

## Composing Baudelaire for contemporary times

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**Composing Baudelaire for contemporary times: towards a ‘thick method’ of song analysis via Nicolas Chevereau’s *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* (2016)**

Understanding the enduring appeal of Baudelaire’s poetry for musicians has been the focus of a 48-month analytical study. The *Baudelaire Song Project* has uncovered over 1,700 song settings of Baudelaire’s poetry in c.40 different musical styles.<sup>1</sup> Interrogating how and why composers and songwriters have been attracted to Baudelaire continues to yield fruitful results as the dataset is analysed through different critical lenses. One approach is to work towards a ‘thick method’ of song analysis to gain deeper insights into individual responses to Baudelaire’s poetry. Building on established ‘thick description’ approaches from ethnographic research (Geertz 1973), recent developments in musicology have sought to deal with ‘complex sensory phenomena’ via an analysis of the ‘thick event’ of musical performance (Eidsheim 2015: 1; 181–183). Extending the ‘thick’ conceptual frame to account for song as both ‘work’ and ‘event’, this article sets out a ‘thick method’ for song analysis by considering the selection of text for setting to music, the treatment of structures and metrical features in words and music, the unfolding of the song’s soundworld, and the context for composition and performance. Where standard analytical practice involves combining study of text, music, and paratextual material, the ‘thick method’ approach expressly exposes and addresses potential interpretative gaps which arise from missing materials or unavailable source data, as much as from issues with attentional-perceptual blind spots (Eidsheim 2015: 181). To do this, the ‘thick method’ approaches the song-as-work and song-as-event from four different entry points (schematic, statistical, time-bound, contextual), using a range of supporting digital tools (Excel, Sonic Visualiser, Voyant), to construct a song analysis which accounts for the wholeness of the song, rather than for specific aspects of it.

In the case of the Baudelaire song dataset, around half of the songs are in the classical music genre, for which songs are usually available in the format of a score as well as a recording, but the accessibility and availability of materials for song analysis is not consistent. Many hundreds of these songs only exist in difficult-to-access formats, such as Pamela Harrison's 1955 orchestral settings of six Baudelaire songs, for which the tape recording held at the British Music Collection in Huddersfield has degraded, or Adrienne Clostre's 1987 music-theatre piece which exists only as an autograph manuscript on tracing paper at the Paris Conservatoire. By contrast, for a small number of songs it is possible to access a particularly extensive set of song materials, such as for Claude Debussy's 1890 settings of five Baudelaire songs for voice and piano which exist in written format (autograph manuscript, first editions, re-editions), , an autograph manuscript and print edition of a 1907 orchestration of the third song 'Le Jet d'eau' and accompanying concert programme, as well as numerous professional recordings of the voice/piano version. In terms of completeness, one particular set of songs stands out in the corpus because of the extensive materials available for analysis: the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* composed by French pianist-composer Nicolas Chevereau in October 2015–January 2016 and published by Éditions Delatour in 2017.<sup>2</sup> Chevereau was drawn to compose settings of Baudelaire because he identified something attractively 'sombre' in the texts (Researcher interview 2016). The five poems selected by Chevereau are all drawn from the 'Spleen et Idéal' [Spleen and Ideal] section of *Les Fleurs du mal* [The Flowers of Evil], and tend towards the melancholic (spleen), rather than the optimistic (ideal):

1. Ciel brouillé [Troubled/Cloudy Sky]
2. Remords posthume [Posthumous Remorse]
3. Les ténèbres [The Shadows]
4. De profundis clamavi [Out of the Deep]

## 5. Élévation [Elevation]

Chevereau also deliberately selected poems which were less familiar to classical song audiences; the texts are more angst-ridden than the poems set to music by the great *mélodie* composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Researcher interview 2016).<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Chevereau deliberately departs from the lineage of *mélodie* composers who opted for texts favouring common tropes such as sensual love and intoxicating experiences, while also connecting with more contemporary trends in Baudelaire's darker poems to music that can be identified in the settings in amplified and electronic music genres. The composer's vision for these Baudelaire songs also extends beyond the intimate scale of the voice/piano format: a year after first completing the songs, he began to orchestrate them, echoing the practices of composers such as Debussy and Duparc who also orchestrated their own Baudelaire songs, in part to as to secure different audiences and performance opportunities for their work.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Chevereau's *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* – and unusually in the Baudelaire Song corpus – the song materials we have at our disposal are relatively extensive, comprising:

- published score for voice and piano (publicly available via Editions Delatour online at <http://www.editions-delatour.com/en/baritone/3618-cinq-poemes-de-baudelaire-for-baritone-and-piano-9790232114583.html>)
- two recordings of the voice and piano version (live and studio, neither yet released but both shared with the research team)
- an orchestration (score not yet published but shared with the research team)
- a live recording of the orchestral version (publicly available via YouTube online at <https://youtu.be/PBlWBqapUgI>)

- composer and performer interviews and online exchanges with the research team

From these recently-developed song materials, it is possible to advance an analysis which is not (yet) shaped by pre-determined markers of value of the work or its related phenomena, while at the same time considering how Chevereau inscribes himself within a long history of Baudelaire songs. By composing Baudelaire for contemporary times, Chevereau contributes to a burgeoning critical conversation about the phenomenology of works for voice (poetry and song in particular). This conversation, which is emerging in the fields of sound studies and voice studies, as well as in literary studies and musicology, invites us to reconsider how we pay attention toward all aspects of an aesthetic event, rather than merely the object, artefact, or product of it. In adopting a ‘thick method’ approach, it is possible to consider the first-person perspective of phenomenological thinking as one which enables us to examine the full range of song-related phenomena, exploring how they structure our experiences of those songs, and how we can consider the words and the music as always combining the textual, the sonic, and the vocal. This perspective encourages us to revisit any potentially reductive assumptions which would see a song as a ‘flat’ product, such as a score, a track, a piece. Instead, the ‘thick method’ exposes the multi-layered, highly-networked aspect of song as more than a text, and more than a product or ‘work’, since it is also structured by the song as ‘event’, by our experiences of hearing, speaking, and singing—phenomena which inevitably compete for our attention as we critically analyse, creatively compose, actively listen, or perform.

### **A ‘thick method’ of song analysis**

In order to analyse settings of Baudelaire from this perspective, the *Baudelaire Song Project* has devised a ‘thick method’ which adopts four different stages of analysis, examining the combined artefacts of poem + music in different material forms (e.g. notated score, audio

recording, paratexts, performance information) and using digital tools to support standard analysis techniques. The literary text and the musical text are considered as a joint product, despite the poems preceding the songs by their prior publication in *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857–68.<sup>5</sup> To prepare the different analysis phases, the research team draws on the resources of the Pléiade edition of Baudelaire's complete works (edited by Claude Pichois, 1975–76) as well as digital textual analysis tools, such as open-source text analyser Voyant, using these alongside further digital tools for score and performance analysis, including an Excel proforma designed by the team, and Sonic Visualiser.<sup>6</sup> The four 'thick method' stages are:

1. Schematic analysis of poems selected for setting to music (see Table 2 below)
2. Statistical analysis of the score using five text-setting parameters: (i) metre/prosody; (ii) form/structure; (iii) sound properties/repetition; (iv) semantics/word-painting; (v) live performance options) (available online at [www.baudelaire song.org/data-tables](http://www.baudelaire song.org/data-tables))
3. Time-bound analysis of the recordings (see Figures 2–5 below)
4. Contextual analysis, to include composer interview, publication details, paratexts, recordings, performances, programmes, orchestrations (see discursive analysis below)

The discussion below captures what the combine analysis from all four stages of the 'thick method' reveals in the Chevereau *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, through an interrogation of motivations and compositional decisions (poem choice and treatment of the text), and potential interpretations (soundworld and wider resonances).

### **Choice of poems**

Chevereau has explicitly set out his inclination towards poems which have not often been set to music (at least in the classical song repertoire). The composer revealed this preference for selecting unfamiliar texts in a researcher interview (2016), using the terms 'insolites' [out of the ordinary] and 'peu communs' [uncommon] to describe the five poems selected. He used

versions of the poems from a Pléiade edition of Baudelaire which he owns. By opting to set poems from published critical editions, Chevereau had access to well-resourced background information, but the choice of poems fundamentally came down to whether or not the texts spoke to him: ‘ce sont des poèmes dans lesquels je comprends quelque chose’ [these are poems in which I understand something] (Researcher interview, 2016). When Chevereau refers to the poems as ‘insolites’ and ‘peu communs’, however, he is not just commenting on the frequency with which they have been set to music, but also makes an implicit statement about the features of the poem texts, especially in terms of their poetic content. A frequency analysis (enabled by Voyant Tools) reveals that the five poems contain 362 unique word forms, of which the most frequently used terms across the five poems are: nuit (4); ciel (3); cœur (3); delà (3); dessus (3); soleil (3).<sup>7</sup> While these terms demonstrate a slight predilection for the natural world (night, sky, sun), and positional adverbs (dessus, delà)—triggered mostly by repetition of the adverbial phrases ‘au-dessus’ and ‘par-delà’ in ‘Élévation’—, in essence, the poems show minimal repetition overall, with a low recurrence of terms. A word cloud helps to illustrate the wider vocabulary clusters that shape these poems selected by Chevereau (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

### **Figure 1: Word cloud**



Rather than considering word frequencies alone, the visual presentation of terms in the word cloud captures how this combination of poem texts also include hazy, cloudy, or shadowy connotations such as ‘brouillé’ (which has the double meaning of cloudy/overcast and to be at odds/on bad terms with someone) and ‘ténèbres’ (which appears both in the poem with that title, and in adjectival form in ‘Remords posthume’ as ‘ténébreuse’), with both of these terms echoed in ‘Élévation’ as ‘l’existence brumeuse’. The hazy/shadowy diction is seemingly contrasted with brighter or more radiant terms such as ‘soleil’ and ‘brille’, but in ‘Ciel brouillé’ the sun is misty (‘les soleils des brumeuses saisons’) and in ‘De profundis clamavi’ the sun is cold (‘Un soleil sans chaleur’ and ‘ce soleil de glace’). The contradictions which collapse the distinctions between light and dark are typical of Baudelaire’s poetry, as exemplified in the oxymoronic description of the lover in ‘Les ténèbres’ who is described in the final line of the sonnet as ‘noire et pourtant lumineuse’. While helpful, it is clear that frequency tables and word clouds do not reveal the full extent of the poetic content. A deeper lexical analysis indicates that each of the poems is conceptually shaped by terms which are primarily negatively-connoted (as indicated in Table 1):



**Table 1: Negatively-connoted diction in Chevereau, Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire (2016)**

Ciel brouillé	‘se fondre en pleurs’ ‘implacable’
Remords posthume	‘le tombeau’ (used twice, and heavily connoted in Q1 with: ‘au fond d’un monument’, ‘marbre noir’, ‘alcôve’, ‘caveau’, and ‘fosse’, and given ability to speak in T2) ‘les morts’ ‘remords’
Les ténèbres	‘tristesse’ ‘condamne’ ‘hélas’
De profundis clamavi	‘gouffre obscur’ ‘horreur’ (used twice) ‘cruauté’
Élévation	‘miasmes morbides’ ‘ennuis’ ‘chagrins’

Chevereau himself acknowledges the negativity of the poem texts he had selected to set to music in the composer’s note for the score. For Chevereau, the Baudelaire set ‘fait écho à mes *Deux mélodies saturniennes* sur des poèmes de Verlaine, quoiqu’avec une noirceur et une morbidité plus accusées.’ [‘echoes my *Deux mélodies saturniennes* on poems by Verlaine, albeit with a more tangible gloominess and despair’] (Chevereau 2014; 2017). In identifying the selected poems as particularly dark, Chevereau also gives an indication of the musical soundworld the texts have prompted for him in terms of the musical design for the songs, as well as offering an insight into his own emotional responses to these texts. Drawing together these negatively-connoted poems reframes the texts themselves (song-as-work) and of sets new interpretations in progress (song-as-event).

### **Treatment of poems and organisational design**

Chevereau recognises that the combination of these five sombre poems, extracted from *Les Fleurs du mal*, and put together in a song cycle does not create a narrative cycle derived from the poem texts. Instead, Chevereau suggests that if the set is to be conceived of as a ‘cycle’, then it comes from the musical design rather than the textual content: ‘le cycle, c’est plutôt la musique, pas forcément les textes’ [the cycle is more the music and not necessarily the texts] (Researcher interview 2016). Chevereau only reluctantly calls these songs a ‘cycle’, recognising that these are not in the mould of the song cycle from the German Romantic tradition, which incorporate a narrative arc (often of a life cycle, or a story going from loneliness, to love, to loss). Yet the five songs are linked through common traits. The first four songs are dark, musically, either because of relentless walking, sinuous, chromatic basslines (songs 1 and 3), incessant rhythmic drive (song 2) or sparseness reinforced by major 7ths (song 4). The fifth song is the only one which opens in a major key, and the vocal entry creates a forward drive through its rising semitone phrase above a piano F pedal note beginning loosely around F major (F<sup>6</sup>) (Music Example 1) and climaxing into a clear D major (2<sup>nd</sup> inversion) on the word ‘champs’ (marked *fortissimo*) in the line ‘S’élancer vers les champs lumineux et sereins’ [Soar up towards the radiant and calm fields] (Music Example 2).

#### ***Music Example 1: ‘Élévation’ bars 1–6***

**Irréel et évanescent** (♩ = 56)

*p*  
*con Flû.*

3 *p*  
Au-des-sus des é-tangs, au-des-sus des val-lées,  
5 Des mon-ta-gnes, des bois, des nu-a-ges, des

**Music Example 2: 'Élévation' bars 37–44**

37 *p molto espressivo* *mf*  
Heu-reux ce-lui qui peut d'une ai-le-vi-gou-reu-se S'é-lan-cer vers les  
*p cresc. poco a poco* *mf*  
41 *f* *ff* *p*  
champs lu-mi-neux et se-reins; *f* *ff* *f*

The pace then slows and the dynamic range and vocal tessitura become more restricted for the static final quatrain. Through techniques such as these, Chevereau largely respects the thematic coherence of the poems as predominantly negatively-connoted, while bringing the set to a close on a note of muted hope rather than outright positivity. In respecting the thematic content of the texts in this way (the macro-structure), Chevereau also endeavours to preserve each poem's integrity (the micro-structure) by adapting core aspects of his musical framework to the poem, rather than the other way round. Chevereau does not situate the songs in overtly diatonic musical language, instead allowing his harmonic frame to flex as the song develops. He also does not select one dominant musical metre, frequently changing time signatures so as to adapt the metrical properties of the music to the metrical properties of the prosody of the verse line (see Table 2).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2: Schematic Analysis of Chevereau Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire (2016)**

Song/Poem Title	Musical framework	Treatment of poem text
	metre / tempo / vocal tessitura	metre / stanzas / repetition / omission / word change
<b>Ciel brouillé</b>		12syll (6+6), 4 x quatrains
	4/4 with sections in 3/4, 2/4, and 6/4	Stanza breaks not clearly demarcated in musical design.
	Placide (crotchet = 66)	No repetition, omission, or word changes.
	B sharp to d <sup>7</sup>	
<b>Remords posthume</b>	5/8–3/8 alternating followed by 4/8 and 2/8 then long section of 2/4 before mixed section of 3/8, 5/8, 9/8 and 6/8	12syll (6+6), sonnet
	Agité (quaver = 168)	Stanza breaks clearly demarcated for each quatrain by musical interlude; T1 splits after second line, and the remaining line is run in with T2.
	d to f <sup>7</sup>	

		No repetition, omission, or word changes.
<b>Les ténèbres</b> <sup>10</sup>	6/8 (9/8) then 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8 Lugubre (quaver = 88) d to f'	10syll (4+6), sonnet Stanza breaks not clearly demarcated; one piano interlude between l.10 & l.11 (following punctuation of sonnet) No repetition, omission, or word changes.
<b>De profundis clamavi</b>	[none], 6/8 with sections of 9/8 Recueilli (quaver = 120), Glacé (dotted crotchet = 50) c to f'	12syll (6+6), sonnet No stanza break between Q1 & Q2, but extended musical interlude between Q2 and T1; no stanza break between T1 & T2 (following punctuation of sonnet). No repetition, omission, or word changes.
<b>Élévation</b>	9/8, 12/8, 6/8, 2/4 Irréel et évanescent (dotted crotchet = 56) c to g'	12syll (6+6), 5 x quatrains Stanza breaks not clearly demarcated in musical design. No repetition, omission, or word changes.

This schematic analysis demonstrates that Chevereau does not use any word repetition, omission, or changes, maintaining the poem's integrity as a verse form designed with a particular aesthetic cadre. As the researcher interview (2016) with Chevereau indicated, the decision to not modify the text is a 'point d'honneur' [point of honour], because Chevereau aims to 'respecter le texte' [respect the text]. What this means in practice is that Chevereau has chosen to preserve sense units rather than maintain the metrical divisions of verse form. Chevereau allows only minimal line or stanza breaks, preferring to unite musical phrases through their overall syntactic drive (of the text, rather than the music), following

Baudelaire's punctuation where possible. For example, in 'Les ténèbres', Baudelaire strings together four relative clauses (beginning with 'Où') over the course of ten lines of the sonnet before providing the reader with a full stop. Chevereau does the same in his musical setting, not allowing the vocal line to pause or rest for any length of time (typically no more than two beats rest) until the full stop. At this point (end of b. 31), Chevereau then inserts a three-bar piano interlude, including a bar of 'quasi cadenza' which ends with a fermata. This decision to follow Baudelaire's large-scale syntactical sense-units is echoed in all five of the songs, demonstrating what Chevereau understands by the concept of 'respecting the text'. In the preface to the songs Chevereau explains how he seeks thereby to enable the poem's text to be understood: 'Les courbes musicales répondent aux phrasés naturels de la langue parlée dans un souci très scrupuleux d'intelligibilité des poèmes.' ['The contours of the music follow natural speech patterns, and the primary concern is the intelligibility the poetic text.'] (2016: 2). This correlates with his comments offered during the researcher interview (2016): 'le français n'a pas d'accent tonique, la prosodie n'était pas du tout problématique (...), je suis le sens – je veux qu'on comprenne le texte (...) pas s'arrêter à chaque fin de vers' ['French has no pitch accent, the prosody was not at all problematic (...) I follow the sense – I want people to understand the text (...) not stopping at the end of each verse']. However, by opting for an apparently natural way of reading Baudelaire's poetry, the concept of what is 'natural' becomes complicated by the musical fabric. For example, in the opening of 'De profundis clamavi', Chevereau indicates how the opening two lines of the sonnet are to be performed 'quasi recitativo', adding the following indication to the singer: '*semplice, en suivant les courbes naturelles de la langue parlée*' [*simply, following the natural contours of spoken language*]. This naturalness is technically a conceit: there is nothing really natural, normal, or everyday about singing in this way, although it is perhaps closer to natural speech than it is,

for example, to the classical French style of declaiming poetry on an intoned note with heavily weighted syllables.<sup>11</sup>

Because of this musicalised diction, there are inevitably some moments of tension between the metrical accents of the music and those of the words. Chevereau's avoidance of a consistent musical meter provides a means to flex musical rhythms in line with the text and poetic-syntactic phrase where possible. However, the fast-paced rhythmicity of 'Remords posthume', for example, brings the tensions between word and music into sharper relief because syllables are hurried along; the composer seeks to attenuate this by indicating that the singer perform with good articulation ('bien articulé'). Furthermore, Chevereau uses a text notation technique throughout the five songs to indicate where accentual tensions need to be assuaged, and others foregrounded. Tenuto markings, using the symbol  $\text{—}$  over a specific note, signal where a particular weight is expected; an absence of a tenuto marking suggests that the note is not to be emphasised (Music Example 3).

**Music Example 3: 'Remords posthume' bars 1–9**

Agité (♩=168) *p bien articulé*

Lors-que tu dor-mi-ras,

*p* *mp* *p* *mp*

*senza ped.* *staccatissimo*

5

ma bel-le té-né-breu-se, Au fond d'un mo-nu-ment cons-truit en

*p* *mp* *mp* *p* *mp*

In performance, these markings can be expressed in various ways. In the studio recording of ‘Ciel brouillé’, for example, Jérôme Boutillier makes particular use of the voiced fricative of the ‘v’ consonant on the word ‘vapeur’ (b. 9) to emphasise that syllable (Chevereau has inserted tenuto markings for each of syllable of va-peur in the score). This may also help mitigate the slightly over-stated emphasis in the vocal writing for the first syllable of ‘d’u-ne’ (b. 9) which immediately precedes it (on the lowest note of the vocal phrase, on a crotchet, at the start of a bar), and for which Chevereau does not include a tenuto marking. Similarly, in the live recording of the Paris premiere, Boutillier very clearly demarcates the first two syllables of the keyword ‘ténèbres’ in bb. 15–16 of ‘Les ténèbres’, but gives lesser emphasis to other syllables with tenuto markings elsewhere. By contrast, it is surprising to hear the emphasis on the third, rather than the expected fourth, syllable of ‘l’im-men-si-té’ (b. 19) in *Élévation*, which has come about because of the 6/8 metre which sees that syllable fall on the fourth quaver of the bar (felt as the second beat of the compound duple time), and because Chevereau has raised the pitch by a semitone for that syllable. Such prosodic tensions – always small-scale and context-specific – are unavoidable, given the competing demands of the music and the words, but Chevereau seeks to mitigate excessive prosodic-accentual disruptions wherever possible, through a combination of techniques.

Chevereau uses minimal large intervallic leaps, mirroring the narrower tessitura of natural speech. Extended sections of the vocal line are declaimed on one pitch, including entire alexandrines such as l. 9 of ‘Remords posthume’ delivered entirely on a (bb. 48–52), or l. 3 of ‘De profundis clamavi’ delivered entirely on b (bb. 2–4). Chevereau makes only very minimal use of melisma (more than one note per syllable), and even this is usually only for a passing note or for a brief moment of expressive commentary on the text (such as the *espressivo* of ‘tièdes et voilés’ in ‘Ciel brouillé’, for which he writes seven notes for the five



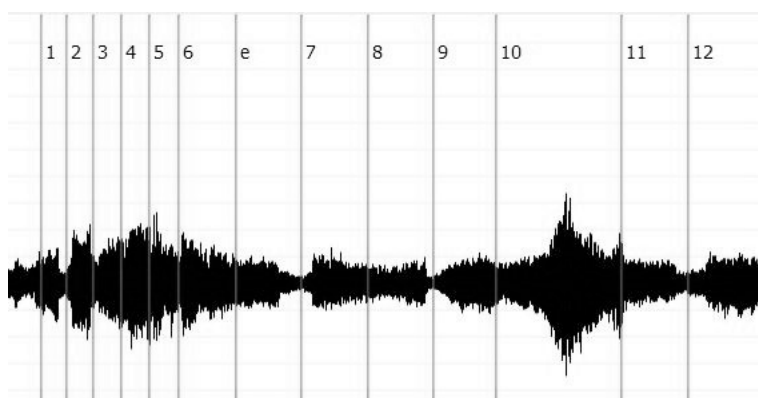
syllables (the first syllable of ‘tiè-des’ is granted two notes, with the first enjoying a long held note over three beats; ‘et’ is also given two notes). Despite the restricted vocal ambitus, both within each musical phrase and across the set of songs which spans one and a half octaves (not stretching the full compass of the baritone range), Chevereau creates a lyrical-melodic style that is more expansive than normal speech, both in terms of pitch and tempo, but not aria-like or embellished. The implications of Chevereau’s treatment of the poetic text (song-as-work) and of how his text-setting decisions can be performed (song-as-event) expose how a work expressly designed for a particular singer (Boutillier) and performed by the composer himself at the piano structure our experiences of those songs.

### **Soundworlds**

Chevereau’s soundworld does not thwart conventions of song because it retains a lyric quality but his compositional style does not adhere to a standard diatonic framework. The status of these songs as ‘lyrical’ is to be understood in the sense outlined by Vincent Delecroix of a lived experience which is also a testing-ground for new aesthetic effects: ‘le chant indique le lieu d’une expérience: il faut parler avant tout d’état lyrique’ [song reveals the site of an experience/experiment: we should talk above all of a *lyric state*] (2012: 339).<sup>12</sup> It is possible to locate the lyric state within a score, but the perceptual-experiential properties of lyrical compositions are unearthed in performance(s) of songs, as a live, or lived events. Moreover, recordings (as audio inscriptions) enable us to scrutinise the lyric phenomena of songs in a different way from analysing scores (textual inscriptions usually prior to the event) or performances (which leave no inscription because they are ephemeral). For example, instead of looking at how a composer has notated treatment of the French *e caduc* or dropped *e* vowel (commonly known as the ‘mute *e*’, which gets performed in sung French), we can listen to that phoneme in the audio inscription, isolate it, visualise it, annotate it, and compare

it to other examples of mute *e*s. The Sonic Visualiser audio analysis tool enables us to mark up instances where the mute *e* gets performed, using the symbol ‘*e*’, such as the handling of l. 4 of ‘*Ciel brouillé*’ (bb. 17–18) as illustrated in Figure 2 by the vertical lines marking up syllable time instants, manually numbered according to syllable of the verse line (1–12) with ‘*e*’ at the point in the line where the extra syllable is performed (between syllables 6 and 7):

**Figure 2: ‘*Ciel brouillé*’ Sonic Visualiser markup l.4 syllables 1–7**



This line would ordinarily scan as twelve syllables, with a traditional pause at the mid-line caesura as per the following reading (| demarcates syllable, // the caesura):

Ré | flé | chit | l'in | do | lence // et | la | pâ | leur | du | ciel [6 + 6]

However, in Chevereau’s setting, the line takes on an additional syllable in the form of a sung *e* vowel that would normally be elided in the spoken verse line (| demarcates syllable, // the caesura, with extra mute *e* highlighted in bold):

Ré | flé | chit | l'in | do | len | **ce** // et | la | pâ | leur | du | ciel [7 + 6]

Annotating such instances of *e surnuméraires* enables us not only to identify how many of these additional syllables occur in a song, but also where they occur (mid-line or line-end), how frequently (consistency of treatment or not), and how intensively they are sounded (duration/volume in performance). In this instance, the duration of the *e surnuméraire* [ce] is

more or less equal to that of the preceding syllable [len] but performed at a more modest dynamic with a longer tail as it fades into quasi-inaudibility. In the score, the two syllables of [len] + [ce] are each given a crotchet note value, on the same pitch (f), and there is no rest between the end of the word ‘l’indolence’ and the start of the second half of the line ‘et la pâleur’. In fact, while Chevereau’s text-setting here seems to imply an additional syllable, through the separate notes, in performance the syllables are not necessarily so clearly distinct; Chevereau’s tenuto markings indicate that the first three syllables of ‘l’in-do-len-ce’ receive weight, where the final syllable (the *e surnuméraire*) does not. Other instances of mid-line *e surnuméraires* in this song receive different treatment. In line 13, an additional syllable is introduced before the caesura, but this time (i) the *e surnuméraire* is given a different note (a semitone lower than the previous syllable), (ii) the *e surnuméraire* is followed by a rest, justified by Baudelaire’s insertion of a comma after the direct apostrophe to the dangerous woman:

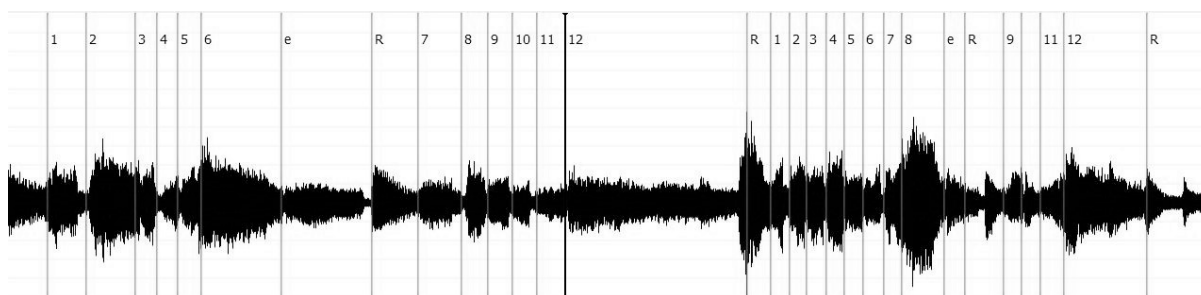
Ô | fem | me | dan | ge | reu | **se**, // ô | sé | dui | sants | cli | mats! [7 + 6]

In the following line, an additional syllable is introduced after the eighth syllable, but this time (i) the *e surnuméraire* is given a different note (a semitone lower than the previous syllable), and (ii) the *e surnuméraire* is given a shorter note value (a quaver instead of the preceding crotchet), and (iii) the *e surnuméraire* is followed by a rest, despite there being no indication of a pause at this point in the line by Baudelaire (Chevereau has run over the anticipated caesura after ‘aussi’ and shifted the pause to later in the line):

A | do | re | rai-je | au | ssi | ta | nei | **ge** // et | vos | fri | mas [9 + 4]

These lines are marked up in Sonic Visualiser using the syllable count (1–12), the *e surnuméraire* annotation (e), and the rest annotation (R) (see Figure 3):

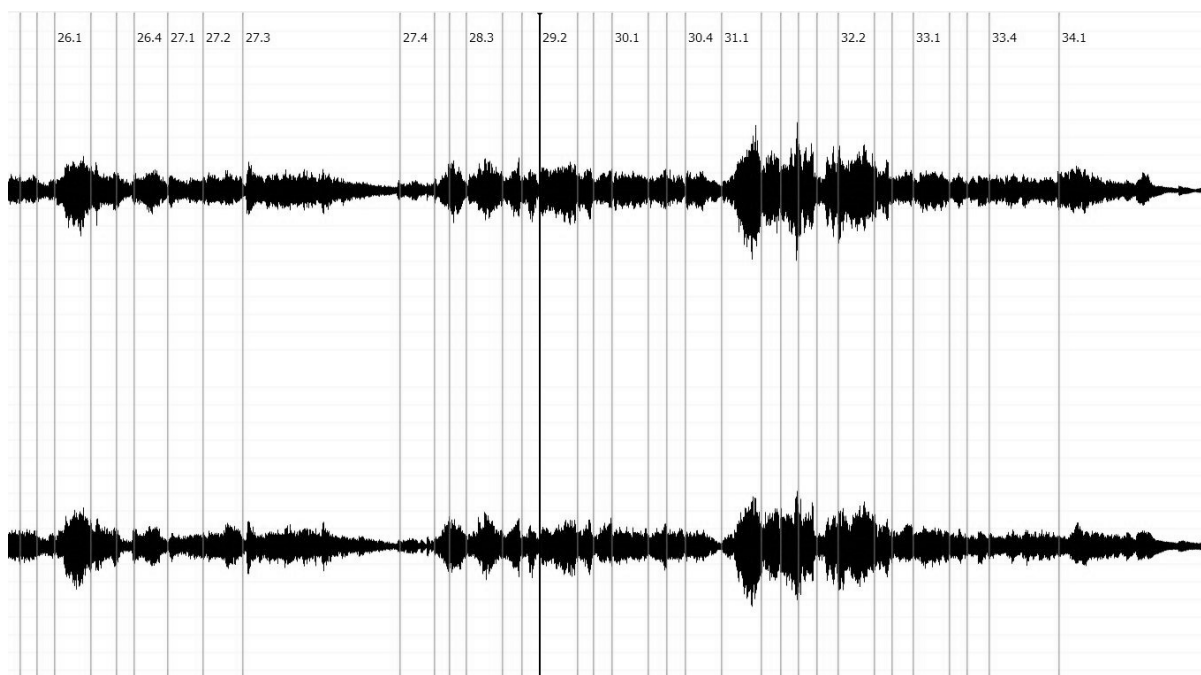
**Figure 3: ‘Ciel brouillé’ Sonic Visualiser markup ll.13–14 (full lines)**



Paying attention to details such as these foregrounds how interpretations of the poetic text by the composer and by the performer are necessarily individualised but also necessarily negotiated. Each of the different parameters pull against one another, such as maintaining the integrity of the verse line balanced against the need for a singer to breathe and an interpretative response to the emotional/thematic/sonic aspects of the poem's fabric in relation to that of the music.

From this micro-level scrutiny of a specific metrical feature as actualised in performance, we can zoom back out again to a macro-level study of poetico-musical semantics. Chevereau does not seek to create a musical illustration of the poem's meanings, but his particular use of piano figuration and tessitura provides interpretative colour. This, however, is not always clear in the visualisation of the 'flattened' audio signal that we can analyse in Sonic Visualiser, because the voice and piano are combined. Instead, it requires access both to the score and to a means of listening which diminishes the prominence of the vocal line in the audio signal. For example, for ll. 9–10 of 'Ciel brouillé', the stereo waveforms available in Sonic Visualiser do not help us to observe how Chevereau has interpreted the text (see Figure 4):

**Figure 4: 'Ciel brouillé' Sonic Visualiser markup ll.9–10 (full lines)**



Nothing in this visual representation indicates that Chevereau has offered a musical response to the text which refers to how the woman the poet admires resembles distant suns cloaked in mist ('Tu ressembles parfois à ces beaux horizons / Qu'allument les soleils des brumeuses saisons...'). Using the score (bb. 38–42) and listening to the track demonstrates that Chevereau has moved both hands of the piano high up in the treble clef (the lowest note is a', the highest a'''), with the left hand mirroring the vocal line by using light-touch doubling (only the upper note of each pair of quavers is the same note as the vocal line, albeit two octaves above), and the right hand using a tremolo figure. Coupled with the indication *molto misterioso* written into the score at this point in the song, this piano figuration hints at a musical depiction of the hazy mistiness described in the poem text, but is not overly determined. This light-touch approach to 'illustrating' the poem's meaning characterises Chevereau's approach to responding semantically to the poem's content, avoiding simple representational devices and favouring more subtle embedded relationships with the poetic text. The fact that we can only experience this response through hearing a performance or reading the score, but not through analysing it as a combined audio signal in a recording

analysis tool, confirms the need for deploying a range of different modes of analysis in order to establish as detailed a set of information as possible of what is taking place when a poem is set to music.

### **Resonances past, present, and future**

Much of the recent literary and musicological scholarship, and especially research which is not yet resourced by digitally-enabled (large) datasets, privileges techniques such as close-reading and small-scale corpus analysis. It is common, for example, to find articles dedicated to the detailed analysis of one Baudelaire poem, or to the comparison of two song settings of the same poem.<sup>13</sup> These approaches have served to enhance understanding of literary and musical artefacts by revealing significant riches as the analysis goes deeper. However, such approaches can stifle our ability to understand how they connect to wider aesthetic practices. A thick analysis method requires us to look beyond the artefact under analysis, so as to understand how it resonates with other related aesthetic phenomena. In the case of the Chevereau settings of Baudelaire, this can take us in a number of directions: to revisit the reach and significance of the poet's work, to revisit the composer's wider work, to revisit how these relate to the work of other composers, and to revisit how else the poet's work might be set to music.

For example, when we consider Chevereau's claim that he has chosen unusual Baudelaire poems to set to music, we can consider this against the context of the most frequently set Baudelaire poems as outlined in Table 3a and Table 3b.<sup>14</sup>

#### ***Table 3a: Most frequently and rarely set Baudelaire poems***

<b>Poem</b>	<b>No. settings</b>  <b>[no. in classical/mélodie genre]</b>
L'Invitation au voyage	75 [35]
Recueillement	72 [57]
La Mort des amants	71 [45]
Harmonie du soir	67 [47]
La Cloche fêlée	50 [45]

**Table 3b: Number of settings of Baudelaire poems selected by Chevereau**

<b>Poem</b>	<b>No. settings</b>  <b>[no. in classical/mélodie genre]</b>
Ciel brouillé	14 [3]
Remords posthume	11 [4]
Les ténèbres	7 [4]

De profundis clamavi	8 [4]
Élévation	27 [15]

In the case of four of the five poems selected by Chevereau, the low instances of song settings, all in single figures in the classical/mélodie genre, demonstrate that Chevereau is right to claim that very few (mélodie) composers have selected these poems before. But in the case of ‘Élévation’, the number of settings reaches into double figures, and there is a predominance of classical composers writing, like Chevereau, in the mélodie genre. Nonetheless, of those composers who have set ‘Élévation’, none is particularly well-known, apart from British composer Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012) who used the poem as the third of three aleatoric compositions for voice and piano entitled *Correspondances* (1975); the piece is not often performed, however, and only one recording exists.<sup>15</sup>

If a quantitative account gives one picture, another account which examines textual properties of poems selected reveals a different picture. Of the poems selected by Chevereau, all sonnets or poems in quatrains, ‘Ciel brouillé’ stands out as unusual in Baudelaire’s corpus for its distinctive rhyme scheme. In this poem, Baudelaire eschews the rule of alternating rhyme, typical of French poetry, which expects an interchange between masculine and feminine rhymes (where the latter ends with a mute e). ‘Ciel brouillé’ uses only masculine rhymes, resulting in an absence of line-end mute es, which means that Chevereau has fewer options for *e surnuméraires* than is the case with most song settings of French poetry.<sup>16</sup> However, the poem’s close semantic resonances with ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ make this poem more familiar than unusual, despite its unconventional rhyme scheme. Baudelaire reuses a number of key rhyme words in both poems: *mouillé* and *brouillé*, used in stanza three of ‘Ciel



brouillé' are also used as a rhyme pair in the first stanza of 'L'Invitation au voyage'. Both poems depict a similar scene in which the poetic voice compares his female lover, with eyes moist from tears, to the (exotic) misty landscape in which he imagines her. By looking back to Baudelaire, and looking out again from his poetry, we can observe that Baudelaire not only re-uses this image across poems (as might be expected) but that the same images resonate widely, with more than one reader and composer. Chevereau, in a pure numerical sense, has selected fairly unfamiliar or unusual Baudelaire poems, but he has still set a very familiar, canonical poet to music, privileging a common conception of Baudelaire's writing as dominated by negative and melancholic diction, and tinged with misty landscapes and blurred images of his lover.

To expand his palette further, Chevereau has also revisited his own work, rewriting his musical material for larger-scale forces. Orchestrations of the five songs reshape the restrained soundworld of the voice and piano version, modifying the work to fit a broader sonic ambition which nonetheless retains some level of restraint in its timbral figuration. The orchestral score indicates how the strings are often deployed with mutes or using pizzicato or tremolo, and the lower brass instruments (trombone and tuba) are used sparingly. The orchestrations are not a replica of the voice/piano version of the songs writ large, but a new version which inhabits a new soundworld in its own right, while still resonating with the voice and piano 'original'.

In the same way that Chevereau's orchestrated songs resonate with his own songs for voice and piano, so too do they resonate with songs by other (French) composers, through different means. Chevereau has outlined in a researcher interview (2018) that he particularly identifies with the song-writing styles of Claude Debussy and Charles Gounod because, in his words,

they create: ‘La prosodie toujours parfaite!’<sup>17</sup> [Always perfect prosody!]. Chevereau thus acknowledges that he admires their treatment of the French language; he does not turn to Debussy or Gounod because he can imitate their song-writing, especially not in the case of Baudelaire song settings, since Debussy only set five Baudelaire poems (and Chevereau chose none of the same texts) and Gounod did not set any of Baudelaire’s poems to music. Chevereau’s decision to turn to Baudelaire in 2015–16 is also echoed by a number of contemporary classical French composers, for whom the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Baudelaire’s death in August 2017 served as a prompt to create new works. For example, Lionel Ginoux composed *Les trois mélodies lourdes*, setting three of the six poems banned from the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* (‘Le léthé’, ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’, ‘Les bijoux’), premiered in Luchon by Sylvia Cazeneuve (soprano) and Caroline Oliveros (piano) on 5 August 2017. Similarly, a number of composers were commissioned to create Baudelaire settings for the 2017 masterclass series of the *Centre international de la mélodie française*, led by artistic director and baritone François Le Roux and premiered by him in Tours, accompanied by Jeff Cohen on 16 August 2017. Composers include two who have set the same poem, ‘Élévation’, also set by Chevereau: Jeff Cohen (‘Chanson’), Gérard Condé (‘Litanies de Satan’), Philippe Hersant (‘Réversibilité’), Jérémy Langouet (‘Élévation’), Dominique Lemaître (Élévation), Alexander Liebermann (‘Semper eadem’), and Christophe Looten (‘Recueillement’). These recent additions to the Baudelaire song œuvre by composers based in France, working in the contemporary *mélodie* genre demonstrate that Chevereau’s settings of Baudelaire form part of a broader network of contemporary artistic responses to Baudelaire’s poetry. The circumstances for the settings are different in each case, but treating each song in isolation ignores the ways in which they are ‘knotted into one another’ (Geertz 1973: 10) culturally and aesthetically.

### **Establishing a new commitment to poetry and music research**

Examining different song settings of Baudelaire's poetry, using a 'thick method' and drawing on an extensive dataset, prompts us to challenge our assumptions, modify our habits, and adapt our levels of (critical) attention. Chevereau's recent settings of Baudelaire, while not unique in the corpus, are rare for their completeness in terms of how researchers are able to access materials, resources, and related song phenomena. This special access has opened up different routes into, and out of, the poems and the songs. Chevereau's songs, drawn from the extensive dataset of the *Baudelaire Song Project*, offer sufficient scope to be indicative of the kind of deep-dive and multi-perspective approaches that are now possible with intermedial works such as song settings of poetry. Using a combination of established critical methods and new digital analysis tools to interrogate, represent, and understand the complex and imbricated data in different ways, has allowed us to establish a new commitment to:

#### ***a. Listening to / reading poems we might otherwise overlook***

As researchers invested in poetry and song cultures from the nineteenth century onwards, analysing a new composition such as Chevereau's *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* draws fresh attention to poems that might otherwise get overlooked in the corpus. Chevereau's statement that he has chosen less well-known poems to set to music prompts us to rethink the poems we might habitually go to when analysing Baudelaire: while it is tempting to turn to the 'usual suspects' of poems set to music such as 'La mort des amants', 'Harmonie du soir', or 'L'invitation au voyage' – all extremely famous Baudelaire poems which have received frequent musical treatment across all kinds of musical genres – this should not be to the detriment of understanding how a broad range of Baudelaire's poems are read and interpreted by different artists and audiences.

#### ***b. Examining aspects of poetic and musical language that we might otherwise gloss over***

As researchers with particular training and analysis skills, as well as our own aesthetic preferences, we each bring our own proclivities to the dataset. Being alert to this, and using a dataset to shift our attention away from what we might typically focus on, is important for what it reveals within the corpus. Having access to Chevereau's scores, audio recordings, live performances, as well as composer-specific details about aesthetic design compels us to interrogate as many aspects as possible, whether it is a mute e, a liaison, a rhythm, a keyword, a key, a lack of key, a flourish, a phrase direction, a harmonic emphasis, a word emphasis, a rhyme sound, or more besides.

*c. New repertoire and challenging audiences*

While Chevereau does not explicitly say that he devised his Baudelaire songs so that they could be programmed, for example, in the same concert as another set of Baudelaire songs (such as famous settings by Duparc, Faure, or Debussy), the creation of such songs mean that they provide new repertoire and programming choices for performers. Performers (and concert promoters) may not always be prepared to put on contemporary works, on the basis of anxieties around audience preferences (and potential impact on ticket sales), and yet are frequently on the lookout for different repertoire to refresh and expand their own programmes. For example, the Canadian soprano Stacie Dunlop expressly commissioned new Baudelaire settings from two Canadian composers for a theatrically-staged show, *Rêve doux-amer* (2012), which incorporated Debussy's Baudelaire songs, settings by Elliott Carter and Jonathan Harvey, as well as new commissions by Tawnie Olson and Clark Ross.<sup>18</sup> Relying on the staples of the song or *mélodie* repertoire inhibits, rather than extends, our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of how poetry and music can interact in productive and innovative ways.

To conclude, each aspect analysed (from poem choice, to technical treatment of structures and metrical features, to musical soundworld, to wider contexts) has foregrounded different practices and preferences, to which we are able to pay detailed and deep attention as a result of an approach which requires us to spend time with, inside, and around the song. The ‘thick method’ makes new demands of our critical-attentional abilities because, using a combination of digital tools and established literary/musical analysis techniques, it opens up the different layers within the poem, the music, the combined song, and the performances and recordings. Navigating this material requires us to refine how we attend to such a complex array of aesthetic and sensory phenomena. As Yves Citton has suggested, we are capable of adjusting our attention in order to see or hear a text or piece of music in a different way, but we can be inhibited by what surrounds us when we try to do so. For Citton, this means proactively prioritising ways of ‘modifying the environment that will condition my future perceptions’ (2017: 176). Citton’s approach sees our attention shifted by our ability to modify our listening/receiving environment (rather than our sensory organs, our eyes and ears in particular). By proposing a way to intervene in the environment through which we access highly imbricated and networked cultural phenomena, Citton echoes Geertz’s commentary on how to navigate ‘complex conceptual structures’ which are ‘knotted into one another’ (1973: 10).

In the case of song settings of poetry, developing a ‘thick method’ benefits from a deep understanding of the interconnections between the different inputs and features of song materials, as well as the surrounding contexts. The ‘thick method’ approach means switching in and out of texts, scores, performances, recordings, and paratexts, and navigating between macro- and micro-level properties and parameters. Bringing these strands of thought to bear on the analysis of song enables us to uncover aspects of the song-as-work and song-as-event

which are otherwise masked by our attentional-perceptual habits, as much as by our critical-theoretical training. By paying attention to as wide an array of source materials and sensory phenomena as possible, using a ‘thick method’ applied to song settings of poetry, it becomes possible to peel back the layers of texts and sounds in such a way as to understand the various drivers that condition our experience of song. Songs do not exist in isolation, but always in multiple different relational configurations to: (i) our senses of hearing and seeing; (ii) our preferences which shape our view of certain genres of song, such as classical art songs / French *mélodie*; (iii) our notions of what poetry such as Baudelaire’s does and says; and (iv) our experiences of words and music as a combined art form. In composing Baudelaire for contemporary times, Chevereau gives us access – as researchers, listeners, and performers – to a series of complex sensory events which open up the poetic landscape to fresh interrogation and new interpretations. We no longer simply read the poem but we hear it, enveloped in a musical soundworld that demands our attention in different, and often competing, ways.

If Chevereau’s motivation for setting Baudelaire to music derived from a desire to set less familiar poems to music, and to select those those poems which are more dark/negative in their imaginative world, then through the analytical frame of the ‘thick method’ of song analysis, it is possible to account for that impetus by requiring frequent shifts in how we gain access to the different features that make up the songs. The ‘thick method’ approach to song analysis thus establishes a framework to rove around inside songs, while drawing in materials from outside, so as to frequently change the angles of analysis, and in so doing inform fresh perspectives on poem and music alike. Not everyone might turn to ‘Ciel brouillé’, ‘Remords posthume’, ‘Les ténèbres’, ‘De profundis clamavi’, or ‘Élévation’ like Chevereau has, but in composing Baudelaire for contemporary times Chevereau has changed the environment

which conditions our perceptions of Baudelaire's poetry (Citton 2017: 176). Chevereau neither updates Baudelaire nor seeks to make him relevant for the twenty-first century, but exposes a highly personal response to Baudelaire's poetry which sets off new interactions within and beyond the work through the events that are created by it.

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<sup>2</sup> The *Baudelaire Song Project* has been provided with unique access to a range of song materials including: (i) scores, recordings, and orchestrations, some not yet published or released; (ii) interviews with the composer; (iii) attendance at premiere performance. The songs were premiered in Paris on 5 June 2016, at the Cathédrale Sainte-Croix des Arméniens in central Paris. Chevereau himself was at the piano, accompanying the baritone Jérôme Boutillier, for whom the songs had been written.

<sup>3</sup> See also: [www.nicolaschevereau.com/oeuvres/musique-vocale/cinq-po%C3%A8mes-de-baudelaire/](http://www.nicolaschevereau.com/oeuvres/musique-vocale/cinq-po%C3%A8mes-de-baudelaire/) (accessed 10 August 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Chevereau's songs are orchestrated for 2222/2221/Timbales/3 Percussion (bass drum, cymbal, tom-tom, snare drum, triangle, glockenspiel)/Harp/Strings, and the orchestration was premiered on 25 June 2019, at the Salle Ravel Levallois, with the Orchestre Symphonique Maurice Ravel youth orchestra, with Boutillier as baritone soloist. A live recording is available at the composer's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/PBIWBqapUgI> (as at 2 July 2019). Debussy orchestrated *Le jet d'eau* [*The Fountain*] in 1907 (17 years after the publication of the original version for voice and piano in 1890); Duparc orchestrated *La vie antérieure* [*A Former Life*] in 1911, some 27 years after the publication of the original version for voice and piano in 1884). By contrast, Fauré only ever orchestrated four of his own songs, and none of his three Baudelaire settings.

<sup>5</sup> Three editions of *Les Fleurs du mal* exist: the first 1857 edition comprises 100 poems, but Baudelaire was taken to court and prosecuted for moral outrage and six of the poems were banned and had to be removed from all extant copies of the work still available for sale; the second 1861 edition comprises 126 poems, with the notable addition of the 'Tableaux parisiens' section; the third 1868 edition is a posthumous edition of 153 poems finalised by Charles Asselineau, Théodore de Banville, and Théophile Gautier after Baudelaire was

unable to complete the edition through illness and subsequent death in August 1867. Full texts of each edition are freely available online (with English translations) from: <https://fleursdumal.org/> (accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Voyant Tools has been developed by researchers at McGill University and the University of Alberta, Canada as a web-based text reading and analysis environment. See: <http://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/about> (accessed 15 August 2018). The *Baudelaire Song Project* Excel spreadsheet song analysis proforma is available in all of our data tables, and we encourage other researchers to use and adapt the proforma for other song corpora. See: [www.baudelaire-song.org/data-tables/](http://www.baudelaire-song.org/data-tables/) (accessed 15 August 2018). Sonic Visualiser is an application for viewing and analysing the contents of music audio files, developed by the Centre for Digital Music, Queen Mary, University of London. See: <https://www.sonicvisualiser.org/> (accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>7</sup> One term—*bois*—has been removed from the frequency count, since the digital analysis tool does not distinguish, in this instance, between the noun ‘*bois*’ (wood), used once each in ‘*De profundis clamavi*’ and ‘*Élévation*’, and the second-person singular form of the verb ‘*boire*’ (to drink), used in the imperative form in the third stanza of ‘*Élévation*’.

<sup>8</sup> <http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=b9bf0dc216efe410e1adb6dae52ec811&view=Cirrus> (accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed visualisation of the metrical properties of Baudelaire’s poems, see *Métrique en ligne* (the ‘noyaux syllabiques’ tab gives a full metrical analysis of each poem): [http://crisco.unicaen.fr/verlaine/index.php?navigation=textesauteurs&auteur=BAU\\_1](http://crisco.unicaen.fr/verlaine/index.php?navigation=textesauteurs&auteur=BAU_1) (accessed 17 August 2018).

<sup>10</sup> ‘*Les ténèbres*’ is the first of four sonnets from the ‘*Spleen et idéal*’ section of *Les Fleurs du mal*, grouped under the collective title of ‘*Un fantôme*’, along with ‘*Le parfum*’, ‘*Le cadre*’, and ‘*Le portrait*’.

<sup>11</sup> There are perhaps echoes of Debussy’s vocal writing in this decision, since Debussy is renowned for his aim to capture in sung French a more ‘natural’ or everyday delivery, especially in his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Gribenski 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Note that the French term ‘*une expérience*’ comprises both senses of experience and experiment.

<sup>13</sup> Examples are numerous, but stand-out recent analyses of single poems include Kevin Newmark’s analysis of ‘*Les sept vieillards*’ (2018) or Susan Blood’s analysis of ‘*À une passante*’ (2008). Recent comparative studies of two or more song settings of the same Baudelaire poem include Muriel Joubert’s analysis of three settings of ‘*Recueillement*’ (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Information retrieved from <https://www.baudelaire-song.org/search/> as at 19 January 2021.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael Downes’ article. The piece was written for Meriel Dickinson (soprano) and Peter Dickinson (piano), who released a recording on vinyl on the Unicorn-Kanchana label in 1979 on the *Dreamscapes* album, subsequently re-released on CD with the same label in 1990, and again on the Heritage label in 2012 on the *British Songs* album.

<sup>16</sup> The pairs of *rimes plates* which structure each stanza comprise eight rhyme sounds in all: *-vert, -el, -lés, -ord/t, -z/sons, -ouillé, -ma[t]s, -er*.

<sup>17</sup> Researcher interview with Nicolas Chevereau, online, 15 August 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Tawnie Olson composed a setting of ‘*Le revenant*’ and Clark Ross composed a setting of ‘*Les bijoux*’ (Dunlop 2016; Strecker 2012).