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“Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues”:

Translations and Transformations of Baudelaire in Black Metal Music

Helen Abbott and Caroline Ardrey

What does Baudelaire’s poetry sound like? How do other people make Baudelaire’s poetry sound? These two interlinked questions remind us that as poetry goes from the page to performance, it is reliant on the voices and sounds of others. Baudelaire’s poetry is constructed from sound patterns and thematic networks which afford the text a particular set of characteristics and influence particular performance genres. Attributes of Baudelaire’s poetry, pervaded by dark imagery, give rise to distinctive performance responses which exploit alternative vocal and sonic techniques. As Baudelaire makes other people—and objects—speak and sound within his poetry, he invites us to explore the source and the nature of these voices and sounds. In the verse poem “L’Horloge” (*OC* 1:81), Baudelaire famously makes the clock speak, calling it a “dieu sinistre.” The warning voice of the clock lists all the things that the poet should remember, making grandiose claims about its own impressive powers. In an off-hand hyperbolic parenthesis, the clock proclaims that it is capable of speaking all languages: “(Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues.)” The clock describes the source of its voice as coming from its “metal throat,” using seemingly direct language to describe its mechanism as it menacingly ticks “Trois mille six cents fois par heure.” Yet this “metal throat” of “L’Horloge” takes on a different hue when it is set against new contexts in which *Les Fleurs du Mal* poems are reused and reworked. What do Baudelaire’s “sinister” poems sound like in these new contexts? How do other people make Baudelaire’s “sinister” poems sound? These

two questions will be the main focus of this article, which examines settings of Baudelaire's poetry in metal music genres.

Baudelaire's use of the term "sinistre" is shaped by his interpretation of "le mal" as the dark but enticing side of humanity, which today is widely interpreted as the 'gothic' side of a poet who finds beauty in things that others find dark. Other interpretations of Baudelaire's dark side have been shaped by shifting concepts of satanism. In the late 1880s, Paul Verlaine characterized a dominant mode of reception of Baudelaire's poetry as shaped by a satanism understood as "le haut et douloureux spiritualisme, l'exquisement amère sensualité" by a wide reading public ("la masse de lecteurs"), thanks to the work of the then popular poet Maurice Rollinat whose *Les Névroses* (published in 1883) were heavily inspired by Baudelaire's dark side.¹ This marks the first in a series of phases of interpretation of Baudelaire's poetry. Where a late-nineteenth-century readership focused on the satanic as a spiritually-inflected aesthetic mode, more recent perceptions of Baudelaire's poetry, notably through musical settings, are shaped by fresh versions of a satanism myth which is more overt in its counter-cultural rebellion.

Musical settings of Baudelaire's poetry have played a key role in cementing his 'mythical' status. Classical music's interest in appropriating Baudelaire's words is well known, with famous *mélodies* such as Henri Duparc's renowned 1870 setting of "L'Invitation au voyage" and Claude Debussy's *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire*, composed in the 1880s. Baudelaire's poetry has also been taken up by many musicians in popular and alternative musical genres, though this aspect of the poet's reception history has often been overlooked. As the analysis below uncovers, the 'gothic' aspects of Baudelaire's poetry (and the related perceptions of his persona) have sparked significant interest amongst key cultural groups, manifested especially in rock and metal music and over a wide international spread. Black metal music is one of a number of extreme sub-genres of heavy

metal music, which also includes death metal, thrash metal, and doom metal. Although there is significant cross-over between these heavy metal sub-genres, broadly speaking, black metal is characterized by particular musical, performative and thematic traits, including rapid tempi, screaming and ‘death growl’ vocals, and an emphasis on satanic themes. Black metal has been particularly influenced by Baudelaire’s poetry, weaving his language into lyrics concerned with satanic and apocalyptic themes. International metal bands such as Gorgoroth, Necromantia, Rotting Christ, and Transmetal—all well known in the field of black metal—have set his poetry to music, with examples from the 1990s to the present day. These Baudelaire settings feed into an ongoing interest amongst sub-groups of popular and youth culture in the key themes of death, satanism, and decay that are prevalent the poet’s *œuvre*, as evidenced by Patrick Eudeline’s 2005 book *Goth: Le Romantisme noir de Baudelaire à Marilyn Manson*.²

The relationship between canonical authors and others who reuse their works in different adaptation contexts is always fraught, particularly when the adapted work seems to be somehow far removed from a text’s original context. However, as Robert Walser reminds us in *Running with the Devil*, heavy metal musicians have long drawn on the work of canonical classical composers. Their reuse of established works tells us something about metal’s relationship with cultural tradition in terms of creative design. Using the example of Johann Sebastian Bach, Walser asks: “if we don’t understand his influence on the music of Ozzy Osbourne or Bon Jovi, do we really understand Bach as well as we thought we did?”³ In this article, we pose the same question *à propos* of Baudelaire and heavy metal, exploring the way in which black metal musicians have appropriated Baudelaire’s words, and examining how his work is opened up afresh by black metal settings. When black metal musicians appropriate Baudelaire for their own creative output, they exploit particular facets of the poet-persona and his work. To understand how they do this, this

article will begin by exploring the thematic traits which might make Baudelaire's poetry particularly amenable to black metal. It will then go on to analyze how these aspects have been foregrounded in four settings of "Les Litanies de Satan" in French and English. "Les Litanies de Satan" (*OC* 1:123-25) offers a particularly rich case study because it has become a "reference text" for experimental and fringe musical genres. For example, avant-garde electronic composers Ruth White and Diamanda Galás both set the poem to music in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, transforming his poetry through electronic voice distortion and experimental vocal techniques.⁴ Galás' performance in particular has taken on a "cult" status, influencing other musical interpretations including some by black metal bands.⁵

Whatever the musical style that emerges from setting "Litanies de Satan" to music, the way in which Baudelaire's words are fused with music needs to be examined under an appropriate critical lens. Kofi Agawu's theorizations on the semiology of song are a helpful starting point. Agawu notes that:

the conjunction of two independent sign systems, music and words, creates a third, song. [...] [T]he resulting alloy should be understood in a multiplicity of ways: how the resulting compound structure signifies and how its two inputs signify, both singly and in conjunction. A semiotics of song prescribes neither a text-to-music nor a music-to-text approach; its sole requirement is that the enabling conditions of each approach be made explicit.⁶

Varied "enabling conditions" shape the different black metal settings of Baudelaire's "Les Litanies de Satan" under consideration here. The four settings of the poem differ in terms of language

choice, performance techniques and the way in which they approach the fusion of words and music in song. In particular, a key focus for this analysis is the role of the vocalist, who may be performing in a language which is not their own, presenting the text in translation, or using spoken-voice techniques or highly distorted (and often inaudible) vocalizations of the text. This focus on vocal techniques extends Agawu's approach to the semiotics of song which denies agency to the performer by considering song itself primarily as a text or score with a "compound structure." The "resulting alloy" of song is, in our view, never stable or permanent, because the agency of the singer is necessarily inscribed in the fabric of the song, as resolutely and essentially a part of its formation. The same words and music can always be performed in different ways, as the existence of numerous different settings of "Les Litanies de Satan," and of sampled or cover versions, indicates. Our analysis recognizes that, unlike many mainstream musical genres, the unstable relationship between the "alloy" of words and music in black metal settings means that we need to focus precisely on those instances where the poetic text is inaudible, performed in a strange accent, or suppressed altogether. This is because these aspects are an inherent feature of the black metal aesthetic, not just in terms of vocal technique, but also in terms of how they encourage us to conceptualize otherness and alternative ways of interpreting our relationship with the world.

Black metal is bound up with a mythology which draws on the darker aspects of certain literary, cultural, and artistic traditions. Themes typically include spirituality and the occult: a Biblically-informed but anti-Christian stance is characteristic of black metal bands. There are some obvious reasons why black metal musicians, in particular, might have taken an interest in the darker side of Baudelaire's *œuvre*, in which he explores the relationship between the lyric voice and the Devil. We might expect such musicians to foreground the demonic and occult aspects of Baudelaire's *œuvre*, tapping into the poet's mythologized 'Satanic' persona. This casting of

Baudelaire as an occult figure is taken only in part from his poetry; much of this poetic identity is a construct of his reception history. Casting Baudelaire as ‘other’—as flâneur, melancholic, or satanist—is, however, to forget the multifaceted nature of his poetic persona and to overlook the diversity of experience and the experimentation which he brought to creative practice. Although “Les Litanies de Satan” in black metal music might, on one hand, play into one of the obvious clichés surrounding Baudelaire’s reception, in fact the creative reception of Baudelaire’s poetry by other people does not always conform to expectations.

“Les Litanies de Satan”

Of all known song settings of Baudelaire’s poetry, “La Mort des amants,” “Recueillement,” and “Harmonie du soir” are the most frequently set to music.⁷ This trend is particularly prevalent in classical art song settings of Baudelaire’s poetry; however, in the case of rock and heavy metal settings, the distribution of poems is rather different. It is in rock, alternative, and extreme metal genres that we find less common choices such as settings of the “Au Lecteur,” the heavily visual sonnet “Une gravure fantastique,” and the four “Spleen” poems.⁸ This suggests that rock and alternative musical genres exploit different thematic agendas from those favoured by classical composers. Of the thirteen song settings of “Les Litanies de Satan” identified to date, seven are performed by black metal bands, with lyrics in a range of different languages, pointing to the peculiar popularity of the poem with musicians in this particular sub-genre of extreme metal. Four of these settings will receive particular attention in this article because of their linguistic commonality: two settings are in French, by Theatres des Vampires and Rotting Christ (Italian and Greek bands, respectively), and two are in English, by Ancient Rites and Necromantia (Belgian and Greek bands, respectively).⁹ The remaining three black metal settings (which, for reasons of

space, will not be analyzed in detail in this article) are in Russian, Norwegian, and Spanish (by Russian, Norwegian, and Mexican bands, respectively).¹⁰ The international coverage of each of the bands—both geographically and in terms of language choice—is significant. In taking on a provocative text by a canonical French poet, there is not a French band among them.

The poem “Les Litanies de Satan” was first published in 1857, as part of the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Although the title of Baudelaire’s collection plays ambiguously with the dual meaning of ‘Mal’ as both pain and evil, the typical translation into non-Romance languages such as English (*Flowers of Evil*) and German (*Die Blumen der Bösen*) suggests a general tendency in Baudelaire’s reception to foreground ideas of evil, satanism, and moral deviance in his work. Perhaps surprisingly, when Baudelaire was put on trial for *Les Fleurs du Mal* on the grounds that some of the poems in the collection constituted an affront to public decency, “Les Litanies de Satan” was not among the six poems which were censored. Through his direct address to the devil in “Les Litanies de Satan,” Baudelaire confronts the problem of evil. Damian Catani argues that there are three different strands to the presentation of evil in Baudelaire’s work, as identified by Walter Benjamin: satanism, crime, and social marginalization.¹¹ All three of these aspects are present in “Les Litanies de Satan,” albeit to differing degrees. Satanism is heavily foregrounded in the title, in the “O Satan” refrain repeated fifteen times, and in the closing “Prière” in which the devil is named. In the sixth stanza, Baudelaire also references those other aspects of evil, crime and social marginalization, through a supplication to the devil on behalf of the “proscrit,” a figure understood as both criminal and outcast. Yet this is a poem which also goes beyond an examination of evil. “Litanies de Satan” is inherently based on translation and transformation, appropriating thematic, linguistic and structural traits from the Christian liturgy. The poem is made up of fifteen pairs of alexandrines, in rimes plates, alternating with the refrain “O Satan, prends pitié de ma

longue misère.” These are followed by a six-line coda—a prayer addressed to Satan, also in alexandrines. On a structural level, the poem has an incantatory quality because of the repeated refrain. Baudelaire’s familiarity with, and ambivalence towards, Christian liturgy emerges clearly in the way the refrain adapts the Kyrie Eleison. In the black metal settings of Baudelaire’s poem, elements of religious chant re-emerge as an important point of reference (especially in Necromantia’s and Rotting Christ’s settings). The incantatory supplication of the refrain is not simply a subversion of the Christian tradition as expressed through Baudelaire’s own response to religion, but also a means to (re)integrate tradition into an alternative, or non-mainstream, creative imaginary. The appeal of Baudelaire’s text for these musicians, then, is not just that it addresses and glorifies Satan and evil, but that it does so in ways that hark back to long-held (and problematic) spiritual traditions which, in turn, resonate with the black metal aesthetic.

Settings in French

French-language settings of Baudelaire’s poetry in black metal call into question the relationship between language and cultural identity in performance in a variety of ways. Neither of the singers performing the French-language settings of this poem is a native French speaker, and the delivery of the French text is heavily accented in both cases. In some respects, this alienates the text from its Frenchness and canonicity, lending it a quality of otherness which removes it from a stable cultural identity. Theatres des Vampires and Rotting Christ exploit a different linguistic tradition, bringing the French text into contact with their own cultural contexts.

Theatres des Vampires—Theatres des Vampires is an Italian black/gothic metal band formed in 1994 and, while some of their songs appear in their native tongue, much of the band’s output is in

French and English. Their choice of band name signals a preoccupation with vampirism, hinting at a fascination with conventions of ritual and performance. The absence of diacritical features—in this case an acute accent and a circumflex—in the word “theatres” is an anglicism pointing towards the linguistic and cultural shifts which characterize the band’s musical output. The group’s setting of “Les Litanies de Satan” appears as track 11 on their 2001 album *Bloody Lunatic Asylum*. Their interest in nineteenth-century French poetry and its treatment of themes of Hell and corruption is reinforced by the presence of track 3, “Une saison en enfer,” which is a homage to Arthur Rimbaud’s prose poem of 1873. Although typically seen as a black metal / gothic rock band, Theatres des Vampires also draw extensively on a symphonic soundscape. Their setting of “Les Litanies de Satan” is stylistically different from the other tracks on the album because the poem is recited, in an incantatory style, over Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. The track is therefore more a juxtaposition of words and music than a fused “alloy” (Agawu) of the two components. Experiments with the intersection between classical music and heavy metal are commonplace in sub-genres of metal, although the particular way in which this link is achieved, through a superimposition of words onto music, with little apparent reference to common traits of heavy metal (power chords, drums, thrashing bass) offers an alternative approach to exploring the relationship between classical music (in Adornian terms: high art) and heavy metal (low art). Theatres des vampires’ super-imposition of mid-nineteenth-century French poetry over early nineteenth-century piano music, within the context of a black metal song can be read in light of what Walser has called a “discursive fusion” which crosses the “sacrosanct boundaries” between classical and popular music (xv). Walser considers the interaction between classical music and heavy metal as a process of “defamiliarisation through cross-cultural juxtaposition”; it can also be read as an act of inscribing permanence and stability into an ephemeral musical form (xiv). Taking

a staple of the classical music repertoire (which is written without words) and appropriating it for other purposes is a common device in popular music (Fauré's *Pavane* is used, for example by Little Mix and Britney Spears). What is particularly striking in this case, however, is the borrowing not only from a musical tradition (German) but also from a literary tradition (French), opening up a transnational and transmedial dialogue through this word-and-music pairing which exploits otherness and alienation.

The theme of alterity lies very clearly at the heart of "Les Litanies de Satan," as the exiled poet figure appeals to an unlikely saviour in the devil. Theatres des Vampires' song setting of Baudelaire's poem thus plays on ideas of otherness through the musical and linguistic elements of performance, notably through the soft incantation of the text which is both disjointed and 'othered' by its performance in unusually accented French. There is limited correlation between the rhythms of the female vocalist Sonya Scarlet's spoken delivery of the text, and the regular pulse of the *Moonlight Sonata* underpinning the words. The lack of correlation is exacerbated by a two-layered voice—the audible spoken voice is anticipated by an almost inaudible whispered-voice version of the poem, out of sync with either the main vocal track or its accompaniment. This rhythmical disjuncture contributes to the setting's sense of being different or other. The vocalist deploys a limited mid-range tessitura for her spoken delivery, though the clarity of the words is distorted by this echo effect. Moreover, to a native Francophone listener, the performance of the French text in an Italian accent creates a further unsettling effect, overtly reinforcing how Baudelaire's poem is mediated through another mouthpiece. Scarlet opts to pronounce most of the latent final consonants, such as the "s" on "angoisses humaines."¹² There are instances, however, where the liaisons and/or pronunciation of a latent final consonant are technically incorrect, such as including

the final “t” of “la Mort” and the “s” on the end of the definite article “les hauteurs,” which further disrupt the Frenchness of the text.

The band have also made some changes to the poem, notably omitting every instance of the refrain. This structural omission makes a significant difference to the interpretation of the poem; from being a direct vocative expression in Baudelaire’s poem, in this song setting, Satan is addressed as “toi,” “le plus savant et le plus beau des anges” and the “Prince de l’Exil,” but is never explicitly named (other than in the song title which is itself not sung). This re-structuring has a number of effects: firstly, the second-person pronoun “toi” establishes a strong sense of proximity between the speaker and a devilish figure who remains shrouded in mystery because he is not named. The removal of the refrain also denies the poem the very characteristic that makes it overtly ‘musical’ in its structural design; its suppressed musicality is replaced by a well-known pre-existing piece of music which bathes the text instead in the programmatic tones of the sombre moonlight with which Beethoven’s sonata is inextricably associated. Theatres des Vampires have thus ‘othered’ the poem in multiple ways.

Rotting Christ—Appearing on their 2016 album *Rituals*, Rotting Christ’s setting of “Les Litanies de Satan” is the most recent black metal adaptation of the poem. The album prizes linguistic diversity with songs in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, English, and Sanskrit. There is a strong religious dimension to the album, with almost all tracks discussing themes of God and Satan, heaven and hell. In the original CD release of *Rituals* “Les Litanies de Satan” appears as track 4, standing between a song entitled “Elthe Kyrie” (Come Lord)—which invokes Christ as well as a number of the gods of Greek mythology—and “Apage Satana” a perverted setting of The Lord’s Prayer, again in Greek. This religious referencing, within an album focussed on Satanism and

devil-worship, subverts Christian practices, directly reinforcing the satanic nature of Baudelaire's poem but in a way which undermines the spiritual, moral, and psychological complexities of the poem. On the 2016 vinyl re-release the order of tracks is slightly different, with "Les Litanies de Satan" appearing as track 5 on the B-side, in between "Apage Satana" and "O, For a Voice like Thunder," which questions the wrath of God. Like *Theatres des Vampires*, Rotting Christ engage extensively with other people in their discography: from William Blake and Baudelaire to the Greek prog rock band Aphrodite's Child, weaving these into their aesthetic identity by foregrounding ideas of satanism and the occult.

Structurally speaking, Rotting Christ's setting of "Les Litanies de Satan" differs from the published version of Baudelaire's poem in a number of ways: firstly, the song ends at the ninth couplet—"Toi dont la large main cache les précipices / Au somnambule errant au bord des édifices." Rotting Christ do not follow each couplet with the refrain, opting instead to repeat it three times after the seventh and ninth couplets, reinforced by the repetition of "O Satan." The song unites the lyric voice and Satan against God and against the treacherous fate which, within the context of "Les Litanies de Satan," brought about the downfall of this "plus beau des anges." In ending the lyrics with the image of Satan's great hand which "cache les précipices / au somnambule errant au bord des édifices," the song refuses closure on a narrative-textual level.

However, Rotting Christ's setting of "Les Litanies de Satan" is also accompanied by a video, mostly in black and white, which presents an image of a winged figure standing on a fiery mountain. This depiction, which invites us to take account of the visual semiotics of performance, adds an additional layer of interpretation to Baudelaire's poem which goes beyond the truncated lyrics and modified structure. As the text becomes inaudible in places, drowned out by the thrashing guitars and synths, the visual comes into play instead; the music video participates in the

meaning-creation of the setting because it also displays the poem text as subtitles, enabling the audience to read what they cannot hear. This official lyric video also closes with an acknowledgement that the poem is Baudelaire's, clearly signalling the otherness of the text, as lyrics which are not their own.¹³

Settings in English

Other international metal bands opt to set Baudelaire's poem in English translation, rather than French. In appropriating the French text through linguistic transformation, both Ancient Rites and Necromantia signal a refusal to conform, privileging linguistic otherness.

Ancient Rites—Ancient Rites are a Belgian band, based in the Flemish region of Brabant and their song lyrics draw on a variety of languages and linguistic traditions. Their song "Exile" is an English-language adaptation of Baudelaire's "Les Litanies de Satan," which appears as track 2 on their 2001 album *Dim Carcosa*. The online heavy metal resource *Encyclopaedia Metallum* lists the band's main themes as "paganism," "satanism," and "European history," perhaps indicating why—of all Baudelaire's poems—"Les Litanies de Satan" appealed to the group as a source of lyrical inspiration.¹⁴ The emphasis in Ancient Rites' setting is placed on marginalization and the notion of exile, rather than on satanism per se. In opting to use the title "Exile," Ancient Rites also signal that their use of Baudelaire's poem interprets the text through a particular lens for which the band use only loosely translated lyrics. The song in fact begins in French, citing the refrain twice before shifting into English, sending the French text itself into exile. The emphasis on exile is reinforced by the repeated exclamation "Exile! Exile!" at the bridge section half-way through the track. The bridge section also introduces a new refrain "Oh Thou fallen angel of gloom, joyfully I

join thy side / Even if this means eternal fire, I embrace thy kingdom of night,” which is then repeated three times at the end of the song. This remodelling of the refrain restructures the poem, creating a bipartite song which relies on repetitive elements other than the refrain itself. The song starts with symphonic synths, before the drums enter, heralding a frenetic guitar solo which prepares the soundworld underpinning the vocal entry 22 seconds into the song. In the first half of the song, the vocalist Gunther Theys alternates between two different vocal styles, performing one line in a clear, shouting tone and the other in a death growl. This vocal technique distorts the human voice and obscures the words, deviating from accepted norms of vocal production typically used in song as a means to convey the text. It is a performance of otherness and difference. The death growl here has profound implications for the marginalized speaker/singer, presenting a figure who petitions to Satan as, himself, exiled other.

The translation and re-formulation of Baudelaire’s poem in English also establishes an uncertain relationship between the speaker and the devil, which means that he does not straightforwardly identify with Satan. Ancient Rites’ reworking has recourse to archaic language, using the familiar second-person pronoun “Thou” to refer to Satan, upholding a sense of intimacy created by the informal “toi” in the poem itself while also privileging tradition over modernity. The subversion of religious ideology is reinforced by the fact that the English lyrics are also subversive, refusing to directly translate Baudelaire’s poem. Satan is cast as a conscious reprobate who is reminded of his (social) exclusion in a mocking tone: “God only judges mild / Those who chant songs to his praise / Oh, Prince of Exile.” Later in the song, Satan is described as “a patron saint of / Heaven’s rejected souls,” calling into question the nature of sainthood in ways that are inferred from, but not directly present in, Baudelaire’s poem.

They change vocal technique with each line, reinforcing an interpretation of the poem as enacting a dialogue or duel between good and evil or between Christianity and Satanism. This alternation of vocal styles establishes a dual-faceted nature to the vocalist's persona and presents him as being, simultaneously, self and other.¹⁵ It also establishes a strange relationship between poetry and corporeality: through his vocal performance the singer is both the body which hosts this errant soul, and himself, revelling in the precarity of self-alienation. The shifts in vocal style also allow the new poetic voice (in the voice of the singer) to inhabit the fringes of popular culture, albeit in a different way from Baudelaire's poet-*flâneur*. This ability to slip into the guise of the other—and to take on deliberately distorted voices, such as the death growl—distances the singing self from what is being said in the text/lyrics, allowing the musical soundscape of distorted thrash and growl to take precedence over clarity of diction and line.

Necromantia—Necromantia are a Greek band whose songs take inspiration from subversions of orthodox Christian traditions. Necromantia's setting of "Les Litanies de Satan" comes from the 1993 album *Crossing the Fiery Path*. "Litanies de Satan" is the only song on the album which uses lyrics from another source, and the vocals tend towards speech instead of the death growls used on the rest of the album. Necromantia's English-language reworking uses two voices, which anticipate and echo each other at various points in the song. After a short choral "Alleluia" chant, the song begins with a distorted guitar solo. The first voice to enter is a whisper with a raw quality, anticipating the short burst of death growl with which the song ends. The other voice is a spoken, declaimed voice in accented English which is present for the majority of the song. Screams and laughter are also used at various points to punctuate the song and introduce the repeated direct address to the devil: "To thee, O Satan..." Unlike Ancient Rites' interpretation of the poem,

Necromantia's English-language adaptation follows the words of the original text quite closely, although they shift the position of the refrain. The ninth couplet is omitted from the translation, and lines 34 and 40 are moved, appearing only in the repeated lines after the refrain. Lasting just over 10 minutes, this is a long track, which reuses much of the textual and musical material to extend its canvas. In so doing, Necromantia present a complex reinterpretation of Baudelaire's poem, interspersing sections of music-only interludes, and gradually increasing the intensity of the vocal delivery through the shift from whispering and declamation to death growl over fast-moving drum and guitar accompaniment to close the song.

Necromantia's engagement with Baudelaire is not a one-off. They return to Baudelaire almost fifteen years later with a song entitled "Litanies de Satan: Act II—From Hell," which appears as the final track on their 2007 album *The Sound of Lucifer Storming Heaven*. This second Baudelaire-inspired song uses musical and vocal features which are more typical of extreme metal and stylistically in keeping with the rest of the album. On this track, Necromantia make extensive use of death growls and screaming vocals throughout, which make the lyrics almost entirely unintelligible. In this second word and music pairing, musical and sonic features take precedence over textual-verbal ones, while in their first Baudelaire setting, the lyrics are given prominence. The alternative reworking of Baudelaire's poem by the same band showcases the depth of Necromantia's engagement with the text, an engagement that is open to fresh interpretations at different points in time.

Conclusions

The voices of black metal may speak in many tongues and use a range of vocal techniques, but each of the bands discussed in this article appropriates Baudelaire as an established spokesperson

for satanism, offering an updated version of the nineteenth-century view of the latter as an oxymoronic form of beauty. The aesthetic ideology of satanism resonates strongly with the black metal scene because of its privileging of otherness. Just as the speaker of “Les Litanies de Satan” aligns himself with Satan as the “Prince de l’exil” and the friend of “parias maudits,” so do these bands align themselves with Baudelaire, presenting him as a kindred spirit and a champion of those marginalized by faith, moral stance, or aesthetic preferences. In engaging with the aspects of Baudelaire’s work which resonate with the black metal aesthetic, these musicians simultaneously carve out a space for themselves as other and develop a collective community of engagement with the poet and his work. Black metal treads a fine line between assimilation and alterity by exploiting the poetry of a canonical poet so as to perpetuate the dialogue between sameness and otherness by questioning the significance of tradition.

The different transformations of Baudelaire’s “Les Litanies de Satan” point to the continued and far-reaching significance of his work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, across a range of languages and cultures. The ways in which black metal bands engage with tradition establishes Baudelaire’s place within a range of culturally rich aesthetic identities, offering listeners a mythologized poetic persona with whom they may themselves identify. The translations and transformations of “Les Litanies de Satan” in black metal music show the different kinds of interpretations which open up when words are set to music. In the particular examples we have examined here, the bands have repositioned or suppressed the refrain, altering its use as a repetitive structuring device, and changing the emphasis of the poem. In casting Baudelaire as other (and as a figure of otherness to whom they can relate), these settings often undermine the dualities or oversimplify the complexities which are central to his poetic *œuvre* and to its reception, becoming a cliché of satanic rebellion fashioned to cohere with black metal ideology. Theirs is not

a permanent recasting of Baudelaire as simply a satanic figurehead, but rather a repeated and reiterated one, which reminds us that we need to be open to ways in which other people have appropriated his work in other formats and genres.

Even one hundred and fifty years after his death, there is still much to understand about Baudelaire and the implications of his poetic *œuvre*. The use of Baudelaire in black metal is not a marker of innovation or originality, but highlights the gradations of difference that are possible in setting a “sinister” text to metal music. The language of black metal music itself is diverse, incorporating different approaches (including sampling classical music such as Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*) as well as retaining many of the common stylistic traits of a dark or threatening atmosphere using heavy distortion of both instrumental and (often spoken, or growled) vocal lines. Baudelaire’s own image of a metallic throat speaking all possible languages—as figured in “L’Horloge”—is transposed into new aesthetic contexts and soundworlds. Black metal settings of Baudelaire’s “Les Litanies de Satan” may, on the one hand, seem to be obvious interpretations of his text, yet on the other, the variety of stylistic decisions taken by each of the bands shows that Baudelaire’s poem does not simply inspire other people to react to his language in the same way. Baudelaire himself may have claimed in his analysis of Wagner’s music that “la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cerveaux différents” (“Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris,” *OC* 2:797). What this analysis has demonstrated is that seemingly analogous responses to Baudelaire’s poetry—through black metal music settings of the same poetic text—generate subtly different aesthetic outcomes shaped by the varied linguistic and cultural contexts in which they emerge. Black metal settings of Baudelaire’s poetry resist categorization as straightforward alloys which fuse words and music, because of the distinctive vocal performative techniques that they exploit, giving rise to a diverse and multi-layered Baudelairean soundtrack.

¹ Paul Verlaine, “Maurice Rollinat,” in *Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols (Paris: Vanier, 1905), V:356.

<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k202914k>>.

² Patrick Eudeline, *Goth: Le Romantisme noir de Baudelaire à Marilyn Manson* (Paris: Scali, 2005).

³ Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2013), 63.

⁴ For a detailed comparative reading of Ruth White and Diamanda Galás’s settings of Baudelaire, see Helen Abbott, “Baudelaire and Electronica: Strange Voices in Ruth White’s 1960s Experimentations,” *Comparative Critical Studies* 12, no. 3 (2015): 357-76.

⁵ Diamanda Galás’s performance has become a reference point for alternative settings of Baudelaire’s poetry, with the band Ordo Templi Aeternae Lucis using her vocals over a different backing track in the first three minutes of their song “Litanies de Satan,” before shifting to an extreme, thrash metal backing with death growl vocals.

⁶ Kofi Agawu, “The Challenge of Semiotics,” in *Re-thinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford UP, 1999), 157.

⁷ This is confirmed by the extensive research collated in a new Baudelaire Song database funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council 2015–19 AH/M008940/1. The full dataset is scheduled for release in 2019 on www.baudelaire song.org.

⁸ For example, Rotting Christ, one of the bands examined in this article, include the track “The Four Horsemen” on their *Rituals* album, which is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s “Une gravure fantastique.”

⁹ A schematic analysis of these songs is available online at <https://www.baudelaire song.org/data-tables/> (accessed Aug. 20, 2017).

¹⁰ A summary analysis of these settings by Black Obelisk, Gogoroth, and Transmetal is available online at <https://www.baudelaire song.org/data-tables/> (accessed Aug. 20, 2017).

¹¹ Damian Catani, “Notions of Evil in Baudelaire,” *The Modern Language Review* 102, no. 4 (2007): 990–1007.

¹² Diamanda Galás, another non-native French performer, also pronounces the “s” at the end of the verb “régnas” (in the closing section of the poem which comes under the sub-heading “Prière”).

¹³ Rotting Christ, “Les Litanies de Satan” (official lyric video): <https://youtu.be/ZGveqSjmz18> (accessed Aug. 20, 2017).

¹⁴ *Encyclopaedia Metallum*, https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Ancient_Rites/28 (accessed Aug. 20, 2017).

¹⁵ In “Les Foules,” Baudelaire himself characterizes the poet in the crowd as enjoying an “incomparable privilège,” the unique ability to be “à sa guise [...] lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun” (*OC* 1:473).