfect candor.

But are the Parisian *litterateurs* driven by such a disinterested feeling, or rather obey, without their knowledge, a very small coterie that pursues a personal and particular goal, very distinct from the glory of Shakespeare?

I have been, on this subject, the confidant of some jokes and complaints that I wish to share with you.

A meeting was held somewhere, no matter where. Mr. Guizot was to be part of the committee. No doubt they wanted to honor him as the signatory of a poor translation of Shakespeare. The name of Mr.



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In April of 1864, Baudelaire departed Paris for Brussels with something of a massive shipwreck in his wake: his major work, *Les fleurs du Mal*, had been condemned and censored a decade earlier, many of his other works were out of print, and he pawned his prized Poe translations to gain much needed survival money. Fearful of being imprisoned for debt, the poet who was an outcast in Paris would soon become a pariah in Brussels. Not long after his arrival, rumors spread that he was a spy reporting on Republican exiles on behalf of the French police.

While encountering a pestiferous city in the midst of redevelopment, and after failing to secure a publisher for his work, Baudelaire would begin writing notes for his projected book on Belgium. In his *catalogus rerum* of Brussels and the Belgians, the general overruling condition is one of blandness and dissolution: with observations ranging from those of a sociologist to an anthropologist, city planner, and aesthete, through Baudelaire's fleeting eye, we witness his examination of physiognomy, cultural and political customs, Belgium's fear of annexation by France, & more. Deemed a mean-spirited and even xenophobic book by figures such as Derrida, Baudelaire himself spoke of it as a sketch and satire that had the double advantage of being a caricature of the follies of France and a simulacrum of a Democratic state.

As he attempted to complete his project on Belgium as well as other works, Baudelaire suffered violent attacks of neuralgia, then, in early 1866, he was plagued with more attacks, dizzy spells, and nausea. After a cerebral stroke, he was left hemiplegic and mute.

In this veritable full-scale examination of every aspect of life in Belgium, Baudelaire's perspectival eye catches a world in a glance. The poet's plethora of notes and vast collection of related newspaper clippings (summarized within) reveal to us the inner workings of his mind, what Blake called the artist's Infernal workshop. *Belgium Stripped Bare* is an aesthetico-diagnostic litany of often vitriolic observations whose victory is found in the act of analysis itself, in the intoxication of diagnosis, just as great comedians exult in caustic and biting observations of society, a slap in the face of the status quo.



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