

On the use of the chain pantun in Baudelaire's *Harmonie du soir*¹

What is the use of metrical studies? Among other things :

1) Metrics being concerned with systematic rhythmic regularities, looking for such regularities may help to reveal relevant aspects of speech which otherwise would not be obvious. One example concerning prosody will be briefly evoked in §1.

2) In France at least, metrical studies are not always well-received among literary scholars and teachers, one objection being that they are useless as regards the interpretation of texts. I will try to show by an example in Part 2 that, on the contrary, careful examination of the metrical structure of a poem may help to understand its meaning or symbolism.

I. Adapting notions

First example, extracted from a French traditional song, considered as verse (when read without music) ; while we would be « intellectually » tempted to analyse it as indicated on the left side of the display below, the observed regularities are rather those shown on the right side² :

<i>Total phonemic form</i>	<i>tot.syllabic length</i>	<i>last syll.</i>	<i>Anatonic phon. form</i>	<i>Catatonic phon. form</i>	<i>Anatonic length</i>	<i>Catatonic length</i>
au clair de la lune	6	lu-ne	au clair de la lu-	-une	5	2
mon ami Pierrot	5	-rot	mon ami Pierro t	-ot	5	1
prête-moi ta plume	6	lume	prête-moi ta plu -	-ume	5	2
pour écrire un mot.	5	mot	pour écrire un m ot	-ot	5	1

The same regularities, observed in such corpuses as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or French poetry, lead us to associate to the two following sub-lines, rather than an « intellectually » apparent 5-5 rhythm, a regular rhythm 4-6 rhythm :

	O Vierge mère, (cf. Dante : Vergine madre,	filie de ton fils ³ figlia del tuo fi[gli]o)
<i>apparent rhythm</i>	5 syl	5 syl
<i>real rhythm</i>	4	6 (or 5 in discontinuous rhythm)

¹ Rough draft of a lecture at Charles University in Prague (nov. 14), adapted in 2015. Thank you to the CEFRES, to Jakub Rihà, Josef Hrdlicka, and other colleagues and students at Charles University for their welcome and suggestions, and particularly to Anthony McKenna for many improvements of my approximative English. Reactions welcome to benoit.de.cornulier@gmail.com).

² For ease of understanding, phonetic alphabet is not used here. – The *tonic* vowel of a line here refers to its last non-feminine vowel.

³ Translation mine, to be read as a 10-syllable French literary line.

In such *tralalas* as shown below (from traditional song⁴), the observed regularity is such that the frontier between the final contrasting part and the identical beginning part occurs precisely at the beginning of the catatonic form (thus non-concomitant with a syllabic frontier) :

<i>Total phonemic form</i>	<i>Anaton. phon. form</i>	<i>Catat. form</i>
Flon, flon, Larira, dondaine,	Flon, flon, Larira, dond-	-aine
Fon, flon, Larira, dondon	Flon, flon, Larira, dond-	-on

II. On the metrics and meaning of *Harmonie du soir*

Study of metrical form often provides a useful line of attack for the interpretation of a poem.

I try to illustrate this method in a book *De la métrique à l'interprétation* (2009) about poems by Rimbaud (about 1870-1872). For instance, the interpretation of his *Chanson de la plus haute Tour* can be improved by recognizing that, underlying this highly literary poem, is a traditional, rural song for children, about agricultural work and food. – More recently, this method helped me to (try to) show that two of his most famous (quasi)-metrical poems, *Mémoire* and « Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon Cœur », apparently semantically unrelated (the former being melancholic, the latter, as revolutionary), are semantically related, and seem to form a sort of diptych⁵.

First approach of Baudelaire's chain pantun

I present below a very famous poem by Baudelaire, *Harmonie du soir*⁶. All its lines, being alexandrine, normally begin with the same left margin; but a particular lay-out is used here – with two different left margins and a few words in bold type – to help understand the analysis I will propose... and the poem itself.

HARMONIE DU SOIR

.....*Module-distichs A*.....*Module-distichs B*.....

- A1 Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
 Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un **encensoir** ;
 B1 Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du **soir** ;
 Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
- A2 Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un **encensoir** ;
 Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige ;
 B2 Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
 Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand **reposoir**.
- A3 Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
 Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et **noir** !
 B3 Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand **reposoir** ;
 Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.
- A4 Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
 Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
 B4 Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.....
 Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un **ostensoir** !

⁴ Example from a 1722 vaudeville. Same catatonic, non syllabic contrast, in "mironton, mirontaine", "tralala, tralalaire", etc.

⁵ In the journals *Cahiers du Centre d'Études Métriques* [on line] and *Parade sauvage*.

⁶ Number 47 in the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs du Mal* (text chosen here), first published in 1857.

Let us begin with a fairly traditional metrical description of the French « pantoum », a French form, deriving from malayan *pantun berkait*, such as the poet Theodore de Banville (1872) tried to codify it later (without quoting Baudelaire's pantun)⁷, under the name « pantoum » :

Rhyme : Stanza rhyme schema *abab*, or sometimes *abba* traditionally often analysed as including a distich *bb* surrounded by a pair of *a...a* rhymes, whence the name *rimes embrassées* (*dd* lines embraced by both *a...a* lines).

Line-repetition between stanzas : Lines 2 and 4 of each stanza become the lines 1 and 3 of the following stanza (line-repetition schema *xAxB AxBx*). This very particular repetition schema is the most obvious, if not main, characteristic of the *pantoum*⁸.

Semantic Alternance. – Two distinct semantic sequences are supposed to alternate in a *regular* pantoum : a sequence A constituted by « the first two lines » of each stanza (here A1 to A4), and a sequence B constituted by its « last two lines » (here B1 to B4)⁹.

Global Line-Repetition Closure. – In a (Banville-)regular pantoum, the last line repeats (comes back to) the first line.

In such a description, the semantic alternance and the repetition schema from stanza to stanza are unrelated with the supposed « embraced » rhyme schema. It is difficult to understand how it could be mastered in oral improvisation (weak cognitive plausibility).

It is generally admitted as obvious that the Semantic Alternance principle is not observed in Baudelaire's pantoum, and obvious that he did not observe the Line-repetition closure.

I will try to show that¹⁰ :

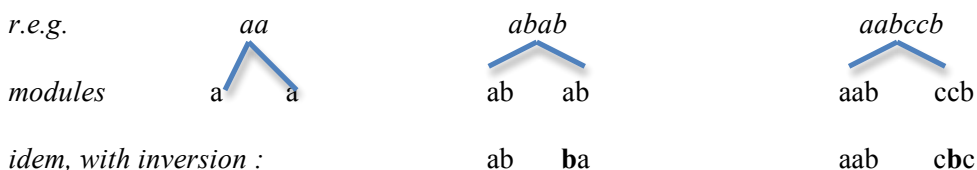
- 1) The three rhyme, repetition and semantic schemas are related ;
- 2) Baudelaire observed the semantic alternance principle.

Relevant metrical notions

For a better understanding of the « pantoum », the following notions may be useful.

Rhyme structure.

In French poetry, most « classical » stanzas are constituted of one or two *rhyme equivalence groups* (*r.e.g.*), each of which is a pair of rhyming *modules* of one to three lines, such as :



⁷ On this story, see Georges Voisset (1997), and particularly Jean-Louis Aroui (2010) about the French « pantoum » tradition.

⁸ The origin of the so-called « pantoum » tradition in French is a translation of a Malayan poem published in a note of Victor Hugo's *Orientales* (1829), where « pantoum » was a misprint for « pantoun » (= *pantun*).

⁹ For instance in Banville, *Petit Traité de versification française* (1872). In such descriptions, the numerical notion « the two [first or last] lines » superficially compensates the lack of a corresponding metrical unit (module) in the metrical theory.

¹⁰ A first sketch of this analysis was published in *L'Atelier de Baudelaire: "Les Fleurs du Mal"* (Cl. Pichois & J. Dupont, Slatkine, 2005, vol. 4: 3559-3560). I did not then know that David Scott (2000), the first to my knowledge, had already proposed a distinct interpretation of the two series of distichs (although substantially different from the interpretation proposed here).

Chaining¹¹:

[.....A] [A.....B] [B.....C] &c.

A familiar example of *line repetition chaining* of couplets in French traditional song :

couplet 1 *couplet 2* *couplet 3*

En passant par la Lorraine
Rencontrai trois capitaines → Rencontrai trois capitaines
→ Ils m'ont appelée vilaine → Ils m'ont appelée vilaine
Je ne suis pas si vilaine...

Bi-phonic alternance (intertwining).

In various oral traditions and in a variety of ways, a systematic alternance between two speakers A and B may be « metrified » in an *AB-AB-AB...* binary periodic sequence, resulting from the intertwining of two unary periodic sequences, one of A's and one of B's; this alternance is metrically realised in a bi-phonic or quasi-bi-phonic alternance in some literary traditions (e.g. some antique *amoeban* verses). Such a binary periodicity departs from the uni-linear tendency of pure *literary* metrics.

An alternating, bi-phonic structure is obvious in Baudelaire's *Abel et Caïn* (1861 *Fleurs du Mal* n° 119), where *ab ab* rhyme equivalence groups are divided in a sequence of initial *ab* modules, let us say the initial A's, addressed to the « Race d'Abel » and a sequence of concluding *ab* modules, let us say the B's, addressed to the « Race de Caïn ». – In the following poem *Les Litanies de Satan*, a series of *aa* distichs is intertwined with a series of repetitions of a unique line-sentence (refrain) ; the combination of each distich with the following refrain occurrence constitutes one sentence in which the distich is a vocative, for exemple the first two :

Ô toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges,
Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère

Ô Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort,
Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère

Here the bi-phonic structure has a metrical reflex : two metrical rules, the *Cadenza Alternance* and the 2-colour rule, are violated in a purely uni-linear reading of the whole poem, but are observed in each A or B uni-linear sequence, independently considered : the successive rhyme-words « louanges » and « misère » have feminine, double endings, although they do not rhyme together ; and the line ending in « misère » will really rhyme (not by mere repetition) only with the last distich of the poem (« colère » and « Père »), though they are separated by (much) more than one rhyme-colour.

¹¹ *Chaining* or *concatenation* (Latin *concatenatio*), a notion familiar to medievalists and folklorists. Child folklore quasi-syllabic example of chaining : « Trois p'tits chats – Chapeau d'paille – Paillasson... ».

French chain-pantun structure

These notions allow a coherent formulation of the metrics and semantics of the Banville-type French « pantoum » :

- 1) **Modular structure of stanzas** : Each stanza is a rhyme equivalence group constituted of two (distich) modules, with the rhyme schema *ab ab* (or sometimes *ab ba*).
- 2) **Semantic coherence of module sequences** : Let A be the sequence of initial modules (*ab...*), B the sequence of terminal modules (*...ab*) ; each sequence, A or B, tends to be semantically coherent, resulting in a semantic alternance of the distichs along the poem.
- 3) **Repetition-chaining of each module sequence** : In each sequence A or B, any two successive modules are chained according to the repetition schema *...a* | *a...*, the first line of a module repeating the last line of the preceding one in its sequence.
- 4) **Semantic parallelism and final convergence of the chains** : Chains A and B are supposed to be semantically parallel in some poetical way, and they are supposed to converge in the last line of the « pantoum » by the global repetition schema [A.....A], the last line of the « pantoum » repeating its first line¹².

Consequence of (2) and (3) : Any two successive stanzas have the repetition schema [*xa xb*] [*ax bx*]. From a cognitive point of view, this combination seems to be more plausible than the linear repetition rule in the « traditional » (Banville) metrical description recalled above : describing chain-pantun structure in a purely uni-linear way sounds a bit like trying to handle in a purely linear description the double helix of a DNA molecule.

Combinations of the « pantoum » (French term), or *chain pantun*, can be observed in different, apparently independent, oral traditions in the world (for instance in the 13th century Galicean *cantigas d'amigo* by Martin Codax). This quasi bi-phonic structure can arise in oral traditions where two persons improvise alternately¹³.

Irregular appearance of Baudelaire's chain-pantun.

Baudelaire was an intellectual, literary poet, an admirer of Edgar Poe, and a careful metrist and poet. It seems rather paradoxical that he should have chosen the (rather difficult) form of a chain-pantun while neglecting its fundamental principle (semantic alternance with parallelism), and without seriously *exploiting* it. And, in this respect, it seems that it would not make much sense simply to claim that his poem is « musical » (without analysis of that very vague notion), or even that its form is related to « valse » rhythm (how ???). – In what follows, rather than systematically investigating from metrical form to meaning, I will try to relate these two aspects informally.

A remarkable lexical/rhyme set.

It is often admitted that, in good poetry, the most efficient word in a line is its last, rhyming word, or, as Banville puts it in his *Petit Traité* (1872 : 42) :

On n'entend dans un vers que le mot qui est à la rime [...]. Le rôle des autres mots contenus dans le vers se borne donc à ne pas contrarier l'effet de celui-là et à bien s'harmoniser avec lui [...]

This suggests giving a stylistic importance not only to the rhyming word which concludes a line, but also to the rhyming-words which conclude larger metrical units, for instance :

¹² Aroui (2010) underlines that this line-closure rule is particularly due to Banville.

¹³ Rip Cohen (2013) tries to explain the structure of a Galician-Portuguese *cantiga d'amigo*.

Line rhyme-word, concluding any line ; a lower degree could be a **hemistich word** even if, at the cæsura, it does not even rhyme.

Module rhyme-word : rhyming word concluding not only a line, but a module (as b^1 and a^2 in *ab ba*).

Stanza rhyme-word (or at least rhyme-equivalence-group word) : rhyming word concluding not only a module, but a stanza (as a^2 in *ab ba*) (or at least an r. e. g.).

And even poem rhyme-word, which concludes a poem (as « ostensoir » in *Harmonie du soir*).

In Baudelaire's *Harmonie du soir*, there are four modules ending in « -ige » and four modules ending in « -oir », and as many module-rhyming-words. The « -oir » series is particularly important because :

– Three of the four « -oir » module-rhyming-words, namely « encensoir », « reposoir », and « ostensoir », share an ostentatious similarity:

- Not only are they 3-syllable words (as could also be « pas-soi-re »), but, more relevantly, they have the same anatomic rhythm (3 anatomic vowels), and the same cadenza or catatonic rhythm (1 catatonic vowel, *i. e.* they all have a simple, prosodically « masculine » ending). Moreover (unlike in « soir » [= evening]), this common phonic ending is associated to one and same nominal suffix « -oir » meaning something like a *functional object*.

- In these three words, while this common suffixal and catatonic ending already contains three phonemes (/war/), it is (graphically) preceded by the same letter « s », and (phonetically) by the same ± voiced consonant /S/ ; this /S/ is similarly un-voiced in the first and last words « encen-soir » and « osten-soir », in which, moreover, the *longest common ending* includes the same vowel spelled, with the same spelling « en »¹⁴.

- These last two words freely « rhyme » with the title *Harmonie du soir*, whose last word, or last syllable, is included in the end of « encen-soir » and « osten-soir », and graphically in « repo-soir » (same last syllable).

- These three words belong to a very specific common lexical field : they are liturgical instruments (in the catholic religion dominant in Baudelaire's culture), the use of which can be related in certain rites as will be specified later.

– The module-rhyming-words « encensoir » and « ostensoir » occupy key positions of the poem. This is most obvious for « ostensoir » which, together with the last line (and last sentence), obviously concludes the last module, the last stanza, the whole poem. « Encensoir », its most similar rhyming word, concludes the first module, and sentence, of the poem. Now it happens that the first and last sentences are semantically more or less clearly detached: the first sentence, as an announcement of something important about to happen, in an already religious tone (« Voici venir les temps où... »), where definite, plural « les temps » has a more serious resonance than simply « season » or « part of the day » (cf. the eschatological notion of the end of the world, when God will manifest himself to the whole Mankind ; the last sentence, being detached by the five suspension points, and introducing the addressee (« toi ») implied in « ton souvenir » = « le souvenir de toi ») and the subject « moi ». Thus in some way the poem is initiated by an *encensoir* and concluded by a *ostensoir*.

The final appearance of the subject, in the last line, is all the more striking since it follows the indefinite « Un cœur tendre... », revealing that this heart was the *heart of the subject*.

– It might then be relevant that « reposoir », the other element of this lexical and liturgical trio, concludes the first half of the poem, so that the two halves of the poem are respectively concluded by a « reposoir » and an « ostensoir ».

¹⁴ The *longest common ending* (*plus grande commune terminaison* or *PGCT* in French), is not to be confused with the minimal regular common ending or *rhyme* (= catatonic form).

Liturgical symbolism

Do the « encensoir », « reposoir » and « ostensor » simply constitute a sort of bric-à-brac borrowed from « la religion la plus fadasse » (Étiemble¹⁵) and belonging to « un fonds romantique assez commun » (Crépet et Blin approved by Pichois 1975 : 919).

Let us rather question this set of liturgical instruments, such as framed within the architecture of poem, and only then examine whether the semantic alternance principle of the pantoum is really neglected.

Encensoir, first module-rhyme-word:

The « encensoir » (Engl. « censer »¹⁶), swayed by humans – here below, on earth –, could send perfumes (« encens ») in the air towards the divinity above. For instance, during the « Offertory » part of a catholic solemn mass (eucharistic service), *before being consecrated*, the bread and wine were offered to the divinity and incensed with codified gestures, with the following words (italics mine) :

Incensum istud [...] *ascendat* ad te, Domine, et *descendat* super nos misericordia tua (= Let the incense *ascend* towards you, Lord, et let your pity *descend* on us).

Note the double direction, human offerings with incense upwards towards heaven, calling for divine pity downwards towards the Earth.

Only in the following part of the service (« Canon »), were the bread and wine transformed by « consecration » into the blood and body of Jesus (*Corpus Christi*) who thus *descended* from Sky in the consecrated wine and bread.

Ostensor, last module-rhyme words.

After the mass in which it was consecrated (« transsubstantiated » into the body or flesh of Jesus), the white host could be exposed to worship in an « ostensor » (Eng. « monstrance »), an instrument generally made of gold throwing out beams around the white host, in such a way that the now Holy Host (*Corpus Christi*, divine body) looked like the sun (the censer was often named « soleil » before the XIXth century)¹⁷ ; as Giles Dimock ([Dominican] recalls in *Questions and Answers on the Eucharist*, New Jersey, 2006 : 86) :

At the end of Vespers or Compline (Evening Prayer and Night Prayer respectively), which were well attended in religious-order and even parish churches, the priest at the end of the service would take out the Blessed Sacrament [the consecrated host] in the monstrance and the congregation would salute it with a hymn (hence the French term *salut* for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament) and often salute the Blessed Virgin Mary with the « Salve Regina » or other Marian hymn. The priest would then bless the people with the Blessed Sacrament [...] In the course of time Benediction became an independent ceremony [...] and [...] became very popular in itself.

Thus, in the *preparation* of the holy sacrifice (offertory), the « encensoir » sent a message upwards, ascending from the humans on earth towards God in heaven ; and by the consecration, the divinity descended on earth into the host, in which he could be « received » (ingested) in Communion, or exposed and worshipped as, for instance, in the evening Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, during the « Vêpres », commonly attended by laymen in churches where the Holy Sacrament was exposed ; « vêpres », that is, the evening office, « (office du) soir », where the etymological notion, *soir*, is part of the title « Harmonie du soir », and a rhyming-word in the first stanza, related to the long-awaited eschatological « fin des temps » (cf. « Voici venir les temps »).

¹⁵ Quoted by G. Voisset (1997 : 99).

¹⁶ As at the end of Poe's *Raven*.

¹⁷ The beaming sun was a very common, traditional, analogy of God in his glory, in religious texts, painting, &c., but rather like a rising sun than like a setting sun as in *Harmonie du soir*.

Reposoir, middle module-rhyme word.

The most common English translation of this word occurring in the middle of the poem, « altar », is too general, not specific enough in this poem. It is aptly defined in Nodier & Verger's 1832 *Dictionnaire* as (italics mine):

terme de culte catholique: *sorte* d'autel qu'on élève et qu'on *prépare* dans les lieux où la procession passe le jour de la Fête-Dieu [Corpus Christi], pour y faire reposer le Saint Sacrement¹⁸.

Interestingly, in several similar definitions, the *reposoir* is not directly characterized as a place in which the monstrance with the holy sacrament is *already* exposed, but a place *prepared* to receive it at the moment the procession will make a momentary halt there.

The specific meaning of the Corpus Christi procession, happening once a year, was, as the archbishop of Lyon (de Bonald, 1841: 4) explained:

... le mémorial [...] du mystère d'un Dieu qui est descendu parmi les hommes [...]. Ainsi quand vous verrez Jésus, caché sous les espèces eucharistiques, porté par nos mains à travers les places de la cité, ne vous semblera-t-il pas que le Fils de Dieu [...] passe encore sur la terre en faisant le bien [...]? (= the memorial of a God who has descended among the humans? Thus, when you see Jesus, hidden in the eucharistic species [?], carried by our hands through the squares and streets of the city, will it not seem to you that the Son of God still passes on earth en faisant le bien [= English "doing good"??]).

In such processions, whereas the consecrated host was normally kept inside a sacred place (church), it was carried and exposed in different places of non-consecrated roads or streets, in the ordinary world, among the people, believers or not; and at several stage-points of the procession, the monstrance was laid down on a *reposoir* prepared for that purpose, and was there exposed to worship. Before that, the *reposoir* was ready to receive it (waiting for it), and people could wait for it there. It can thus make sense that the heaven-« *reposoir* » is evoked halfway between the « *encensoir* » which can be used before the consecration and the « *ostensoir* » which exposes the result of consecration to worship.

Thus the lexical and rhyming set *encensoir* – *reposoir* – *ostensoir*, respectively located at the end, middle, and end the poem, rhythmically correspond to a ritual eucharistic progression.

Communion.

All this eucharistic symbolism ends in the mention of the sun dying « dans son sang » and the last line « Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor ».

The formula which performatively transforms (« trans-substantiates ») bread (host) and wine into divine flesh and *blood* (*Corpus Christi*) repeats words pronounced by Jesus offering bread and wine to his disciples at the Last Supper on the eve of his death¹⁹ (italics mine) :

Take, and eat ye all of this ; for this is my body [...] For this is the chalice of my blood [...], which shall be shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins. As often as ye do these things, ye shall do them in *remembrance of me*.

After this *consecration*, the host(s) ultimately could be received²⁰ and ingested by the believers in the so-called *Communion* sacrament. In *receiving* communion, the believer was supposed, according to a well-known expression, to receive Jesus in his heart (« recevoir Jésus dans son cœur ») and to be intimately *united* with him.

In this context, after the action of the « cœur » which « recueille » the « vestiges » of the sun drowned in his blood, and *after* the lapse of time suggested by the five suspension points which succeeds to this statement *just before the last line of the pantoum*, the present tense of « luit »

¹⁸ = A sort of altar which is raised and prepared in the places where the procession passes on Corpus-Christi day, to place the Holy Sacrament.

¹⁹ The sacramental formulæ had to be uttered in Latin, « Accipite, et manducate ex hos omnes ; Hoc est enim Corpus meum [...], Hic est enim calix Sanguinis mei [...] qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum. [...] Hæc quotiescumque feceritis, in mei memoriam facietis » (quoted from a 1854 *Paroissien Romain complet selon le rit romain* (Paris, Leroux, p. 85)). English translation borrowed from a 1850 *Golden Manual being a Guide to Catholic devotion* (Londres, p. 234).

²⁰ As in the common expression « recevoir la sainte communion » (to receive holy communion).

(glowing in the dark) may suggest the state in which all this ends. Thus the result of the poem, namely the presence of « ton souvenir » in my heart, is analogous to the real presence of God in the heart of a believer after Communion ; and the « harmonie » announced in the title can be analogous to the intimate union of the believer's heart with God, or « ton souvenir » in « moi »²¹.

This mystical symbol makes *Harmonie du soir* a poem of worship... of the lost person, who, by means of its « sorcellerie évocatoire », can still be present in the memory of the subject²².

Semantic alternance in *Harmonie du soir*

By the Eucharist, a God, invoked by a mystical human rite, comes back from heaven down to Earth where he can be worshipped and received in the heart of believers. The double direction thus implied seems to be reflected in the two series A and B at least throughout the first three stanzas of *Harmonie du soir*, making it a real chain-pantun²³ :

<i>in stanza</i>	<i>Lines of chain A</i>	<i>Lines of chain B</i>
1	Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige	Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir ;
1-2	Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;	Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
2-3	Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige ;	Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir
3-4	Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir !	Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.....
4	Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !	Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor !

First stanza.

A1, by the rhyme-word « tige », first of the A series and of the poem, introduces the stems of the flowers ; the stem is not the most commonly poetical part of a flower, but it is relevant in this poem as evoking the ground (on earth) to which each flower is attached, as opposed to the above air and sky.

In the second line, the comparison of a flower with a censer may concern not only the fragrance (not yet named) which emanates from both (« évapore »), but also the « vibr[ation] » of both : during a liturgical service, the censer was permanently swayed, either softly just to maintain its burning, either more strongly to activate the emanation of its fragrance during certain symbolical, liturgical gestures ; its movement was provoked by the chain held by a person (standing on earth), comparable to the stem which ties the flower to the ground. In a solemn mass, during the Offertory (where the « holy sacrifice » of divine Jesus to his Father is prepared), while the prayer « Incensum istud a te benedictum ascendat... » (Let this incense ascend towards you) was pronounced, the censer was swayed, then *rotated*, so that the fragrance « tourne », above the offered bread (host) and wine²⁴ before they were transformed by the formulæ of « Consecration » into the very flesh and blood of Jesus (*Corpus Christi*). – But by evaporation the flowers and censer send perfumes from earth *towards heaven*. The ascending

²¹ Jesus, who had returned to the Sky after his death and resurrection, was supposed to be substantially contained, at every mass, « under the species » of consecrated bread and wine.

²² This interpretation was only sketched in my contribution to Cl. Pichois & J. Dupont's *Atelier de Baudelaire* (2005 : 3561). The only precise interpretation of *Harmonie du soir* as eucharistic I know of is that of Françoise Metzger (2011 : 231-234) which I found on Internet after my Prague lecture ; she mentions the formula « Faites ceci en mémoire de moi » and the notion of « sorcellerie évocatoire ».

²³ The semantic alternance of Baudelaire's pantoum was sketched by Clive Scott (2000 : 114) : « Baudelaire observes the pattern of repetitions and, more unusually, incorporates that convention of pantoums, insisted on Banville (19809 : 243-8), whereby each pair of lines of the quatrain (i.e. first and second, third and fourth), pursues, through the length of the poem, a different thematic thread : the first two lines of each stanza are devoted to the vicissitudes of the heart, while lines three and four trace the fortunes of the dying light, the poem's final line reaching across into the world of the heart » (I did not know this study when I wrote my 2005 interpretation).

²⁴ The priest « encense le pain et le vin, dirigeant son encensoir par trois fois au-dessus du calice et de l'hostie », and « Ensuite il fait *tourner* son encensoir autour du calice et de l'hostie » [italics mine ; in...].

fragrance was interpreted as a symbol of the prayers which, from the poor humans on Earth, should ascend up to the high-above divinity (« le Très-haut » [« the Highest »]).

B1, Line 1, explicitly introduces « les parfums » (fragrance) only implied in A1. While the first rhyme-word in A1 tied the flowers to the ground (earth, « sur sa tige »), the first rhyme-expression in B1 situates them (with sounds) in the « air » (in French, « en l'air » means : above the ground, not supported by it).

This distinction of the domain of the flowers and the domain of their fragrance may remind us of a these lines of Hugo in *Les Chants du crépuscule* (1835) :

D'une double nature hymen mystérieux !
La fleur est de la terre et le parfum des cieux !

The sounds (« Les sons... ») in air also come from an instrument on the ground, yet to be mentioned.

Line 2 introduces a « valse », which can be a dance (by couples of persons on the ground) or a music (therefore in the air)²⁵. The dance is characterized by a turning movement of the dancers ; but then, no person has been introduced, the turning movement is ascribed to the sounds and perfumes which « tournent dans l'air », before this movement is qualified in the second line as a waltz : a waltz of sounds and perfumes in the air.

Thus the explicit space of B1 is the air, even though the melancholy and « langoureux vertige » attributed to the waltz may evoke a human being²⁶ ; the epithet « langoureux » could apply to music (Littré).

Second stanza.

A2. Line 2, mentions the musical instrument which, handled by some human on the ground, can send music in the air. By comparison with this violin is introduced a yet undefined « cœur qu'on afflige » (possibly subject to melancholy and languor).

The notion « un cœur *qu'on afflige* » is much less commonplace than « un cœur *affligé* » (which would not rhyme in the poem such as it is). While it could allude to some sentimental relation where a loved person does harm to a loving person, the following lines do not seem to give a clear confirmation of such an interpretation ; but the end of the stanza may suggest that the heart is afflicted by the loss of a « passé lumineux » (for instance, in a masculine poem, loss of a loved woman, but the notion « passé lumineux » is more general).

The heart « qu'on afflige » is compared with a violin which « frémit », where the quivering of the violin is analogous to the *vibration* of the parallel flowers and censer. The quivering of the violin corresponds to the vibration of the instrument being played, where, as a dictionary puts it, « Toutes les parties d'un violon qu'on joue entrent en vibration » (p. 667 of *Nouveau dictionnaire universel des arts et métiers*, Francœur & al., Bruxelles, Jamar, 1839, italics mine). Thus the heart « qu'on afflige » vibrates or quivers like a violin « qu'on joue ».

This heart obviously is, or belongs to, a person living on earth, unlike a dead person who might already be in heaven. But the comparison of the heart « qu'on afflige » with a violin being played which sends its music in the air may suggest that the quivering (vibration) of the heart produces something analogous to the music sent in the air, or to the perfumes sent towards the divinity.

The strong liturgical framework of the poem provides religious connotations which give sense to this precise analogy. Human life was most commonly depicted by preachers as being, since Original Sin, a miserable life on earth, during which humans, expelled from the Paradise

²⁵ As in : « Je le priaï de me jouer une valse. Il en joua deux avec assez de verve » (dans *Scènes et Proverbes* de Octave Feuillet, 1855, Paris, Michel Lévy, p. 326).

²⁶ In classical French, the meaning of « vertige », far from being reduced to the notion of dizziness, still was related to the latin root of « vertere » (= to turn). The Littré *Dictionnaire* defines it as a state in which « il semble que tous les objets tournent et que l'on tourne soi-même » ; if the sounds turn in the air, the « vertige » can apply to the sounds. The languor could also be provoked by incense. Remember the rotation movements of the censer.

garden (« passé lumineux » of Mankind), and waiting for a happy life above after death, prayed heaven for consolation. The most famous and popular prayer embodying this view was the *Salve Regina* ; in singing this hymn, addressed to the mother of God, « mother of mercy », who is above us in heaven, the faithful sang : « To thee, [...], we banished children of Eve [...] *send forth our sighs*, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears » (« ad te suspiramus, gementes in flentes in hac lacrymarum valle »), and ask her to show them Jesus « after this exile » in the vale of tears (« Jesum ... nobis ostende »). The terms « affligé », « afflictions », were the most commonly used to designate the sufferings of human life (see examples in Appendix). Through this catholic ideology, in the same way as, from a vibrating censer or violin, perfumes and music can ascend in the air, mourning and sighs and prayers for pity can ascend in the air from an afflicted human heart. However strange such a combination of images may seem nowadays, it was far from exotic during the catholic Second Empire, and it is clear that, on some other occasions, Baudelaire made an ostentatious, complex use of Catholic (and liturgical) symbolism : for instance the *Franciscæ meæ laudes* linguistically and rhythmically transpose a hymn to Mary, mother of Jesus, into a hymn to a beloved woman ; « La Mort des Amants » evokes the Last Judgment²⁷, etc.

B2 : Line 2 explicitly mentions the sky / heaven (« Le ciel ») and immediately associates it with a religious, eucharistic comparison to a « reposoir », the place where the host could be located (as it will be later at the very end of the poem). This symbol of expectation of the divine host is coherent with the prayers of an afflicted heart. The sadness of the sky / heaven (« triste ») is not incoherent with the fact that the host is not yet there.

Third stanza.

A3 qualifies the afflicted heart (on earth), and perhaps his very affliction, hating « le néant vaste et noir (contrasted to the lost « passé lumineux »), analogous to the feared, expected end of the evening, which will be complete darkness. – That this heart is « tendre » may reinforce the sentimental interpretation of the afflicted heart, but at the same time is compatible with the religious evocation of an afflicted life in the valley or tears, taking into account a classical meaning of *tendre* (sensitive – thus sensitive to suffering).

B3 introduces the sun, which is in the sky, and, through an allusion to the reddening colour of the lower sky in the dusk, the idea of the death of the sun (« noyé ») and of its blood, both in precise correspondence with the eucharistic symbol introduced by the « reposoir » in the preceding B-module. The « holy *sacrifice* » of Jesus not only symbolized, but supposedly *really* reproduced by Catholic mass, is his death, associated with his presence in the heart of those who receive his body in Communion²⁸.

Thus, so far, the A-modules concerned earthly elements – « fleurs », « encensoir », « violon », human « cœur » – and the B-modules, elements in the air or sky (« sons », « parfum », « air du soir », « ciel », « soleil »).

Last stanza.

A4, Line 2, introduces « tout vestige [...] du passé lumineux », where the notion « passé lumineux » seems to be ambivalent. Considered in the sole context of the A series, it seems to refer to the bright, happy past of the heart (on Earth), where the notion « vestige » implies that this happy time is finished (« passé »).

But at the same time the image of a heart which hates the « black » void and « recueille tout vestige » « du passé lumineux », in the prevailing context of « soir » (title, « air du soir » and rhymes), alludes to the day, with its light, which is passed when the « black » night is there.

By this ambivalence, the series A and B, parallel in the other stanzas, converge in the first module of the last one. This convergence is pointed out, as it were, and concentrated, in this essential word : « recueille » : this word designates an action which unites – one coming into the other – the sun (or « tout vestige » of its light) and the heart.

²⁷ V. Cornulier 2015.

²⁸ The fact that the blood « se fige » (clots) is a manifestation of death (the Mass represented the sacrifice of Jesus ***redonde à texte annoté !).

The last line of the poem will retrospectively specify the symbolism of « *recueille* ».

One may observe that the heart is central in the the A-series : after it has been symbolically prepared by the flowers, censer and violin as its analogues, his evocation extends over the three other stanzas : « (A2) Un cœur qu'on afflige ... (A3) un cœur tendre, qui hait le passé vaste et noir... (A4) du passé lumineux *recueille* tout vestige ».

B4. Line 2, last line of the poem, introduces three entities : In h1 (first hemistich), *you*, or at least the memory of you (« *ton souvenir* ») ; *me* ; and, in h2, a *sun-monstrance* containing *the host*. This final, explicit reference to « *you* » and « *me* » had been carefully delayed by the indefinite notion « *un cœur* ». The « *ostensoir* » (monstrance) has the shape of a beaming sun (and had sometimes been named « *soleil* ») ; the comparison of the last line equates you (« *ton souvenir* ») and the monstrance sun. It follows that an A-entity « *un cœur* » (heart of the subject on earth, « *moi* ») and a B-entity, the sun meet together in the last line of the poem²⁹.

Thus, A and B entities meet together in the modules of the last stanza. *Harmonie du soir* was written long before Banville's codification of the « *pantoum* » was published, but the concluding convergence of Baudelaire's chain-pantun could be compared to the semantic effect of Banville's « *pantoum* » closure rule.

In all the poems of the *Fleurs du Mal*, when the sex of the subject is relevant, it is masculine, and it is often equated with the poet. Several clues in the poem suggest that the melancholy and sadness are associated with the loss of a lost loved person, plausibly a woman.

The concluding, rhyming-word of the poem, « *ostensoir* », prepared by the « *encensoir* » and the « *repositoir* », makes explicit the eucharistic meaning, as the *ostensoir* contains the consecrated host, believed to *really* be the divine body of Jesus. It was sometimes specified that the consecrated wine becomes the blood, and the consecrated bread (host), the flesh of Jesus ; the officiating priest ingested both, but generally, in the Catholic church, the laymen received only the bread (hosts) which thus, alone, could represent the whole body of Jesus. In the last module, the blood and bread (host) respectively conclude the two lines (« *son sang qui se fige* », « *un ostensor* »). But in the last line, the host alone (in the monstrance) can represent the divinity.

This double revelation, linked by « *comme* », makes explicit the analogy between the (let's say) sentimental or lyrical and the religious aspects of the poem. The presence of the lost loved person (through « *ton souvenir* ») in my heart is analogous to the presence of the Jesus (dead and resuscitated) in the host ; the relation you-in-me (« *ton souvenir en moi* »), following the idea that « *un cœur* » (me) « *recueille tout vestige* » of the sin (you), may evoke, more specifically, the communion rite.

The five suspension-point before the last line, and its present tense (« *luit* ») after « *s'est noyé* », suggest that the gleaming of your memory in my heart is the present result of this « *sorcellerie évocatoire* ».

Relevance of the notion « *harmonie* » in the *pantoum*.

[To be completed].

²⁹ Clive Scott (114-115) observes the convergence of the last line with Lines 1-2.

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Le texte ci-dessus reproduit, à quelques détails près, celui, rédigé en novembre-décembre 2014 à l'attention de collègues et étudiants de Charles University (Prague), d'une communication faite dans cette université (v. note 1), corrigé pour mise en ligne fin 2015. La version mise en ligne sur le site < <http://www.normalesup.org/~bdecornulier/> > vers la mi-décembre 2015 avant corrections par Anthony McKenna témoigne mieux de la médiocrité de mon anglais naturel.

L'ouvrage de Françoise Metzer est le premier à ma connaissance à fournir une analyse développée du symbolisme eucharistique dans ce poème (mais sans tenir compte de l'architecture biphonique du pantoum).

Le dernier paragraphe simplement annoncé ci-dessus (« Relevance of the notion "harmonie" in the pantoum ») devrait souligner que l'« harmonie » nommée en titre n'est pas un vague concept musical (belle musique...), mais une notion précisément pertinente dans un poème où se déroulent en parallèle, puis enfin se réunissent en *communion* finale (dernier quatrain), deux séries thématiques en rapport avec terre et ciel. Une notion musicale d'*harmonie* semble pouvoir être précisément pertinente à ce niveau.