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ABSTRACT

This article examines the under-frequented musical contexts for Baudelaire's poetry, notably 1960s American experimental electronica (Ruth White, *Flowers of Evil*, 1969). By focusing on the role of the composer-translator, this article tests the hypothesis that the composer-translator adds further layers of complexity and distancing to the voices of his poetry, in such a way as to create challenging new soundworlds which shatter the already fragile categories of 'poetry' and 'music' as distinct elements. The alliance between text and sound, it is suggested, becomes increasingly complicated by dislocated voices in a foreign tongue and in an experimental musical genre such that the relationship between poem and music is suffused with heightened levels of strangeness. Moreover, by critiquing the dual (but complicated) role of the composer-translator, it is possible to re-examine accepted tenets of translation theory by pitting the notion of the translator as 'literary critic' (Scott: 2000) alongside recent word-music theory that perceives the composer as 'critical reader' (Allis: 2005). It is suggested that unusual song settings of Baudelaire (using the composer's own translation) expand our understanding of Baudelaire's poetic palette, his use of voice(s), and the cultural reception of his work.

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Baudelaire's relationship with music has a long history. Celebrated settings of his poetry by famous composers include songs by Debussy, Duparc, and Fauré dating from the late nineteenth century. Driven in part by their engagement with Baudelaire's complex verse, these composers contributed new developments to the classical *mélodie* or art song form. *Mélodie* combined verse poems with music for voice and piano in such a way as to make greater technical and interpretative demands of singers and pianists than had been the case during the previous generation in France during which simple salon songs such as the strophic *romance* or *chanson* were popular. The complexity associated with Baudelaire's poetry and how this influenced his composers is, in fact, mirrored by the way Baudelaire himself was earlier influenced by the complex and large-scale dramatic music of nineteenth-century German opera composer Richard Wagner, as attested by the poet's famous article on Wagner following the 1861 *Tannhäuser* debacle at the Paris Opera. However, Baudelaire's relationship with music extends far beyond the domain of canonical classical composers such as Debussy and Wagner, and yet his influence on future song composition based on his poetry remains largely overlooked by the critical scholarship. By privileging the peripheries of music associated with Baudelaire, and specifically music inspired by Baudelaire's poetry well beyond his own era and country, this article sets out to explore the text/sound interface between Baudelaire's poetry and electronic music reimaginings of his work by 1960s American experimental electronica by Ruth White. It will question the extent to which White, inspired by Baudelaire's own ambivalent use of voice, creates strange and difficult-to-locate voices in her song settings. By approaching White's soundtracks with close critical attention to how the different electronic layers alters the text and its comprehensibility, it will examine the shifting boundaries of aural landscapes derived from Baudelaire's verse.

To select White's 1969 album *Flowers of Evil* as the main corpus for examination here means examining why her electronic settings of Baudelaire have largely remained on the peripheries of comparative Baudelaire scholarship. In fact Baudelaire's poetry has often frequented diverse, non-classical, and indeed non-canonical musical contexts, such as popular *chanson*, gothic rock, or

extreme metal, but only scant attention has been afforded to these more popular and/or

experimental dimensions of the reception of Baudelaire's poetry in musical contexts. This is perhaps

surprising given that Baudelaire himself enjoyed the work of popular songwriters such as Pierre

Dupont, but this is a fact which scholars have often struggled to reconcile with the seemingly intense

'literariness' of his poetry.[1] When Baudelaire's poetry has been examined in relation to music other

than classical art song or his musings on Wagner, it has typically been in the context of the French

chanson fascination with his poetry, such as the work of Léo Ferré in his centenary album recording

of poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* or Serge Gainsbourg's 1962 setting of 'Le Serpent qui danse'. This

very French tradition of *chanson*, with a singer-songwriter often self-accompanying on guitar or

keyboard, is not, of itself, particularly unfamiliar territory for Baudelaire's poetry: French

chansonniers of the 1930s-1990s frequently had recourse to French poetry of the nineteenth

century (especially Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Hugo, particularly by Ferré and Brassens), in part

because using respected poetic texts also conferred some additional artistic weight to their own

œuvre.[2] Moreover, this is in fact an extension of work by an earlier generation of French poet-

composers in the late nineteenth century who set Baudelaire's poetry to music in a style more suited

to the cabaret or café-concert than the recital room, such as Maurice Rollinat in the 1880s.[3] This

points towards an important reception context for Baudelaire's poetry; in the *chanson* mode, his

poetry features prominently in the reception patterns of the general public in France, predominantly

linked with song formats which deploy lyrical-melodic and therefore highly 'singable' text-setting

techniques, often mirrored on speech rhythms of the poem, yet this goes against the grain of much

of the critical-academic discourse on Baudelaire and song.[4] A trenchant perception still remains

regarding the aesthetic hierarchies of art song and popular song in relation to Baudelaire's poetry

which has yet to be fully overcome.[5] Responding to this issue requires expanding the field of

knowledge of Baudelaire's word-music relations, and delving into the unfamiliar and under-

frequented musical contexts that his poetry began to inhabit over the course of the twentieth

century as it moves beyond France, such as the experimental electronic music of Ruth White.[6]

White's place within this reception history sits in relation to the transcultural and translingual transfer of Baudelaire's poetry in the early years of the twentieth century. Baudelaire's verse began to exceed its national boundaries and move far beyond its closely-related French aesthetic and musical milieus of the salon, the *mélodie*, and the *chanson* from c.1900 onwards. As this happens, his poetry is also subjected to an additional layer of transfer, as the text is translated into the vernacular. While, for reasons of space, this article will not examine in detail the translation losses and gains enacted upon his poetry by his translators, it will scrutinise the role the translator has to play alongside the composer in this process of transfer, and question the extent to which both these figures can be considered to be 'literary critics' or 'critical readers' of Baudelaire's work. In so doing, this article will test the hypothesis that the composer-translator adds further layers of complexity to the voices of his poetry, in such a way as to create increasingly challenging soundworlds which shatter the already fragile categories of 'poetry' and 'music' as distinct elements. The alliance between text and sound, it is suggested, becomes increasingly complicated by dislocated voices in a foreign tongue and in an experimental musical genre such that the relationship between poem and music is permeated by heightened levels of strangeness.

When analysing word-music relations it is tempting to take the straightforward view that poem + music = song. In fact, as scholars such as Steven P. Scher and Eric Prieto have outlined, there are many more layers of complexity which derive from the combinatory possibilities.[7] Even the most straightforward assumption of 'vocal music' is complicated by the extent to which either words or music are present. Scher suggests that only when literary text and musical composition are simultaneously present and bound as a 'symbiotic construct' can a piece of vocal music be considered a 'fully-fledged work of art'.[8] These views throw into sharper relief the possibility of many more gradations of works that sit on the margins of being 'fully-fledged' vocal music, particularly if we take into account Prieto's more nuanced views of metaphorical, cognitive, and structural relations between the different art forms. For example, where, as traditional music analysis has foregrounded, art song sets a poem to music scored for solo voice and accompanying

instrument (typically piano, harp, or guitar), it always results in some level of disruption to the poetic text, such as displaced meter, word changes, stanza or line omissions, and repeated lines or words. Such disruptions can better be understood more neutrally as necessary manipulations to the poetic text on the part of the composer who negotiates the oral and aural boundaries of poetry as a performed medium not cognate with but related to music. Not only are manipulations to the poetic text permissible according to unwritten conventions of song setting, but they also highlight the requirement for flexibility in negotiating the demands of the poetic text and those of the musical score. It then becomes the performer's role to engage with that flexible musical reading of the poem text, to acknowledge – as Lawrence Kramer suggests – the mobility of both art forms that is always at stake when words and music interrelate.[9] Accepting the mobility of both poetry and music in song settings, additional features can be built into the song framework which further complicate the song form, such as an expanded number of vocal and instrumental lines or translation of the poem text into another language prior to being set to music in the foreign-language version.

This view of song as a necessarily complicated arrangement between poem and music suggests that the categories of poem and music constantly permeate each other. This, in turn, raises questions about how to validly interrogate the highly mobile features of song, given the differing levels of perceived 'strangeness' that this permeation can enact. In order to critique and evaluate how and why certain song settings of Baudelaire's poetry have remained on the periphery of critical analysis (and indeed public reception), three core areas for analysis emerge:

(1) construction – the practical concerns of selecting and combining poem(s) and music in a given (or newly-created) song form;

(2) voice – the aesthetic concerns of language choice, subjectivity, and agency in performance;

(3) text/sound interface – the relationships between practical and aesthetic concerns on the micro and macro levels (including syllabic stress, word choice, or poetic/song structures at a given point in the song framework).

White's *Flowers of Evil* album offers both an important case study to test out the proposed analytical approach, and a significant example of adding layers of complexity to the already mobile features of song, notably the elements of translation and multi-layered electronic instrumentation. The undeniable strangeness of the album remains difficult to pin down, however, and this 'strangeness' merits further analysis to establish whether it comes from the selection and configuration of the poems (construction), the choice of language and performer (voice), the text setting techniques such as repetition, omission, or overlaying (text/sound interface), or a combination of all of these elements.

White describes her *Flowers of Evil* album as 'an electronic setting of the poem [*sic*] of Charles Baudelaire'.[10] This barely prepares the listener for what is to follow: a series of heavily manipulated electronic compositions, deploying innovative techniques generated by the then very new Moog modular synthesizer, combining White's solo voice with music concrète techniques which deploy acousmatic sounds derived from both conventional musical instruments and electronic generators. In addition to this new aural landscape, White develops her own (prose) translations of Baudelaire's poetry into English in such a way as to further manipulate both Baudelaire's verse and her own voice(s) through multi-layered performances on analogue recording devices. In releasing her 12-inch vinyl album with Limelight Records in 1969, White opted for the title *Flowers of Evil*. Her choice of album title suggests an attempt at the apparently simple approach of direct equivalence in her translation, and this is indeed a feature of White's versions of Baudelaire throughout the album, in which the French poem is consistently replaced with her own 'direct' English-language versions. In White's own words: 'In the translations, there was no attempt to rhyme the verse as in the original French poems. I tried only to keep the language as direct and simple as possible'.[11] White's close engagement with Baudelaire as she reworks his language into her own suggests at once an intimacy with the Baudelairean text and a pushing away from it: the contention here is that the 'composer-translator' settings by White serve as a means to rethink word-music relations in Baudelaire as a close interaction with the poetic text on multiple levels (construction, voice, text/sound interface).

Construction

White offers us a 9-track album lasting just over 33 minutes and culminating in by far the longest

and most demanding of all the songs, the final B-side track *Litanies of Satan* (see Table 1):

Table 1: Ruth White, *Flowers of Evil* (1969)

		Ruth White title	**Baudelaire original French title**	**Track**
			(and section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*)	**duration**
A side	1. The Clock		L'Horloge (Spleen et Idéal)	3'00
	2. Evening Harmony		Harmonie du soir (Spleen et Idéal)	4'01
	3. Lover's Wine		Le Vin des amants (Le Vin)	2'58
	4. Owls		Les Hiboux (Spleen et Idéal)	2'45
	5. Mists and Rains		Brumes et pluies (Tableaux parisiens)	2'06
B side	6. The Irremediable		L'Irrémédiable (Spleen et Idéal)	4'54
	7. The Cat		Le Chat - *Dans ma cervelle se promène...* (Spleen et Idéal)	3'27
	8. Spleen		Spleen – *Quand le ciel bas et lourd...* (Spleen et Idéal)	2'52
	9. Litanies of Satan		Les Litanies de Satan (Révolte)	6'53

White's programming choices here may at first glance seem relatively straightforward; the majority

of poems are selected from the longest section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the 'Spleen et Idéal' section,

and this seems to tally with other composers' choices of text. However, of the poems selected by

White, there is in fact a predominance of poems that are rarely chosen to be set to music (see Table

2):

Table 2: Frequency of settings of *Flowers of Evil* poems

Very frequently set	'Harmonie du soir' (e.g. Debussy, de Bréville, Rollinat, Gretchaninov, Zemlinsky, Ferré, Chelon)

Some rarer settings (by mainstream composers / songwriters)	'Le Vin des amants' (Berg), 'Les Hiboux' (de Sévérac, Vierne, Ferré, Chelon), 'Brumes et pluies' (Ferré, Chelon)
Almost never set	'L'Horloge', 'L'Irrémédiable', 'Le Chat', 'Spleen', 'Les Litanies de Satan'[12]

That the album includes only one poem that is frequently selected by composers to set to music tells us less about that poem (which directly evokes music), and more about White's apparent predilection for the rarer poems (White does not select any other supposedly 'musical' poems). Moreover, the fact that the set culminates with a setting of 'Les Litanies de Satan' is revealing: not only is it a poem that is rarely used by composers or songwriters, but it is also rarely examined in the critical scholarship on Baudelaire. This shows White making a bold choice, attempting something that at once challenges her listeners, and moves far beyond any kind of comfortable or positive relationship between words and music (and an aesthetic ideal) that has so often been identified in the settings of 'Harmonie du soir', for example, and disproportionately promoted to date by scholars on Baudelaire.[13] 'Harmonie du soir' does of course thematise the important (positive) Baudelairean doctrine of 'correspondances' and the intermingling of the senses ('Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir', v. 3) and reinforces the extension of the intermingling of senses with the cooperation of different art forms through direct references to music ('Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige' ,vv. 4 & 7; 'Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige', vv. 6 & 9). By contrast, the *Litanies of Satan* track is a demanding choice of text which privileges the darker side of Baudelaire, calling on those beyond redemption who inhabit the depths of hell. The inhabitants of hell are already signalled in the track which opens the album's B side, *The Irremediable*, in which a journey through hell is evoked as the poet negotiates the river Styx (v. 3). Selecting such poems as these signal an engagement on White's part with Baudelaire's more unnerving texts. 'Les Litanies de Satan' in particular offers a philosophical reflection on the nature of human suffering, and on the agency of human depravity. It brings lepers and prostitutes into prominence, deploying the typically

Baudelairean approach of foregrounding protagonists who are alienated or kept at the margins of society:

> Toi qui, même aux lépreux, aux parias maudits,
>
> Enseignes par l'amour le goût du Paradis,
>
> Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère! (vv. 10–12).

> (You who teach through love the taste of Paradise
>
> Even to lepers, and to cursed outcasts,
>
> O Satan, have mercy upon my long despair!)

The uniting force for these alienated protagonists is exile: Satan is described by Baudelaire as 'Le Prince de l'exil' (v. 4), and stands as the figurehead who guides the social outcasts. The poet-protagonist thus allies himself with the exiled by calling on Satan through repeated anaphoric apostrophe and direct address (either 'Ô..', or 'Toi qui...'). By setting up this direct address in the 'tu' form, Baudelaire thus seems to confirm his intimacy with Satan. However, the question of irony raises its head when the poem's thematic content is pitted against his metrical choices. Baudelaire has opted for the traditional alexandrine line throughout the poem, and maintains – quite unusually for Baudelaire – a consistent 6+6 caesura throughout.[14] Yet such rhythmic stability is seemingly at odds with the thematic content of exile, alienation, and non-adherence to the respected mainstream worldview. What is striking in this choice of final poem for the album is that it suggests that White is

capitalising on the notion of poetry (ironically) already being at odds with itself, sitting uncomfortably in its own voice and tongue, unsure of how to emerge from its marginalised state (like the lepers and prostitutes). Closing the album with this poem, and framing it with other rarely-set poems, White reconfigures Baudelaire's poetry in such a way as to challenge the notion of coherence.

White's reconfiguration of nine poems clustered into two sides of a vinyl album is the result of an active process of triage, selection, and repositioning typical of how composers engage with poetry as they opt to set it to music. Closer analysis reveals how White's particular choices exploit key rhetorical effects that are particularly prevalent in Baudelaire's work, notably antithetical techniques including juxtaposition and oxymoron. Such oppositional tactics often found within individual poems are also played out across the collection as poems that were once distant from each other are repositioned next to each other from the 1857 to the 1861 editions; the same process and effects are played out when a composer such as White reconfigures the poems into a fresh order. With the creation of new oppositions, new pathways are opened up to negotiate the texts, and these can create responses of strangeness on the part of a reader familiar with Baudelaire's verse in its *Fleurs du mal* contexts. The effects of reconfiguring the order of certain poems also help us to deepen our understanding of the interactions taking place when a poem is reconfigured to form a song setting: it is not a perfect or uncomplicated combination of two art forms, but a porous interaction, in a hybrid context created by the new oppositional combinations. Yet this, in itself, is not sufficient to contribute to a reading of White's settings as wholly strange or unusual; in fact, although she selects a particularly unusual poem to set to music with 'Les Litanies de Satan', the overall selection and construction techniques which re-order the nine poems are not, of themselves, especially unusual.

If there is anything unusual in White's approach, it is to be found in her overarching ethos as set out in her liner notes: 'To me, Baudelaire's poems are of such unique power that they always seem to rise above the level of the personal and sometimes existential nature of their content. In this composition, I have attempted to parallel the transcendental qualities of the poetry through

electronic means.'[15] White thus highlights how her composition process is not one which seeks to absorb or integrate Baudelaire's poetry into a coherent new whole, but one which allows elements to work in parallel. The parallel White offers, however, is not parallel language (the English is not presented alongside the French), but a form of parallel analogue that works at the levels of aesthetic and linguistic remove (the electronic music alongside her own English translation of a poetic idea). The supposed simplicity of this approach, like the apparent straightforwardness of the directly equivalent translations, belies a layer of complexity that is to be found embedded on a deeper level within her album through her exploitation of auditory space.

Voice

At first hearing, White's album can be disorientating. This is derived, in part, from the way in which White deploys her own voice. White sometimes chants and sometimes speaks her translated Baudelaire texts, her voice often heavily modulated by different electronic effects using filters, tape speed changes and delays, white noise, and added reverberation.[16] As White herself explains: 'I used my own voice as the generator of the original sound to be altered or "dehumanized".'[17] This 'dehumanizing' process is further reinforced, as we have seen, by White's particular selection of poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* which privilege some of Baudelaire's most unsettling texts. White deploys words at first remove in English, voiced through electronic filters, and removed from corporeal agency by synthesized techniques. This dislocation of her own voice foregrounds a feature of Baudelaire's own poetry which challenges the status of voice, subjectivity, and agency. It is difficult to pin down who is speaking (or singing) at a given moment. For example, although in 'Les Litanies de Satan' there is a clear (singular) voice which directly addresses Satan in a 'je'–'tu' relationship, in fact the persona behind the 'je' protagonist remains highly uncertain. Baudelaire's voices are often neutralised – we make assumptions that it is the male-voice poet voicing the 'je' but in fact this is a key example of a voice that allows itself to be entered and inhabited by countless others (whether male or female).[18] Although White goes one step further by producing a

'dehumanized' voice which has haunting qualities thanks to the electronic manipulation techniques,

it is nonetheless generated by White's own voice which is, itself, already in dialogue with Baudelaire

because it is White's own translation of Baudelaire. That Baudelaire creates voices that enable you

to enter and inhabit them, irrespective of gender or class, means that he also opens up his voice to

multiple possible manipulations such as translation into another tongue, timbre alterations, tempo

switches, or changes of emphasis. White uses all of these modulating techniques, but the most

striking is the translated voice of Baudelaire performed in English, in White's female voice, with an

American accent. While it may be tempting to suggest that these trigger irreconcilable differences

(because Baudelaire's voice is French and male), Baudelaire's own voice invites and privileges such

interaction with unfamiliar voices. As Scott has argued in *Translating Baudelaire*, translation sets up

a new conversation between the translator and the author, or – more precisely – between the target

text (TT) and the source text (ST): the TT, in Scott's words, is 'one half of a personal dialogue with the

ST'.[19] For Scott:

> Translation is not only an account of a text but an account of a response to a text, of cohabitation
>
> with a text. We read translations not only to understand the ST better, but also to come to know
>
> another reader, and to come to know about the process of translation. (p. 181).

The dialogue allows, as White herself identified, different elements of the text to co-exist alongside

each other in parallel ('cohabitation') and, for Scott this means that the translator-in-dialogue also

plays the role of literary critic. As Scott acknowledges: 'translation is not an intenser form of literary

criticism, but is one of the few ways we have of making manifest what reading has released in us'

(p. 101). This idea of showing half a dialogue, of producing an account of a response to a text,

highlights the agency of the translator in both the reading and the rewriting process. Another way of

'making manifest' a reading of a text is through in a cognate kind of rewriting (as White's case

foregrounds) which opens up the possibility for different types of vocal interactions: setting a poem

to music. Where Scott identifies the literary critic in the translator, Michael Allis, in his analysis of word/music relations, identifies the literary critic in the composer, suggesting that composers present us with 'critical readings' of a poem they have set to music which offer a 'significant contribution to the literary debate over the meaning of the poem'.[20] With White's *Flowers of Evil* we are able to access a doubly-reinforced manifestation of her critical engagement with Baudelaire's poetry, both in her translations and in her musical readings of the poems. Because White does not sing her translated texts, her settings of Baudelaire are not voiced explicitly as (lyrical) songs, but as something more hybrid, closer to declamation of the poem, using the voice in a way which inheres to speech but tends towards music. By choosing to retain the spoken voice, White presents us with something that seeks to retain the poem *as poem* rather than transpose it wholesale into song. The privileged use of voice in White's settings, while complicated through its dehumanizing techniques, thus works on multiple levels: it shows her in dialogue with Baudelaire's text, cohabiting with it, and critiquing it, but not absorbing or integrating it fully into music. It is thus at the level of vocal manipulations that White's settings increasingly privilege strangeness; we have neither poem nor song, but a flexible and multi-layered musical form.

Text/Sound Interface

To better understand what is at stake in the heavily processed nature of the voice deployed by White, it is helpful to examine the subtle manipulations that White has enacted upon the text in each track of the album. In her dehumanizing use of voice, White exploits the text/sound interface through the layering techniques afforded by her state-of-the-art recording equipment and multi-instrumentalist facility. In each track, White problematizes the location of voice sources, not just of the textual spoken-sung voice of the English translation, but also of other instrumental lines in which it is difficult to discern, for example, whether it is a traditional instrument (guitar, accordion, piano) or an electronic synthesised sound created by analogue monosynth which exploits its closeness to, yet difference from, acoustic instruments:[21]

1. 'The Clock' deploys excessive reverb on the vocal line which makes it hard to distinguish the words. White speaks largely on a monotone (deploying limited inflection) intensifying the foreboding final call of the poem 'it is too late'.

2. 'Evening Harmony' is one of the rare 'lyrical' songs of the set (perhaps not surprising for the one 'famous' poem in the set which also directly references music). Its lyricism is not, however, in the vocal line, but in the melodic line set up in the musical introduction on guitar sounds that partially mimic French accordion music of the chanson genre, using an underlying waltz rhythm (referencing the 'valse mélancolique' metaphor of vv. 4 & 7). The spoken voice phases across the stereo sound spectrum, such that locating the source of the voice is sometimes problematic. The repetition inherent to the pantoum form of the poem is picked up in repeated musical material throughout the song which also disrupts the notion of textual or musical boundaries (with no clear beginning or endpoint).

3. 'Lover's Wine' exploits screechy synthesized sounds layered with white-noise effects that challenge the listener's forbearance. It shows innovative use of the Moog synthesizer, particularly in the lengthy musical introduction. The voice remains muffled by reverb throughout, with the soundscape taking precedence over the poem text itself such that the words remain largely indistinguishable.

4. 'Owls', by contrast, is almost predominantly voice-generated. It selects notes on which to chant each stanza, with only the occasional semitone shift in each stanza which destabilise the root of the tone structure. Nonetheless, it is the most tonal of all the compositions, and the only one that could potentially be sung and performed 'conventionally'.

5. 'Mists and Rains' exploits the panning effects of the synthesizer using the full stereo spectrum, and adds in some traditional 'word-painting' techniques but using modern manipulation of the sounds (notably of dripping water). In this way, the spoken text remains clear because it is supported by the selection of electronic sounds which reinforce rather

than undermine, but the location of the voice is constantly shifting through the auditory space.

6. 'The Irremediable' exploits slowed-down speech with extensive reverb. The synthesized sounds throughout culminate in a siren wail after the words 'consciousness in evil' to signal the start of what seems to be a coda. In fact, White completely re-orders the poem text, beginning with the two short stanzas of part II of the poem. After the supposed 'coda' following part II, White then introduces new echoing musical material, almost in canon, which leads back into the start of the poem (part I) at 3'16. Whereas part II was heavily slowed down, she speaks part I at standard tempo, with limited reverb allowing a brief moment of textual clarity. To privilege the comprehensibility of the text at this particular moment, the musical accompaniment slowly tails off, such that the final stanza comprises just the solo voice uttering the haunting words 'All these emblems, perfect pictures of an unchangeable fate, they make us think that whatever he does the Devil does well'. (This foregrounds White's selection of Satan/Devil-inspired poetry, pre-empting what is to come in track 9). The contrast between the extremely incomprehensible slowed-down text, and this rare moment of vocal clarity serves to throw into sharper relief how little of White's settings allow the text to be heard clearly.

7. 'The Cat' begins with a minute-long instrumental introduction. When the voice enters, it is relatively unmodified, following the tempo and patterns of normal speech but maintaining a monotone throughout. White creates a brief musical gap between the two sections of the poem, but runs on over the stanza breaks, privileging syntactical reading over one which preserves any enjambment . As a result, a number of the translation decisions reorder the French text (this is the only poem in which she does this). For example, White reorders the opening three lines of the poem as 3-1-2, beginning with what is v. 3 of the French poem ('Un beau chat, fort, doux et charmant') and creating a new word-order ('A handsome cat, strong, gentle and charming, prowls along my brain as though in his own home'). In this way, White

lulls us into a false sense of security about the audibility and accessibility of the poem text, which reminds us that the setting starts with an extended instrumental-only section in which the voice (and with it the poem) is completely silent.

8. 'Spleen' begins with the voice only, at a fast speaking pace and heavily processed so as to contain two different pitches centred around the interval of a perfect fifth apart (akin to the organum effect of plainchant), with occasional step-wise movement of the upper voice pitch at line-end cadences. As other sounds are layered into the track, the listener's expectations are challenged: based on all the previous tracks, the listener expects the additional sounds to be modulated instrumental sounds but in fact the new layers are highly processed versions of White's voice with the words slowed right down so as to be incomprehensible, even though the pitches are variable and quasi-melodic. The primary voice line drops out half way into the track, and the other incomprehensible voice layers take over for the remainder of the track (the sound effect created is more redolent of horror film soundtracks evoking ghosts).

9. 'Litanies of Satan' is a distorted incantatory reading of the poem accompanied by roving synthesized sounds that fill the auditory space, underpinned by an ostinato low-timbre distorted version of the refrain 'O Satan have pity on my long misery'. By just half-way into the track, all 15 couplets of the main poem have been read but without the intervening refrain (since the refrain is transposed into a different musical layer in the soundscape forming the ostinato underpinning). At this point, the music changes abruptly into an almost cheerful language with a computer game-like quality as White reads the final 'Prayer' section of the poem. The accompanying music is highly rhythmic, and each of the syllables of the 'Prayer' is separated out; the beginning of the prayer is repeated ('Praise to you o Satan') as the voice dies out and the highly synthesized coda takes over with its maniacal rhythms for the final minute of the track.

As this examination of the voice and instrumental techniques reveals, each song exploits the liminality of voice to acoustic / synthetic instruments through different layering, phasing, and

distortion techniques. In this way, the text/sound interface is revealed as highly permeable in White's settings of Baudelaire. If White could be considered a 'critical reader' of Baudelaire through the parallel dialogue she sets up in her English translations and musical settings of his poetry, she nonetheless repeatedly undermines the perceptibility of his text (and the clarity of her 'critical reading') through her range of techniques that interrogate the text/sound interface. This incessant chipping away at the status of voice, subjectivity, and agency through bringing the text in and out of focus in disorienting manoeuvres enacted by the use of the multi-layered instrumental tracks in fact reinforces the notion that poem and music are fragile categories which can permeate each other, particularly as technology advances and enables new ways of doing this.

The analysis centred around three core areas of White's *Flowers of Evil* (construction, voice, text/sound interface) thus reveals how, through modern experimental techniques which exploit the use of natural and synthetic voices, and the porous boundaries of the text/sound interface, White introduces increasingly defamiliarizing techniques that contribute to the 'strangeness' of her settings of Baudelaire. It is not just the choice of English-language translation (which reveal her as a 'critical reader' of Baudelaire, in dialogue with his poetry), but also the decision to dehumanise and dislocate the multi-layered voices within her settings, which contribute to this sense of 'strangeness'. Significantly, the effects created by White in *Flowers of Evil* challenge our conceptions of comprehensibility pertaining to the nature of the human voice and its relationship to both poetic and musical language. Nonetheless, we should be wary of reviewing these findings in isolation.

Finding settings against which to evaluate White's supposed 'strangeness' is not straightforward, particularly since the nature of comparative song analysis to date has tended to focus on trying to evaluate which translation or setting is nominally 'better'. Only very recent scholarship in the fields of translation studies and word and music studies has begun to challenge the value-laden judgements often cast in comparative approaches, and it is from these that we can take our lead in order to examine specific technical aspects of related settings.[22] In the case of comparative settings of White's versions of Baudelaire, the works of two other female, American, experimental

composers, broadly contemporary with White come to mind. All three women opted to set 'Les Litanies de Satan' to music in a twenty-year period (1963-1982). Examining these other settings, albeit briefly, can allow us to qualify how White's example, while privileging strangeness through the use of vocal manipulation techniques, is not exclusively the preserve of the unusual, the rare, and the unfamiliar, but in fact contributes to an extension of modes of engaging with Baudelaire's texts at the peripheries of new music.

Dating from 1963, Gideon's composition is a post-tonal classical music setting of *The Litanies of Satan*, which uses the English translation of the text by Edna St. Vincent Millay, while maintaining the French original for the refrain. Gideon scores the setting for a broad tessitura, specifically for soprano, tenor, flute, bassoon, string quartet, forming the third song of a set published under the collective title *The Condemned Playground*. The two preceding songs are also macaronic settings of poems, but not by Baudelaire (they use texts by Horace in English and Latin, and by Gary Spokes in English and Japanese). Gideon states in the liner notes of the LP recording made of *The Condemned Playground* that the three songs on the album are designed to explore 'the impingement of the sinister upon the pleasurable'.[23] This highlights an interest in a particular side of Baudelaire's poetry, and suggests a response to his poetry on an intrinsic emotional level, but Gideon's mode of expanding upon this interpretation of the text in her composition is relatively contained and does not deploy any of the disorienting vocal techniques used by White, nor indeed does it significantly challenge the text/sound interface.

At the other end of the spectrum, Diamanda Galás's 1982 album, entitled *The Litanies of Satan*, privileges the unfamiliar and, perhaps drawing her inspiration from White, exploits some of the same technical voice manipulation techniques which distort vocal comprehensibility. The first track of the album is subtitled 'from the poem by Charles Baudelaire', and Galás' interpretation of the text lasts close to 18 minutes, signalling its expansive nature (nearly three times as long as White's already expansive version of the poem). Like White's setting, it is an experimental work for solo voice, tape, and electronics, and the track is often hailed as one of the most harrowing renditions of

a Baudelaire poem. However, unlike White, Galás recites the poem in French (with additional repetitions of the refrain), and although she makes some errors of pronunciation (e.g. pronouncing the 't' on the end of 'tort' and 'fort' line-end rhyme words in vv. 4-5), her delivery is weighty and redolent of the traditional French style of poetry declamation. However, the electronic scoring, and the extent of manipulation afforded to the text remind us of the distance Galás creates from the tradition of French declamation styles. After the first four couplets, which take up the only first two minutes of the track, Galás repeats the refrain and adds in a highly distorted low-tessitura voice (a slowed-down version of the opening couplets), layered with heightened electronic effects, gradually increasing tempo in order to reiterate a sped-up high-tessitura version of the same opening couplets. This technique is akin to the 'theme and variations' technique deployed by classical composers, reusing material in different tempi and pitches, remaining recognisable as the 'original' theme but taking that theme to unfamiliar places. In the case of Galás' setting, the voices and sounds become more and more distorted as the track progresses, turning into terrifying screams, howls, shrieks, and grunts in incomprehensible vocalisations. The uncompromising demands of the track challenge the boundaries of where noise becomes music, and vice versa, such that the text/sound interface is effectively shattered. The audible poem recitation returns briefly after c.13 minutes, deploying stretto entries which further compromise comprehensibility as they become increasingly intractable. At c.16 minutes, Galás allows the poem text to become comprehensible once again with a full recitation of the final 'Prière' section of the poem; however, she declaims the prayer in such a way as to exploit the violence of the consonants, and the eeriness of the vowel sounds when extended excessively. The overall effect of the track is one of virtuoso performance and original interpretation of what is already a challenging Baudelaire poem. That the opening and the closing sections of the poem are voiced in comprehensible French suggests that the inner sections of highly distorted vocal and musical language could contain the remainder of the long poem; the intervening 11 couplets and refrains are technically unheard (because they are undiscernible), but this does not mean that they remain completely unvoiced. The multiple layers

afforded to the track by electronic means – particularly tape speed changes, and vocal gymnastics – reveal how Galás takes her interpretation of Baudelaire to the furthest extremes, expanding the palette of his poetry into auditory and musical territories rarely ventured into elsewhere. Where Gideon's setting is more conventional than White's, Galás' offers a significantly more extreme version of the vocal manipulation technique, in part demonstrating how a wider spectrum is now available to her through further technological advancements in the electronic recording medium than was available to White in the late 1960s. Galás' example, alongside White's, suggests that developments in electronic technology play a significant role in the reception of Baudelaire's poetry in unfamiliar contexts; the newness of the technology thus enables unusual performances.

The desire to use Baudelaire's poetry as a means to enable composers to also showcase new technology shows how his texts appealed to composers as ripe for offering new ways of creating and capturing sound, and expanding the overall musical-poetic palette by interrogating the possibilities of the human voice and the text/sound interface. The development of electronica from the 1960s onwards showcases a new cohort of critical readers of Baudelaire who work at the level of vocal interaction through manipulations which dehumanise, defamiliarise, and dislocate his already complexly voiced poetic texts. For the poet of modernity, such technological developments afford new ways of testing out the comprehensibility of poetry through the transformed soundscapes that they can create, suggesting that the critical readings that emerge from the work of composers, and particularly composer-translators, radically expand the cultural reception of Baudelaire's poetry into less familiar aesthetic territories.

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[1] Graham Robb and Rosemary Lloyd are important exceptions here, even if their analysis of the importance of popular song in Baudelaire's early years as a poet has often been overlooked. See: Graham Robb, *La poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française 1838-1852* (Paris: Aubier, 1993), pp. 243–278; Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[2] According to Adeline Cordier, in the 1950s and 1960s heyday of French *chanson*, 'by setting poets to music, singers brought the two genres together and thus contributed to ennobling *chanson*'. Adeline Cordier, *Post-War French Popular Music: Cultural Identity and the Brel-Brassens-Ferré Myth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.134.

[3] Peter Hawkins has also argued that the late nineteenth-century *chanson* tradition of the emerging café-concert is an extension of the work of the art song / *mélodie* composers: 'In the latter part of the nineteenth century, it became common for musicians such as Fauré and Duparc [...] to compose classical musical settings

for poems by Parnassian and Symbolist poets such as Baudelaire or Verlaine. [...] The cultural prestige attached to this treatment of well-known poems attracted the early artists in the popular *chanson* tradition, performing in the context of the *café-concert* and the music hall.' Peter Hawkins, *Chanson: The French singer-songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the present day* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.28. Rollinat performed regularly at the *Chat Noir* cabaret in Montmartre, and composed two sets of six Baudelaire songs in the 1880s.

[4] F.W. Leakey famously uses a throwaway comment to describe how Ferré's settings come from 'a quite different musical sphere' before returning to analysis of highbrow classical settings by Debussy, Duparc, Fauré et al. F.W. Leakey, *Baudelaire* Les Fleurs du Mal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 103–104

[5] This is a false dichotomy, but it is one that holds sway in much Baudelaire song reception to date. Whilst this is not the space to expand upon Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production, there is much to be said here about changes in perception of popular song from the nineteenth-century Parisian milieu to the present day. French *chanson* continues to hold much prestige in France, but it is largely the recent UK-based scholarship that has reshaped opinions of aesthetic status of popular music per se, including Simon Frith's important work which challenges the perception of popular music as a genre somehow 'less worthy' of study than other musical (or literary forms). In the specific context of French *chanson*, it is the work of Peter Hawkins, David Looseley, and Adeline Cordier which has contributed much to the debate – negotiating the complex boundaries between its popularity and prestige amongst the public, while still finding its place as 'worthy' of academic study.

[6] Other popular music compositions could have been selected here, such as The Cure's 1987 setting of 'Les Yeux des pauvres' or Celtic Frost's settings of 'Tristesses de la lune' also from 1987, but as these are stand-alone songs within a broader rock album, White's fuller set of 9 songs was privileged for the breadth of her engagement with multiple Baudelaire poems and her use of highly experimental instrumentation, recording, and structuring techniques.

[7] Scher proposed in a famous 1982 essay that there are three different models for examining word/music relations: (1) music and literature (collaboration of literature and actual music, e.g. song, opera, other vocal music); (2) literature in music (influence of literature on music, e.g. programme music); (3) music in literature (appropriation of musical devices in poetry or prose, e.g. fugue form). See Steven P. Scher, 'Literature and Music (1982)', in Steven P Scher, Walter Bernhart, Werner Wolf (editors), *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004)* (Amsterdan; New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 173–201 (p. 175). Drawing on Scher's work, Prieto outlines the challenges inherent in defining word-music relations and understanding the larger critical-analytical significance of research in this field, proposing five methodological guidelines for word and music studies: (1) Metaphoricity; (2) Cognitive dissonance; (3) Deep structures; (4) De-essentializing the arts; (5) Focus on significance and implications. See Eric Prieto, 'Metaphor and Methodology in Word and Music Studies', in Suzanne M. Lodato, Walter Bernhart, Suzanne Aspden (editors), *Word and Music Studies: Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 49–67 (p.51).

[8] Scher, 'Literature and Music (1982)', p. 175.

[9] Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 7–24.

[10] White, *Flowers of Evil*, album cover (subtitle).

[11] Ruth White, *Flowers of Evil* (Limelight Records, 1969), liner notes.

[12] Some rare mid-to-late 20th-century and early 21st-century settings of some of these poems do exist. See <www.melodiefrancaise.com> and <http://www.recmusic.org/lieder> for a wider selection. None of the existing databases of song settings of Baudelaire's poetry are fully comprehensive, however, so whilst we can draw some conclusions from the existing dataset, there are likely other (less well-known) settings besides the ones listed in either the *Partothèque* of the Centre International de la Mélodie Française or the crowd-sourced data of the RecMusic LiederNet Archive (as both focus predominantly on classical song).

[13] For example, this view is repeated by major Baudelaire scholars Barbara Wright, Rachel Killick, and J.A. Hiddleston in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Wright describes 'Harmonie du soir' as 'a moment of peace and reconciliation' (p. 38), Killick foregrounds its relationship to the 'traditional forms of *chanson* [...] reproducing for the ear the "languid vertigo" ["langoureux vertige"] of the slow decline of evening into night.' (p. 63). Hiddleston characterises the poem as one which deals with 'the *ecstasis* of the poetic ideal' (p. 140).

[14] David Evans highlights how Baudelaire reworked the poem to reinstate 6+6 regularity. See David Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion, and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 66.

[15] White, *Flowers of Evil*, liner notes.

[16] 'To modulate my voice, I used a variety of techniques. Changes of timbre were achieved with filters. Tape speed changes were used to control pitch. Into the shape of some words, I injected sound waves and white noise, thus changing the quality of their sound but not the flow of their delivery. By adding reverberation, I varied atmospheres and decreased or increased space illusions. To accent special words or phrases, I used controlled tape delays. Choruses were created by combining slight delays with multiple track recordings.' White, *Flowers of Evil*, liner notes.

[17] White, *Flowers of Evil*, liner notes.

[18] Rosemary Lloyd has written helpfully about the interchangeability of the gender-specific mask of Baudelaire's voices in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. See for example Rosemary Lloyd, 'Hypocrite Brother, Hypocrite Sister: Exchanging Gender in *Les Fleurs du Mal*', *French Studies* 53.2 (1999), 167–175; Rosemary Lloyd, 'Engendering Performance in *Les Fleurs du Mal*', *Dix-Neuf* 17.1 (2013), 24–36.

[19] Clive Scott, *Translating Baudelaire* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000), p. 178. Subsequent references to this work will be given in parentheses in the main body of the article.

[20] Allis demonstrates this through analysis of two different settings of Tennyson's 'The Lotos Eaters' by Parry and Elgar. See Michael Allis, 'Musical Reactions to Tennyson' in Phyllis Weliver (ed.), *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 132–173 (132).

[21] Recently Will Gregory from Goldfrapp has revived the use of the Moog synthesiser. His electronic music blog in *The Guardian*, 9 June 2015 explores the 'large expressive range' of the Moog and likens it to 'the territory that a conventional acoustic instrument inhabits'. Will Gregory, 'Back to the future: I'm in the Moog again', *The Guardian*, 9 June 2015 < http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2015/jun/09/moog-synthesiser-revival-70s-monosynths-will-gregory-moog-ensemble> [accessed 9 July 2015].

[22] F.W. Leakey's analysis of Baudelaire settings is a case in point here. So too, are Graham Johnson's analyses of the Debussy and Charpentier settings of Baudelaire in *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[23] Miriam Gideon, *Gideon/ Weisgall: Song Cycles*, New World Records, 2011 (re-release), liner notes at: <http://www.newworldrecords.org/uploads/file0cLIQ.pdf> [accessed 16 January 2015].