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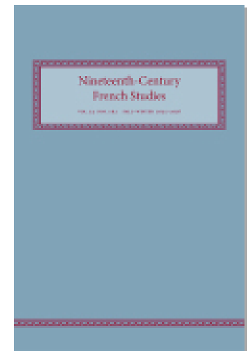

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How Do You Bury a Poet? Baudelaire Down Under

VALENTINA GOSETTI AND ALISTAIR ROLLS

This article asks what happens to Baudelaire's poems when they are transplanted onto the contemporary Australian poetic landscape. Starting with Dorothy Porter's composition "Charles Baudelaire's Grave" (2009), it focuses on Toby Fitch's 2021 collection *Sydney Spleen*, which situates Baudelaire's famous "Spleen" poems in Sydney during the recent COVID lockdowns. What emerges from a comparison of the source and target texts is an uncanny overlapping of two places and times simultaneously in lockdown and breakdown. We argue that the distinctive Australianness of Fitch's texts and their situatedness is enabled by the equally distinctive setting of Baudelaire's own poems, whose city is already crumbling before the poet's eyes. Far from being lost down under, Baudelaire's "Paris" is reborn metonymically in the literal and metaphorical representations of "Sydney" in contemporary Australian poetry. In this way, these new reflexively Australian versions ensure Baudelaire's living-on in the form of what Ross Chambers calls an intertextual, or paratextual, "thickening," which turns to the past to look to the future.

BURYING BAUDELAIRE/EXHUMING BAUDELAIRE

> "J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans"
> —Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* 68

"How do you bury a poet?" asks the first verse of "Charles Baudelaire's Grave," one of the last poems to be written by visionary Australian poet Dorothy Featherstone Porter (1954–2008) before her premature death from breast cancer. This is a provocative question indeed to ask poetry scholars, professionally trained exhumation experts. News in April 2023 of the passing of another Australian poet, John Tranter

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(1943–2023), sparked that immediate and instinctive drive to unearth his work. Random titles of poems, collections he had written, even broken lines of verse were immediately called back to mind. Tranter seen through the eyes of French studies (broadly intended) scholars in Australia is, in many ways, different from the Tranter of the Australian contemporary poetry scene. That is because Tranter's French-inflected work had been forever mediated by one of Ross Chambers's last brilliant essays, "Significant Others, or Textual Congress: Concerning Baudelaire and Tranter," reprinted in 2018 in the discipline's foremost journal down under, *The Australian Journal of French Studies*. Chambers's essay offers an intriguing reflection on Tranter's "Grab Your Passport," a playful mistranslation of Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage." Tranter's poem was published in the "Contre-Baudelaire" section of his 2010 collection *Starlight: 150 poems*, an *exercice de style* that he undertook during a memorable artists' residency in Italy in 2009, a period when he "wrote and wrote and wrote, taking Baudelaire's poems from his *Les Fleurs du Mal* (in French and in various English translations) and working them into more or less contemporary poems only distantly related to their originals" ("Toby Fitch interviews John Tranter"). The result was fifty-six poems mainly responding to the "Spleen et Idéal" section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

For Ross Chambers, the original Baudelairean material was in fact all the more interesting—and indeed relevant—precisely for its perceived distance and its mangled status: "it's a strange experience indeed, bordering on the uncanny, to have one's ears ring with Baudelairean reminiscence while reading Tranter's cheekily vernacular verse, which contrasts strangely with Baudelaire's stately alexandrines, and even the shorter lines used in French poetry to suggest song" ("Significant" 224). For Chambers, a key to the two poems' eternal and indissoluble proximity was that "[e]ach poem 'calls' to the other, across one hundred and fifty years of history; each 'answers' the other's call [. . .] while nevertheless each implies, in different modes, an alienated relation toward the history that, in the end, they share" ("Significant" 231). On the one hand, it is true that, as Clive Scott has posited, "[a]s it is translated again and again, the ST [Source Text] becomes an increasingly small fraction of its total potential self, of all the versions of itself that might be elicited" ("La forme" 151). On the other hand, it is also undeniable that, as Chambers notes, "'L'Invitation au voyage' survives in 'Grab Your Passport'—far from the latter poem's displacing the former—precisely because the two poems, between them, produce a thickening, the density of which neither poem, dense as each may be individually and in its own way, can equal" ("Significant" 235). Scott's and Chambers's reflections are in many ways complementary, as the "thickening" mentioned by the latter finds an echo in the former's idea of expansion—"the source text (ST) expands, through the number of translations it attracts, into its own textual totality" (Scott, "La forme" 151). Scott links this process back to the Baudelairean idea of the "vaporisation [. . .] du *Moi*" (*Œuvres* 479): "Baudelaire's own self-amplifying mental and imaginative activity

[. . .] which is the expansion of self into the multi-sensory and into a time and space suddenly endowed with extra dimensions" ("La forme" 163).

From this perspective, one could claim that there is something about Baudelaire's works that primes them for translation; and the translated versions that emerge, such as Tranter's "Grab Your Passport," capture the original's will to translation (its movement from self, which nonetheless remains in Paris) and speak back to it with new intimacy. What happens in Australia in the twenty-first century is nonetheless surprising, for Baudelaire's will to move in time and space is relentlessly resituated in this specific new time and space.[1] Baudelaire's poetry of mid-nineteenth-century Paris, as we have mentioned, inspired Porter in 2004, as she grappled with ideas of mortality, and, in 2010, it seduced Tranter with its erotics of sublime and (sublimely) frustrated travel. In 2016, Jan Owen celebrated Baudelaire's poeticization of the mundane (and vice versa) in the form of the limerick. And finally, in 2021, Fitch took Baudelaire up in, and back into, Sydney, finding in Baudelaire's obsession with life and death, and travel and stasis a mirror to Sydneysiders trapped in COVID lockdowns. As we shall argue, seeing their own situation reflected back in Fitch's poems allowed Sydney readers to rediscover new landscapes in well-known poems and, like Baudelaire, to travel without leaving the confines of the metropolis. It seems clear that there is something specific about Baudelaire's original texts that lends itself to such a repeated re-location in a country so far removed, in time and space, from Paris. That specificity, which results in what Chambers describes as a thickening, is what we are calling, in direct response, a crumbling.

Our argument therefore is that Scott's idea of an original text representing only a fraction of its potential self, a fraction destined to be reformed into a new whole in subsequent translations that it conjures at source, is present thematically in Baudelaire's Parisian verse. In "Le Cygne," to name but one obvious example, Paris is reduced to a building site. In other words, as early as *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris is a crumbling version of its (sometimes imagined) former self. And we use the word *version* advisedly. The metaphors of grief that telescope backwards into ancient myth are but one aspect of Paris's representation; its other half is its metonymic reduction of itself into a new vista of poetic boulevards, which others (perhaps the famous "bien d'autres encor!" of the poem's final line [*Œuvres* 82]) will build in poems to come. As Scott writes, "in translating [widely interpreted], we are not trying to find a way back to the ST; we are trying to find a way forward for it" ("La forme" 163). We are not trying to go for a walk in the Paris of 1860, so to speak, but rather to walk elsewhere in time and space, notably in twenty-first-century Sydney, with fragments of Parisian poetic cobblestone weighing in our pockets. And we insist on the "poetic" aspect here. After all, had "Paris" *ever* been (one with) Paris, even for Baudelaire? This foundational problematization of place—or even placelessness (Finch-Race)—lends itself to a form of radical translatability, or mapping of the (unstable) here onto (the equally unstable) there. In this case, this *there* is about as far from Paris

as it is possible to be. And, as our discussion of Chambers's reading of Tranter has highlighted, time, which is almost invariably opposed to timelessness in Baudelaire's poems, is also primed for translation. The tumultuous mid-nineteenth century of Baudelaire's texts finds itself mapped, in our principal Australian examples, onto our own post-COVID now.

Certainly, Fitch's *Sydney Spleen* (2021) is as much about remembering (perhaps as part of forgetting) the COVID lockdowns, as it is about remembering Baudelaire (and his own fraught relationship to remembering and forgetting). Our main focus in what follows will be on Fitch's readaptation of the four Spleen poems included in the "Spleen et Idéal" section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is our contention that these four poems provide an opportunity to question what a twenty-first-century, post-COVID poetic "Sydney" haunted by Baudelairean "Paris" might sound and look like.

Let us begin, however, by recalling Porter's particularly apt, and seemingly prescient, framing of these questions.

Burying Baudelaire (in Sydney)

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE'S GRAVE

How do you bury a poet?

Surely not
how they buried Baudelaire
thrown in with his parents
like an infant death.

It stretches
to a ghastly irony
Pasternak's remark
that poets should remain
children.

Do poets really want to trade
the lingering savour
of experience
for guileless eyes?

There's something
repulsive
about an empty fresh
adult face.

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Such baby faces
can be seen in uniform
or with a foot
on a slaughtered tiger.

They can be capable
of anything
or a long lullaby
of nothing.

I want to exhume Baudelaire
and give him his own
magnificent mercurial vault.

From one angle
an arching ebony cat.
From another
sneering black marble
spleen.

No poet
dead or alive
should rot
with their parents. (45–46)

While Porter's poem is ostensibly about Baudelaire's legacy and the paradox of questioning how to bury a poet in a poem that necessarily stages that poet's continued relevance, and thus his living-on, it also lends itself to a post-COVID lens. Did we not all end up spending time locked-up in our home environments, feeling our space constrained, in some cases to bedrooms that may not quite have been coffin-sized but were in many cases not unlike vaults? And whereas some of us found ourselves unable to be with family members, including those who were dying, others among us were confined with them, parents and children couped up together, our separate spaces merged into one. In light of this, Porter's last comment about rotting with one's parents strikes the post-COVID reader with an immediacy that may drive Baudelaire from the picture. And yet, these issues of life and death are intrinsic to Baudelaire's take on modernity, so, in a way, Baudelaire is still there, isolated and isolating with us. If Porter wants for him a "magnificent mercurial vault," she likely has in mind something more magnificent than an isolated poetic tribute can provide; instead, the magnificence lies in the mercuriality of the vault, which sees in death a renewal of life.[2] What the post-COVID moment adds to this mercuriality is a layer of reflexivity: going into the vault gave us time, we discovered, to read, including poets of death, and to spread our wings, albatross-like, over other poetic landscapes. By

doing so, our own intimate spaces took on new meanings, thus becoming different spaces entirely.

Translation, too, has something of the mercurial about it. The famous opposition of domestication and foreignization seems particularly apt, for what Fitch et al. translate here is a space in which the familiar is always already made unfamiliar, or foreignized. Paris, which was for Baudelaire unrecognizable as such, is now reworked as Sydney. The Sydneysider gaze brought by Fitch seems to echo Lawrence Venuti's understanding of retranslation, which "constitutes a special case [of translation] because the values that [it creates] are likely to be doubly domestic, determined not only by the domestic values which the translator inscribes in the foreign text, but also by the values inscribed in a previous version" (25). Certainly, as a title, *Sydney Spleen* performs the double domesticity of retranslation: on the one hand, it clearly locates Baudelaire's collection geographically; on the other hand, it carries with it the trace of its foreign source by adopting the shape of a previous version, in this case, Louise Varèse's English translation of Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, which was first published in 1947 under the title *Paris Spleen*.[3] Ostensibly therefore, Fitch's collection is doubly domestic by virtue of its inscription of Baudelaire's poems into a new foreign locale via a previous act of domestication. And yet, all is not quite as it seems here. First of all, the poems that Fitch most obviously retranslates in the collection are taken not from *Le Spleen de Paris* but from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. For all their shape-changing (including different experimental typographical layouts) and their nods to the prosaic, none of Fitch's poems goes as far as to abandon verse altogether; instead, the retranslation of the original prose poems is most clearly signalled paratextually. This is particularly fitting, as the original space of the prose poems was no longer the Paris that felt like home to Baudelaire and the only clue that he gives to their location is in the overarching title of the collection. If the move towards prose was a sign of Baudelaire's disillusionment with poetry itself, it was also a vivid reminder that, post–1848, Paris was, literally, no longer recognizable as such. In Fitch's case, if Sydney is referenced explicitly in his verse, this collection is also haunted by its own title, just as was Baudelaire's, and doubly so: metonymically, *Sydney Spleen* is a reforeignizing domestication, and thus Paris as well as (or however much) Sydney, and a collection of verse grounded in prose.

Fitch's Mercurial Vault

In *Sydney Spleen*, Baudelaire's four Spleen poems (Figures 1–4) resist the pull of the prose form to which their title alludes; at the same time, however, they signal, and embody, a progressive formal deconstruction of Baudelaire's verse. (In this way, they lean strongly towards Spleen rather than the Ideal.) "Spleen 1," which opens the first section, retains the shape of the original sonnet. "Spleen 2," which inaugurates the second section, is much shorter than the Baudelairean original and consists of two

obliquely placed seven-line diamond stanzas, a sort of stylized hourglass, producing a feeling of geometrical enclosure. In "Spleen 3," the spleen is now scattered over the page in all directions. Finally, "Spleen 4" presents three short stanzas in vertical arrangements—somewhat inspired by Apollinaire's *Calligramme* "Il pleut"—and three horizontal ones that run perpendicularly to them. One of these perpendiculars is just a short line of verse—"then constellations erupt" (77)—redolent of "Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie" (*Œuvres* 70), which constitutes the poem's turning point. This is not the sole acknowledgement of the original Baudelairean structure, as Fitch replicates the iconic anaphora of "Quand" (here "When") of the first three stanzas, which rings out the relentless katabasis of spleen—"When the clouds are low," "when battened-down Earth," "when torrents download from the sky"—until the chaotic eruption "into space" (77). Fitch's collection then ends with a more formally conservative fourth section, which comprises a long, pandemic-inspired, diaristic poem in twenty-five entries, titled "Morning Walks in a Time of Plague" (81–99).

The textual and spatial dispersion of Fitch's Spleen(s) may, at first sight, produce an estrangement from Baudelaire's verse poems, as it entails an erasure of their crystalline organization, and thus of the verses' own memory. But in poetry, remembering forward is also an option: "Verse-forms [. . .] have their own cultural memories, a sedimentation that passing time may only add to, memories which are not ours, but those of a literary tradition. But the writer can inflect those memories by, as it were, remembering forward, outlining for memory a future path" (Scott, "La forme" 161). Through the ruins of the alexandrine, the spleen(s) sneer back at us, encouraging a double reading through time and space.[4] Thus, the crumbling of the spleen(s) sparks the thickening, the expansion of our reading.

The splenetic sneering, a mocking game of hide and seek, continues in other ways, too, not least of which is the troubling of the metonymic relation itself. For, within Fitch's collection, the Spleen poems function as parts of the whole and thus point back to the Sydney frame that overarches them. And yet, their respective paratextual, or titular, traces are, as we have seen, to separate Baudelairean sources: the singular of *Sydney Spleen* cannot but echo *Paris Spleen*, that is, Varèse's translation of *Le Spleen de Paris*; the "Spleen" poems, on the other hand, retranslate the verse poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, whose own Parisianness, is at times explicitly, at times metaphorically signalled.[5] Thus, Fitch's Spleens have a double source and play a double game throughout: on the one hand, the alexandrines of the original Spleen poems are obliterated in Fitch's versions; on the other hand, they offer a number of re-versifications of fragments of Baudelaire's prose poems. Such is the case with "Sparkling Anxiety" (48–50), a poem sparked by "a meme that went viral on Twitter: 'It's only existentialism if it comes from the existentialism region of France. Otherwise, it's just sparkling anxiety'" (Fitch 101). As Fitch describes, this poem, among other sources, "adapts and collages phrases from Baudelaire's *Paris*

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Spleen 1

January, pissed off with Sydney, pours
steaming torrents on the lessees
of Camperdown cemetery and mortal dumps
on the tenants and landlords of suburbia.

Tiles offer scant comfort to Minky,
her failing back legs splayed out like a frog's
for maximum chill; tiny Kafkas haunt the hot drains,
squeal as they're turned into ghosts by Raid.

A siren grieves summer, its miasma of smoke, fire;
a mosquito hums falsetto to this end-of-day's
catarrh. Meanwhile, some other apocalypse drops

biblical ice on Canberra, and invisible
solar coronas eating battered lungs for breakfast
disinter whole centuries of fear.

Fig. 1. Toby Fitch, "Spleen 1." *Sydney Spleen* 3.

Spleen prose poems throughout" (101). When we read "Sparkling Anxiety," our ears ring with Baudelairean images such as "The moving shapes of smoke" (cf. "La Soupe et les nuages," *Œuvres* 918–19); "Like flowers. Like dusk," "Furniture that appears to dream," "The language of silent fabric" (cf. "La Chambre double," 847–49); and "The moon, who is caprice itself" (cf. "Les Bienfaits de la lune," 910–11). Other compositions may not contain such transparent references, but they seem

Spleen 2

more memories than if i'd lived
a billion algorithms—what's that
in years? no museum or big data
no will or poem or legal bulldust
could ever hold what's crammed
in my skull—that tomb of all i've
loved & pyramid the moon hates

ugh the worming & posturing over
the eternities i harbour vs the real
seasons i limp through—the kaolin
i could smash if i weren't a sphinx
the terrariums i could unstopper
if it weren't for the machinic sun
brewing storms in its randomiser

Fig. 2. Toby Fitch, "Spleen 2." *Sydney Spleen* 31.

nonetheless redolent of Baudelaire's prose poems. "An Absolutely Ordinary Poem" (12–13), which is set in an unequivocal Sydneyscape, the heart of the City Business District—"Martin Place was dark; all the cafés were empty"—evokes "Perte d'auréole" (920), but in Fitch's version it is poetry itself that is left lying on the street—"The poem sat on the matt grey pavers" (12)—only to be ultimately rendered illegible by torrential Sydney rain: "before a many-fingered rain flattened the poem

Spleen 3

The royals and their rain-kingdom
still reign on Country
with flagging
fawning, decrepit ministries
whose busts erect themselves
as heads of state
whose pig skeletons
switch lore for law
whose pet
alchemists rush the rivers
whose boredom
bores into land
and pitchforks
make
mincemeat of species
whose puppets compose
the jingles
whose poets
ooze out the preambles
whose citizens are
invaders of one kind or another
(either nihilist or denialist)
their bloodbaths
their Lethe-laced veins

Fig. 3. Toby Fitch, "Spleen 3." *Sydney Spleen* 59.

out, / pored over its words till they were all torn up/into moonshine that no one could read/even if they'd been there to read it" (13). Here, the dilution of the trace is paradoxically embodied: a poem about a poem washed away by Sydney rain is nonetheless a poem, its absence of lines told by lines clearly present. Thus, Sydney rain washes, not only away, but also clear, traces of Parisianness. So it is, too, with

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Spleen 4

When clouds are low and heavy as a drenched doona
and in the gloom screens pour out globular
daylight like a honeytrap;

when battened-down Earth
becomes a weepy dropping us face-first into our
crystalline devices;

when torrents download from the sky
and our organs upload themselves into our brains'
debasements;

then constellations erupt

into space
a caterwaul a shitstorm a clusterfucking
doomsday cloud;

and like bored ghosts with no body to haunt
we rehearse in each other's skulls desires
fit to breach the æther.

Fig. 4. Toby Fitch, "Spleen 4." *Sydney Spleen* 77.

the absent reader of whom we read and who we are. One reader who is clearly not here to read the results of this rainwashing is Baudelaire, but his poems still ring, inevitably, in contemporary ears.[6]

Let us now look a little more closely at Fitch's four Spleen poems, with some tangential incursions into Tranter's adaptation of the second Spleen, the only spleen poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal* that he adapted. The first line of the very first poem of Fitch's *Sydney Spleen*, is a bold statement of "over-situatedness," that is, an overtranslation of a location: "January, pissed off with Sydney, pours" (3).

Baudelaire's "ville entière" (*Œuvres* 68), whose location can only be inferred, here becomes the Australian metropolis, both explicitly and metonymically, but also of course linguistically through the suitably Australian play on the colloquialism "pissing down" in the form "pissed off." This double domestication is reinforced in line 3, in which the original "voisin cimetière" (*Œuvres* 68) becomes a cemetery in Camperdown, an inner western suburb of Sydney, a reference not easily recognizable to non-Sydneysiders. Thus, Fitch's perspective changes—from outsider to insider—similarly to the way Baudelaire's does when he shifts from verse to prose poem. Interestingly, the cemetery has something more obviously of the mercurial vault about it in Fitch's version: where previously it was inhabited (by its "pâles habitants" *Œuvres* 68), in a typically Baudelairean paradox of living death, the occupants are now "lessees," dead perhaps but only temporarily.[7]

The resigned sarcasm of line 4, where mortal dumps pour "on the tenants and landlords of suburbia," reflects an obsession with real estate and a housing crisis that is arguably pan-Australian, but its reflection on the divide between inner-city wealth (including Camperdown and its surrounding areas) and the relative poverty of those living further out in lower-cost real estate (suggested by that other meaning of "dumps") is certainly evocative of Sydney. Arguably, "working from home" became the great real-estate leveller of the COVID lockdown period, but the addition of "mortal" to the "dumps" stresses, especially, that other levelling, between the living and the dead. For their part, the "tiny Kafkas" of lines 7–8, which "haunt the hot drains" and "squeal as they're turned into ghosts by Raid," appeal specifically to a Sydney bestiary, which is to say, its famous and omnipresent cockroaches.[8] Furthermore, these tiny Kafkas replace "l'âme d'un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière" (*Œuvres* 68), their own literary metaphor making them Sydney albatrosses, fallen birds that turn into the "corporate high-flyer" of Tranter's "Albatross" (138). While, for Baudelaire, the albatross is a metaphor for the misunderstood poet, it is difficult not to read in Fitch's undersized Kafkas the cultural cringe that is so famously Australian. Whether Fitch is lamenting the lot of poets in Australia, or reflecting on his own relative size in the global poetic pantheon as he grapples with Baudelaire's verse, it is clear that the gutter was already the poet's lot in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Indeed, the "Raid" of line 8, a popular brand of insect repellent and an unmissable presence in Sydney homes, thickens when perceived by our Gallic ear, as the French pronunciation of this word (which also features in the French dictionary as an Anglicism, meaning inter alia an air raid) is the same as that of *raide*, meaning "stiff" and "lacking money," both of which apply to the destitute old poet of Baudelaire's version.

The third stanza of Fitch's "Spleen 1" insists on the hemispheric shift, which entails a change of seasonal—and thus temporal—coordinates: when transplanted down under, "pluviôse," January,[9] is indeed "summer," hence the splenetic feeling of oppression conveyed by the unbearable heat and humidity, mosquitos, summer

bushfires, and smoke, redolent of the dreadful bushfire summer experienced in 2019, before COVID. Of course, torrential rains followed on the heels of bushfires, so this poem speaks inevitably of changing regimes, as does Baudelaire's, whose use of *pluviôse* speaks to a calendar introduced in 1792 after the (first) French revolution and abolished by (the first) Napoleon in 1806, or half a century earlier. This old word echoed then revolutions past (1789) and more recent (1830 and again in 1848), and its translation echoes now the revolving La Niña and El Niño summer weather patterns now familiar to Australian readers.

The final tercet witnesses an internal dis-location, as Baudelaire's "vieille hydropique" (*Œuvres* 68) becomes "biblical ice on Canberra" (line 12), where perhaps *vieille* is misread as *ville* and where the Australian capital, which is much younger than Sydney, is hit by the apocalypse and "solar coronas eating battered lungs for breakfast / disinter whole centuries of fear."[10] Here, the global pandemic exhumes bygone fears of the plague and a long literary tradition—including Boccaccio's *Decameron*, referenced elsewhere in *Sydney Spleen*—that we are *now* able to grasp in their alarming relevance. The poetic universe of this collection seems to be global pandemic Sydney, and the spleen here is thus transplanted as a seed from which Sydney germinates (splenetically, satanically, down under) in a spiral of echoing resonances.

With "Spleen 2" (Fitch 31) the thickening extends to Tranter (202–03), forming a "non-linear framework of coexisting interlocutors" (Finch-Race and Gosetti 49). The common theme is that of being overwhelmed by technology and unbearable amounts of obsolete data. In Tranter's first stanza, for instance, the nineteenth-century *paperasse* that fills up endless drawers ("gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans," *Œuvres* 68) becomes an obsolete mainframe computer "chocked with a hopeless tangle of COBOL code/databases with a hundred million fields" (202). In Fitch's version, Baudelaire's big numbers ("mille ans" in his case [68]) expand still further with the mention of "big data": "more memories than if i'd lived / a billion algorithms—what's that / in years? no museum or big data / no will or poem or legal bulldust" (31). In the original poem, time slows down, and all is claustrophobia and ennui. In Fitch's version, enclosure is presented typographically in the form of two diamonds of text. Both Australian poems express an unbearable dragging of time: "the eternities I harbour vs the real / seasons I limp through" in Fitch's (31) and "Time seems to crawl, in my dismal apartment; it takes an hour to make a cup of tea" in Tranter's (202). The temptation is to read Tranter via Fitch's pandemic lens. After all, who could have got through lock-down without at least one "whole afternoon looking through / that cardboard box full of old photos" (Tranter 202)? The stillness turns metaphysical in Tranter's last stanza, in which "a god whose ancient and eternal rage / sings only in the glow of the setting sun" (203), whereas in Fitch we have a "machinic sun / brewing storms in its randomiser" (31). This is the poem conscious of the inevitable presence of Baudelaire locked inside the square, diamond, or hourglass, alongside Tranter now too, however much the lines are shaken up.

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These themes are then picked up in Fitch's "Spleen 4" (77), where the nexus between technological hell, pandemic enclosure and Sydneysider interior becomes even more prominent. The "couvercle" (*Œuvres* 70) formed by oppressive clouds in the original is replaced by that most Australian of covers: "a drenched doona." The katabasis of spleen plays out here in terms of register, which continues when Baudelaire's lost hope is adapted for the screen as a "weepy," and an illegal one at that, as suggested by the playful sound of "when torrents download," which cleverly renders the original "filets" (*Œuvres* 70) or "nets," as well of course as confirming the technological edge of Fitch's clouds, one inspired also by the homophonic connection between the French *cerveau* and the English server. Interestingly, given the dexterity with which Fitch updates Baudelaire's version, "Spleen 4" is also remarkable for its, perhaps deliberately, missed opportunities. Baudelaire's poem is uncannily Australian in terms of its bestiary; indeed, a Sydneysider reading the original, with its "chauve-souris" and "araignées" (70), could hardly fail to think of the iconic fruit bats that once populated the Sydney botanic gardens (before being euphemistically "rehomed") and the funnel-web spiders that are both Australia's most dangerous spiders and native to Sydney. As Chambers ("Significant") and Scott (*Translating the Perception of Text*) both note, thickening occurs over time, in the direction of the target text, but it also causes us to return to the source and to reread with our foreign lens. In other words, when we reread Baudelaire through Fitch, we see Sydney everywhere. To draw further on translation theory, we might consider such fragments as "Bats no longer live rent-free in my head," which appears in "Planned Obsolescences" (76), just before "Spleen 4" in Fitch's collection, as an example of compensation, or of seeing Baudelaire-Paris wherever we read Fitch-Sydney, and vice versa.

We have deliberately left Fitch's "Spleen 3" (59) until last because, although the poem still presents some thematic resonances with the original, here we witness a full-blown transplantation into the colonial history of Australia's oppressed Indigenous population. The shape of the poem itself deconstructs into scattered lines as if what we thought we knew of place and Australian history was exploding, or crumbling, before our eyes. The response, sparked by the formulaic *incipit*—"Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux / Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très vieux" (*Œuvres* 69)—gives "The royals and their rain-kingdom still reign on Country." Clearly, the capital "C" of Country is different, and here (as the comparison with Baudelaire's *incipit* suggests) diametrically opposed, to country (now Gadigal,[11] rather than Australia), but this is a reference easily missed by international readers. In this context, Fitch's "bloodbaths" can only reference the extermination of the Aboriginal populations by the colonisers. Baudelaire's "bains de sang" (70), of course, were differently metaphorical: the Latin sense of bathing in blood for the purposes of rejuvenation is explicit in the original, but the revolutionary metaphor was also clear. In Fitch's version, what is considered by some as the foundational creation in blood of modern Australia (the young country), that is, the Gallipoli campaign in

the First World War, is replaced by the crimes committed against the Indigenous Land (Country) and its original custodians.

If it has been posited that Paris has occupied a central role within modern Australian poetry, as "the fugitive capital of an avant-garde tradition that has struggled to find within its cultural context a suitable zone to claim as its 'home',"[12] we hope to have shown, conversely, the extent to which "Paris" needs to be poetically buried, or doubly domesticated, in order for it to be incorporated and reborn in, and as, a completely novel poetic context. What Chambers dubs a "thickening" and Scott an "expansion" must, we argue, be preceded by, and predicated on, a progressive "crumbling" of Baudelaire's Paris, including its status as the symbolic capital of poetic modernity.

Ruins thus become the foundations of new poetic recombinations and dislocations, out of which Sydney calls back "to the other, across one hundred and fifty years of history" and in so doing produces "a reading of Baudelaire that would not have been available to Baudelaire's contemporaries, nor even to Proust" (Chambers and St. Clair 121). While Chambers had in mind the global trauma of AIDS, we read Fitch and Tranter in the wake of COVID, the new reality of climate change and twenty-first-century wars. More recently still, in the wake of Australia's disappointing failed referendum of 14 October 2023, when Australians were asked whether "to change the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice" (NIAA), we non-Indigenous Australians can only be all the more conscious of our (dis) location on unceded Aboriginal land. Hence the relevance of (re)reading Baudelaire (everywhere). As Maria Scott and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer argue, Baudelaire's influence persists today because of his preoccupation with "what it means to live in permanent proximity to other people" ("Baudelaire" 1). As argued and demonstrated time and again, Baudelaire's poetry keeps speaking to the present in myriad ways.[13] To the extent that Baudelaire lived himself as other, his poetry is perhaps uniquely adapted to onward translation. His ruins, his remains, remain. And this, ultimately, is the answer to Porter's question.

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NOTES

1. Here we shall be focussing on some twenty-first-century examples, but one could go back in time to find more, such as a 1974 poem by Gwen Hardwood (1920–95), which was only published in 1994 under the title "The Owl and the Pussycat Baudelaire's Rock," a sort of lullaby.

2. Insofar as it appeals to an idea of death teeming with life and of life tending towards death, our reading of Porter's mercuriality aligns it with Julia Kristeva's famous theorization of the abject, which seems particularly apt for Baudelaire's poems.

3. In that collection, it is noted that Varèse worked on the prose poems as published in the 1931 Pléiade edition of Baudelaire's complete works. Fitch acknowledges his use of Varèse's translations.

4. As Seth Whidden's readings in his recent volume on Baudelaire's prose poems clearly demonstrate, after all, Baudelaire's poetry had already undergone a similar process in its path towards poetic modernity.

5. The verse poems of the "Tableaux parisiens" section (*Œuvres complètes* 77–98), of course, also have the metonymic connection to the city via the section title. To this extent, this section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* functions as a proleptic embodiment of the prose poems to come.

6. The fate of forever hearing Baudelaire when reading poetry by other authors, including from other times and places, is eloquently recorded by Scott ("Translating Baudelaire" 195–96).

7. There is likely a reference here to the numerous changes that Camperdown cemetery has undergone, especially since the 1940s. Interestingly, the cemetery's heyday, as it were, in terms of number of burials, was between 1849 to 1867, which corresponds closely to the period of Baudelaire's own activity as well as his decline, including regular changes of address, and his death (on 31 August 1867).

8. New South Wales more broadly is famous for this insect, to the point that "cockroaches" is among the colloquial terms used by Queenslanders to refer to their southern neighbours. Insects, of course, cannot "squeal"; vermin do, on the other hand, which returns the reader to the original opening of "The Metamorphosis" and its untranslatable, and unspecific, reference to Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into "einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer."

9. *Pluviôse* in fact spanned January and February.

10. Interestingly, the words *vieille hydropique*, or "old woman with dropsy," also echo medical terms like *hydropic villi*.

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11. Gadigal is the name of the traditional custodians of the unceded lands on which Sydney is now located.

12. Musgrave 173. For a similar viewpoint, also see Hawke.

13. The way in which Baudelaire's poetry speaks to the present has recently been explored in such studies as Lübecker (for an analysis of "Le Crépuscule du soir" along these lines, see Lübecker 73–101).

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