CHAPTER-5

LES FLEURS DU MAL, LE EPAVE AND HYPERION-
THE PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF THE BEAUTIFUL
Les Fleurs du Mal, Le Epave and Hyperion-
The Progressive Sense of the Beautiful

The main idea upon which Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy rests is that both matter and spirit, or body and soul are looked upon as real. Both are given equal importance and none is ignored as it is so often done in one-sided spiritualistic or materialistic philosophies.

In his work The Life Divine Sri Aurobindo declares-

…the affirmation of the divine life upon earth and immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognize eternal spirit as the inhabitant of bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept matter of which he weaves constantly his grabs; he builds recurrently the unending series of his mansions.¹

Sri Aurobindo affirms the presence of spirit in all forms of matter, and this spirit is important to give meaning to the idea of immortal sense in immortal existence. Through this he claims the presence of all pervading spirit in all forms of matter.

When we closely look into the history of human thoughts different philosophers have always been ignoring one or the other. Many times spirit has been denied as an illusion of imagination and at other times matter has been denied as the illusion of the senses. Each time it was either a loss of life or a loss of things of spirit. To understand these things better, knowledge becomes of paramount importance. It is not the knowledge which is kept within the narrow boundary of senses. There are fields
present which are inaccessible to the senses. So in such cases knowledge may mean reconstruction of sensuous materials by mind and the powers of the spirit.

The spiritualistic denial of the material world, which Sri Aurobindo terms as the refusal of the Ascetic, has a more perilous affect on individuals than the materialistic denial of the spiritual world. He took into account only one aspect of the world process which can also be called aspect of ascent. This one-sided affirmation or the ‘great refusal’ has always been dominating an Indian thought. This refusal helped in quickening the spiritual life and at the same time created in man the aspiration for the unity with the divine. This unity with the divine cannot however be complete without another important movement which Sri Aurobindo terms as involution which means the aspect of descent. According to him without the descent of the spirit into the world there cannot be accent of the world into the spirit. This descending process ‘involution’ and ascending process ‘evolution’ is directly related to each other and is also a continuous process. The descent of spirit into matter helps matter evolve into something higher than matter itself- Life. Then the descent of spirit into life makes life evolve into something higher than life- Mind. Then again the descent of the spirit into mind transforms it into something higher- Super mind. This process continuous till the Absolute spirit or the Sachinanda is reached. This evolution of matter is only possible because of the involution of the Spirit. Here we have to understand that Spirit already exists in all Matter and when Spirit descends the matter opens up, receives the energy coming from above and thus evolves. So it is necessary for us to look upon matter as spiritual being. This is why a spiritual view that ignores matter totally is also wrong. Same thing applies for Life, Soul and Mind. So for a spiritual evolution existence of spirit within is important. Involution is necessary for evolution.
The involution and the evolution helps man realize that life is liberated from mortal limitations, the physical life is fit for divine inhabitat, the attachment is not restricted to our present corporeal frame but exceeds the law of physical body the conquest of death and earthly immortality. According to Sri Aurobindo the evolution to higher state does not mean severance from our body, life, soul, and mind but it is a mere transformation of these. In this transformed state much of the characteristics belonging to the unregenerate state will disappear. This total transformation is possible only when the mind intensely aspire to receive the light. For that, opening up of the whole of our body, life, soul, and mind is of utmost importance.

Evolution or the ascent does not take place in a random process. Spiritual evolution according to Sri Aurobindo is –

...a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from mind into spirit.4

The process of evolution takes place in three ways namely- widening, heightening and integration. Widening is providing a greater room for the operation, heightening means ascent from the lower to the higher level and integration means taking up all previous lower grades and transforming them. It is not just an ascent to the higher grade but also a transformation of all the lower grades. It also means descent of the higher principles into the lower ones or in other words it is ascent through descent. Thus when mind evolves it also includes the descent into all the lower areas, which leads to the uplifting and transformation of them. The evolution of mind brings
about transformation but this transformation does not take place all of a sudden. It is a very slow process with each ascent bringing about partial change and evolution. In the process ignorance strives for knowledge. So in this slow process of ascent at some point knowledge or consciousness substitute the ignorance and unconscious.

According to this, the first and basic being for the evolutionary process to take place is matter. Both mind and Life are evolved in matter. Life and mind thus are not original creative energy and they thus have their own limitations. The source of energy that transforms and helps in the process of evolution therefore lies somewhere in higher region. The power is from consciousness higher than life consciousness and mind consciousness. A power of spirit that is more powerful than material energy. This power spiritualizes our material substances thus changing the mental into supramental being.

Spiritual evolution is not just at the cosmic level but is very much present at individual level, and the recognition of this is another feature of Sri Aurobindo’s concept of evolution. According to him the significant fact about universe is the increasing of the importance of an individual as he arises in the scale. The self as an individual is equally important to self as cosmic being or the spirit and both are the powers of the eternal. Individual is not a mere auxiliary product of the play of consciousness but an integral part of external spirit. It is that through individual, the spirit discloses itself. This supreme spirit that dwells and discloses itself is the essential condition for the discovery of supreme reality and the cosmic self.

The individual can come into relations with the Supreme Spirit only after it assumes some kind of body. This assumption of body is what we call birth.
Thus birth of a body is the starting point of the whole process of spiritual evolution.

However Sri Aurobindo takes up birth not as an isolated incident but considers it along with its past which is prepatory and future for its fulfillment. He believes that birth of a soul must continue in other births and must be preceded in other births. These different births shed light to the evolution of individual soul. He believes that rebirth is necessary and the only possible machinery for such an evolution to take place.

To put it in the words of S K Maitra,

> evolution means a transformation of the whole of our terrestrial existence, material, mental and vital first by an ascent to higher principle, and secondly, by psychization, as we may call it of the whole being, that is to say a transformation of the whole being through the light emanating from the soul.⁶

In the process of spiritual evolution, triple transformation is essential according to Sri Aurobindo. The first step is the psychic change. The psyche or the soul the inner or the hidden part of our nature is immutable and imperishable. It is an ever-pure flame that burns within us which cannot be extinguished and polluted. The first step of triple transformation is the removal of the veil that separates this inner being and let the surface being be flooded with its light. When this psychic being is fully developed it leads to the transformation of mind, life, and matter. The second step in the process is transformation through spiritual consciousness. Psychic change is not enough for total evolution. The soul should open itself not only to the life, mind, and matter but also to the higher light of the spirit. In other words soul should readily accept the Supreme Spiritual status or the higher
existence. This helps in the descent of the higher existence or involution, which is very necessary to make the change permanent. When the ascent to the higher existence takes place without the descent of the latter the change that takes place is no permanent transformation of the being. According to Sri Aurobindo this descent is important as it brings about the awareness of infinite. The last and the final stage of this evolution is the Suprarenal change. The change is brought about due to the ascent to the supermind, which is made possible by the descent of it. This final stage transforms the whole terrestrial, physical, vital and mental existence. The suprarenal change is a shift from the nature to supernatural and here the change is the stage in knowledge

Sri Aurobindo believes human beings to be Gnostic beings that has shed off ignorance and is illumined by light of knowledge. According to his law of the super mind Gnostic beings are not of single type. It is a unity in diversity, infinite diversity but oneness in constitution, all revealing, all uniting order. Gnostic beings are governed by the power of universal spirituality. Universal yet individual and this individuality are not limited to his separate individuality. This Gnostic being acts in universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. He has no ego thus he can harmonize himself with the outer world. The wall between the individual and the universe breaks down with the giving up of ego. As a result of which both individual and the universe becomes the expression of one and the same supreme reality. The Gnostic can realize, see, feel, and hear the divine within his own vast sense of being. Body becomes an instrument for the spirit.

So holding on to this theoretical base, in this chapter I shall look into Keats’ *Hyperion* and Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and try to find out the
progressive sense of beautiful in them. Before plunging into the poems let us briefly look into Keats ideas which support this concept of evolution.

In a letter to P.B. Shelly written on 16th August 1819, Keats proclaims ‘my imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk’ and this sums up all about how much Keats gave importance to imagination. However the imagination Keats talks about is at the same time grounded on some kind of worldly image. It is not altogether dissociated from this real world. In the same letter written to Bailey on 22nd November, 1817 he gives an example of how on listening to a beautiful song we get transported by imagination but none the less all the time we associate that exaltation with some kind of worldly images. He says-

But I was saying- the simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repeti(ti)on of its own silent working coming continually in the spirit with a fine suddenness –to compare great things with small- Have you never by being surprised with an old melody- in a delicious place- by a delicious voice felt over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul- do you not remember forming to yourself the singer’s face more beautiful that (for than) it was possible and yet with the elevation of the moment you did not think so- even then you were mounted in the wings of imagination so high –that the prototype must be here after-that delicious face you will see.  

Imagination, passions and sensations are not the only things of importance for a mind moving towards poetic excellence. It is through knowledge that one’s mind becomes mature and philosophic. Knowledge that Keats speaks
about is again an all round knowledge which one can acquire through experience and with time. In the same letter to Bailey, Keats says-

‘to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic mind – such as one I consider yours and therefore it is necessary to your eternal happiness that you not only drink this old wine of heaven, which I shall call the redigestion of our most ethereal musings on earth; but also increase in knowledge and know all things’.  

Imagination according to him moves towards truth and he has put this view about imagination in his letter to John Taylor written on 30th January 1818. He writes-

When wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the imagination towards truth. […]It set before me at once the gradations of happiness even like a kind of pleasure Thermometer- and is my first Step towards the chief attempt in the drama- the playing of different natures with joy and sorrow.  

Different levels of imagination produce at the same time different degrees of happiness or pleasure.  

His love for knowledge can also be seen in his letter to John Taylor written on 24th April 1818, where he speaks out his plan to cancel his trip to North. The problem that he speaks of is his quest for knowledge. He knows knowledge to be an important factor for creative process. He says-

I was purposing to travel north this summer- there is but one thing to prevent me- I know nothing I have read nothing and I
mean to follow Solomon’s directions of ‘get wisdom’- get understanding- I find cavalier days are gone by. I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge- I find that there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world- [...] there is but one way for me-the road lies th(r)ough application study and thought. I will pursue it and to that end purpose retiring for some years.  

Experience and time leads to maturity of mind and once the mind becomes matured no branch of study whatsoever would affect the poetry that came out of it. In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds written on 3rd May 1818, he talks about his continuous study of medicine. He says-

Were I to study Physic or Medicine again, I feel it would not make a least difference in my poetry; when the mind is at its infancy a Bias is in reality a Bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a Bias becomes no Bias. Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a greater whole. I am so convinced of this, that I am glad at not having given away my medical books, which I shall again look over to keep alive the little I know thither wards. [...] an extensive knowledge is needful to to thinking people- it takes away the heat and fever; and helps by widening speculation, [...]. The difference of high sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this- in the latter case we are falling continuously ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and will all, (the) horror of a bare shouldered creature- in the former case our shoulders are fledge, and we go thro’ the same air and space without fear.
He not only speaks about the idea of matured mind always remaining aloof but this idea about evolution is again reiterated when Keats in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats written in between 16th December 1818 and 4th January 1819, speaks about our mind’s continuous progression. No one thing can hold us for a long time. Our thoughts move on from one thing to another. He says-

My thoughts have turned lately this way - the more we know the more inadequacy we discover in the world to satisfy us - this is an old observation; but I have made up my mind never to take anything for granted - but even to examine the truth of commonest proverbs - This however is true - Mrs Tighe (Mary Tighe, author of Psyche) and Beattie once delighted me - now I see through them and find nothing in them – or weakness - and yet how many they will delight! [...] a year ago I could not understand in the slightest degree Raphael’s cartoons - now I begin to read them a little.  

In a letter written to Benjamin Robert Haydon, on September 28th, 1817 he speaks about the importance of experience in creative process when he says-

-Rome was not built in a Day - and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next Poem.  

This evolution process is important for an artist. So where and how does this process take place? In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats written in between 14th February to 3rd May 1819, Keats describes world as “the vale of soul making.” He claims that many have called this world ‘a vale of
tears’. He thinks that it is not so. Here he elaborately describes what he means by soul. Soul for him is intelligence which is important to possess the sense of identity. According to him three things- world, human heart and soul is necessary for the whole process of soul making. Proper action of heart and soul in this elemental space better known as world helps in the whole process. The world full of its joys and sorrows gives ample scope for the poet’s soul to evolve into maturity.

This speaks a lot about human mind. It is always in the process of evolution. No mind can be satiated with one thing or knowledge. It moves on and this process of evolution is so perfectly found in his Hyperion and his Odes.

Hyperion is an unfinished poem in three books. Keats takes up a Greek myth as its theme. Keats tells us about the Olympians the new order of Gods defeating Titans the older order of Gods. In fact the Olympians are Titan’s children. The work opens up with one of the deposed Titans, Saturn mourning over his defeated state. In the opening lines we are also introduced to another defeated Titan, Thea. She comes over to console Saturn but is so much grieved at the sight that she herself ends up weeping at Saturn’s feet. Saturn later stands up and is led by Thea to the place where other fallen Titans were. The second part of the poem shows one Titan, Hyperion who is still undefeated. He readies himself to help Saturn. Hyperion still holds his position and place yet he feels a strange premonition of some kind of disaster. The second book describes the meeting of the deposed Titans. Saturn himself opens up the discussion. Many of them lament about their fallen state and some of them hope to rebuild their force and fight the rebel Olympians. Yet most importantly there are few who have come to understand the cause of their fall and they have come into terms with their state. One such titan is Oceanus, the Sea
God and Keats uses him as his mouth piece to speak about his belief in the idea of evolution. For this very reason Oceanus’s speech becomes most impressive and important. He asked his fellow Titans to come into terms with the change that has come upon them. He names it a part of natural process and even goes on to the extent of praising the beauty of his supplanter. Oceanus finds a supporter in Clymene a sea nymph who speaks about the beautiful song, Earth sang to greet Apollo. According to Oceanus-

"First in beauty should be first in might."\(^{15}\)

(*Hyperion; Bk 2, L 229*)

is the eternal law. He also adds that when their supplanters grow old they too are going to meet with a similar kind of fate in the hands of more beautiful Gods. The lines also give us a hint about Keats’s belief in the power of Beauty. In the same book we have a contrary voice in Enceladus who does not want to accept the change.

Book III a mere fragment tells us about Apollo who will supplant Hyperion as the sun God. Apollo possesses ‘knowledge enormous’\(^{16}\) which transforms him into a God. Through this Keats also tries to hint at the idea that a beautiful being also possesses greater amount of knowledge. This is again the knowledge that Sri Aurobindo talks about in his theory of evolution knowledge that is essential to bring about the evolutionary process.

When we closely study this poem we find different kinds of progression taking place at different levels.

Keats tells us about the different kinds of changes that time brings about. With the progression of time the Titans had their fall. They were once
supreme rulers, powerful in all respect. They were beautiful but now are old and of no match to those who have superceded them. Michael O’Neill terms Hyperion to be ‘...one myth that of evolutionary progress’.

With the fall of the Titans their joy is gone as Clymene laments-

.. And all my knowledge is that joy is gone,
And this thing woe crept in among our hearts.
(Hyperion; Bk II,L 253-254)

These lines hint at the direct relationship between beauty and joy. We can see that anything beautiful can give us joy in one-way or the other. Loss of beauty brought about fall in the life of the Titans, which led to the loss of joy too. A similar kind of idea about beauty is proposed in another line-

A thing of beauty is joy forever (Endymion; Bk I L- I)

The new generation of Gods who have superseded the Titans in power are more beautiful and were destined to excel them.

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty born of us,
And fated to excel us, as we pass.
(Hyperion; Bk II; L 212-214)

Keats also reminds us that this kind of evolutionary progression is also a nature’s law. Oceanus, the God of sea in his speech gives voice to it and comforts his companions by saying-
We fall by course of Nature’s law, not force\(^{21}\)

\textit{(Hyperion; Bk II, l 181)}

This line helps us to understand that nature is always in an evolutionary process. One generation is superceded by another generation, which is more beautiful and more powerful. The change is mandatory and it is always for the better. Keats’s belief in this change can be found in his letters also. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats written on September 1819 he writes-

\begin{quote}
All civilized countries become gradually more enlightened and there should be a continual change for the better.\(^{22}\)
\end{quote}

Oceanus’s speech in Book-II of \textit{Hyperion} tells us about how the Titans came to rule. Chaos and darkness was there in the initial stage. There was no shape as such. When the moment was ripe Chaos ceased and the Titans who were then very beautiful started to rule the universe. Now younger Gods who are more beautiful and powerful have superceded them who once were supreme.

John Blades in his work titled \textit{Analyzing Keats’s Poetry} thinks that the word perfection in the line-

\begin{quote}
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads\(^{23}\)
\end{quote}

\textit{(Hyperion; Bk II, L 212)}

emphasized Keats’s faith in evolutionary process, and the evolution brought about improvement. This law of progress, again according to Keats was making mankind increasingly enlightened. Keats mentions about this in his letter of September 1819 to his brother George. At the same time this law of progress is an eternal one. One generation is disposed by another who is
more beautiful andmighty. The poet believed that beauty is intimately
associated with strength. A beautiful being according to him is more
powerful.

According to the speech the progress is from utter chaos to the formation of
Titans and then to more beautiful younger Olympian Gods. So initially
when out of chaos the Titans came they were the most beautiful beings but
with time they became old lost their beauty. New order of Gods, Olympians
looked more beautiful than their predecessors. Not only they became first in
beauty but also first in strength, ultimately superseding the older Gods.
When Keats talks about beauty he is not merely mentioning physical beauty
but going beyond that to the spiritual realm. The progression is thus from
one realm to an altogether another one.

The younger generation represents new light, hope and new authority. Here
Keats expects the Titans to understand the eternal rule of evolution and
accept their fate. Out of the group Oceanus and Mnemosyne understands
this and presses Saturn and others to face the reality of evolution which
according to them is also the eternal rule of nature’s course. She also
understands that to be transformed into a deity one has to experience the
pains and pleasures of the world. Accordingly we have Apollo’s elevation
in book III where he is equated to ‘eagle golden feathered’.

The progression is furthered and finally in The Fall of Hyperion Keats
gives us a view of suffering which leads to personal revelation- a kind of
catharsis.

Keats in his letter of 3rd May 1819 to his brother George says-

Call the world if you please ‘the vale of soul making’.
By this he means that when a man is born unto this world human soul is only partly formed and it becomes a complete one through various experiences of this world. This was what Keats believed and on this principle of progression is Hyperion based.

Moneta is the embodiment of knowledge and revelation. She has suffered her bit, and by undergoing those, she has become matured and her mind has progressed from one level to another, from the physical to the spiritual thus helping her to understand and come into the terms with her fall. Keats believed that, trials and experiences are important in a man’s life as it helps them to achieve the impossible happiness in one’s lifetime. Role of Moneta in the poem is that of soul making and it is one of the important themes of Hyperion as it comes about through evolutionary process.

Another important kind of progression we find in Hyperion is Apollo’s state of mind. Apollo is deeply conscious that in order to fulfill his task as a God of sun he must come to ripeness first. To achieve this ripeness he has to experience firstly ‘the pain of truth’. That state of glorification can be reached only after enduring the pain of worldly experiences.

In *Hyperion* Apollo proclaims-

> Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.\textsuperscript{26}

*(Hyperion, Book III line 113)*

Knowledge that he talks about here is of experience and not an intellectual one.
Through this we can understand about Apollo’s progression from one realm to the other. This takes place only after he has undergone various experiences.

It has been agreed by everyone that the book *Les Fleurs du Mal* must be read as a volume in spite of its having a number of cycles. At the same time the over all meaning still remain debatable.

According to Nicole Ward Jonne in his *Baudelaire a Fire to Conquer Darkness* says-

> the main idea behind *Les Fleurs du Mal* is that Satan holds Baudelaire under his sway and renders useless his efforts to regain original purity and to soar towards beauty.\(^{27}\)

In all his poems whatever the theme might be we see a common phenomena – a quest to progress from the common to the higher level, from the physical to the spiritual realm. He seeks to find beauty in the ugly things of life and this is the most important type of evolution that we see in Baudelaire’s individual poems. The progression leads from the real to the ideal, from ugly to the beautiful and from the physical to the spiritual realm.

In his poem *Projet D’Épilogue-Pour la Seconde Édition des Fleurs du mal* or *Draft for Epilogue for the second edition of Les Fleurs Du Mal* he writes:

> Car j’ai de chaque chose extrait la quintessence,
> Tu m’as donné ta boue et j’en ai fait de l’or\(^{28}\)

(Projet D’Epilogue-Pour la Seconde Edition des Fleurs du mal; l 33-34)
…for from each thing I’ve extracted the quintessence.
You gave me your mud and I’ve turned it into gold

(Translated by: Carol Clarke)

Through these two lines the poet tells us about the kind of progression we may expect and find in Baudelaire’s work. The poet took up the simplest and common things of life and turned them into invaluable ideas. The worldly is transformed into spiritual. It is not something beautiful that is made more beautiful but on the contrary in Baudelaire’s poems the ugliest becomes most beautiful.

By the age of twenty-five Baudelaire had written most of his love poems. Love for him was an important thing in life. It was love that made him a poet but at the same time it was also the same thing that ruined him as a man. The love poems that he has written have no match in French Literature. In his love poems he mostly pays tribute to and thus glorifies woman’s charms. When he does so he portrays the beauty of his lover but when he does so he does it by describing ugliness in her.

Les Bijoux (The Jewels) the poem condemned by the masses for its vulgarity, describes a naked woman waiting for the poet wearing only her jewels. Her dark skin glows in the firelight. She is said to be looking like a Moorish concubine waiting to please him. With her physical charms she looks more alluring than the angels of evil. Many descriptions implicitly speak about love making and satisfaction they get after it. Especially the fifth stanza -
Et son bras et sa jambe, et sa cuisse et ses reins,
Polis comme de l’huile, onduleux comme un cygne,
Passaient devant mes yeux clairvoyants et sereins;
Et son ventre et ses seins, ces grappes de ma vigne,?

(\textit{Les Bijoux; l }20-24)

And her arm and her leg, and her thigh and her loins,
Shiny as oil, sinuous as a swan,
Passed in front of my eyes, clear-sighted and serene;
And her belly, her breasts, grapes of my vine,

(Translated: William Aggeler)

However her candidness and wantonness together gives her a noble look, which adds up some supernatural charm to her beauty. Most importantly it does not confine to this experience at the physical realm but as Baudelaire points out-

\begin{quote}
Me ravit en extase, et j’aime à la fureur
Les choses où le son se mêle à la lumière.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

(\textit{Les Bijoux; L }7-8)

Transports me with delight; I passionately love
All things in which sound is mingled with light.

(Translation William Aggeler;)

The sound of the ornaments and the light transports the poet to a completely different realm. Similarly \textit{Le Serpent Qui Danse (The Dancing Snake)} is another such poem where Baudelaire describes to us about his lady love’s beautiful body. He confesses that he loves to see her shiny skin. However
the reason is that the sight of her physical charms transports the poet’s
dreamy soul to a far off heaven.

Comme un navire qui s’éveille
Au vent du matin,
Mon âme rêveuse appareille
Pour un ciel lointain.  

(Le Serpent Qui Danse; L 9-12)

Like a vessel that awakens
To the morning wind,
My dreamy soul sets sail
For a distant sky.

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

As he looks at the beautiful skin of his mistress and gets lost in her hair,
which immediately like a vessel sets sail for a distant skies. He also feels as
if he is sipping some wine, strong and overpowering, and that lights his
heart with stars. In another poem Chanson d’apres-midi (Afternoon Song),
once again Baudelaire celebrates his lover’s beauty. He speaks about her
eyes, tresses, and perfume in her flesh. Her eyes remind him of sorceress
and not an angel, her hair is full of memories and the scent of her flesh
incites him. In this poem again the lover helps the poet to progress from one
state of being to another. It rejuvenates and brings the poet back to life.

Mon âme par toi guérie,
Par toi, lumière et couleur!
Explosion de chaleur
Dans ma noire Sibérie!  

(Chanson d’apres-midi; L 37-40)
My soul brought to life by you
By your clear light and color,
Explosion of heat
In my dark Siberia!

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

In Tout Entiere (All of Her) Baudelaire tells us that once he was asked which part of his lover’s body he liked most. He contemplated, and finally drew a conclusion that he could not name just one part, as her body in entirety worked on his senses. Each and every part of her body worked together to bring about the mysterious metamorphosis or change in the poet’s life.

Ô métamorphose mystique
De tous mes sens fondus en un!
Son haleine fait la musique,
Comme sa voix fait le parfum!\(^{33}\)

(Tout Entiere; L 21-24)

O mystic metamorphosis
Of all my senses joined in one!
Her breath makes music,
And her voice makes perfume!

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

In Le Poison (Poison) once again the poet glorifies his lover’s beauty. Here he tells us that the poison that comes out of his lover’s eyes is much more powerful than that, which comes of wine and opium. Her green eyes and the saliva make the poet to introspect himself. So the progression here is from the physical to the spiritual realm.
Baudelaire frankly writes about the erotic and sadistic fantasies. He describes them, but again does not linger or stop over them. He continues to progress towards the ideal.

In the fifth stanza of *Le Lectuer* *(To The Reader)*-

Ainse qu'un debauche pauvre qui baise et mange
Le sein martyrise d'une antique catin.\(^{34}\)

(*Le Lectuer*; L17-18)

…Like a penniless lecher kissing and nibbling an old strumpet’s tortured breast, we thieve our furtive pleasure

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

Apart from these he also wrote a number of platonic love poems. Most of the poems from *The Sabatier Cycle* fall under this class. In poems like *Le Flambeau Vivant* *(The Living Torch)*, *Hymne* *(Hymn)*, *L’Aube Spirituelle* *(The Spiritual Dawn)*, *Rversibilite* *(Reversibility)*, Baudelaire writes about the moral influences his lover has upon him. The lady is relentlessly considered as a light, an angel that leads, as someone who fills the poet’s life with joy as a Goddess. She is continuously presented as a living force that transports the poet to a different sphere. In the *Hymne* the lady is said to permeate the poet’s life and add the taste of eternity in his soul. *L’Aube Spirituelle* speaks about the spiritual dawn that takes place. It is a slow but steady movement from the fallen to the raised state. The blue of spiritual heavens which till now was closed is thrown open like a yawning abyss ready to devour anything. This new experience transforms the soul which ultimately becomes-
Le soleil a noirci la flamme des bougies;
Ainsi, toujours vainqueur, ton fantôme est pareil,
Ame resplendissante, à l'immortel soleil!35

(L’Aube Spirituelle; l 12-14)

The sunlight has darkened the flame of the candles;
Thus, ever triumphant, resplendent soul!
Your phantom is like the immortal sun!

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

In Rversibilite poet addresses the different angels of gaiety, kindness, health, beauty, happiness, joy and light. He wonders and asks whether they know about the different hardships, vices, ugliness and various other shortcomings. He doubts, because they are to some extent perfect angels who have reached the ideal state. Through this poem Baudelaire might be fulfilling his idea of looking for in the external and the visible nature examples and metaphors which allowed him to characterize the pleasures and impressions of a spiritual order.

He believed that a correspondence between the visible things of this terrestrial world and the invisible things of the spiritual world give an understanding of the existence of the Divine. God as the source of all objects of creation bears a hidden meaning. The world and the various things in it acts as a cloak – the body is hidden behind. The world is but just a harmony and we are only participants. It is a light one see and a melody one hears which bear correspondence with the divine.
La nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers
Laisse parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L’Homme y passé a travers des forets de symbols
Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers³⁶

(Correspondances; l 1-4)

Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes.

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

In these lines of Correspondences Baudelaire compares nature to a temple. Nature utters a host of words, provides man with forests of symbols and watches him with knowing eyes. The words and the symbols Baudelaire talks about here are not just those related to this world but on contrary belong to the world beyond this physical one. This is clear when we look at the next four lines.

Comme de longs echos qui de loin se confondent
dans une tenebreuse et profonde uniote,
vaste comme la nuit et comme la claret,
Les parfumes, les couleurs et les sons se repondent.³⁷

(Correspondences Lines 5- 8)

Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance
In a deep and tenebrous unity,
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,
Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.
(Translated by: William Aggeler)
The words and symbols Baudelaire speaks about in the first stanza share an analogy with each other. They understand and answer to one another. They have a deep unity and oneness. The phrases ‘as vast as darkness’ and ‘as vast as light’ sheds light not only to unity but also at the same time they speak about their infinite nature. He writes about the unified vision of natural, admirable, instinct of beauty, which makes us consider the earth and mystical spectacles as a unity, as a correspondence of universal analogy. The reciprocal analogy between this world and the spiritual world that exists beyond speaks a lot about how God has created world in its complex and indivisible totality. This unity itself speaks about the greatness of the creator. Baudelaire always tries to see this and the other world as a whole thing. At times as in Correspondances his poetry acts as a bridging gap between these two worlds.

Once Gautier told about Baudelaire

he possesses the gift of correspondence to use the same mystical medium that is to say he knows how to discover by a secret intrusion invisible relationship with others and thus brings together by unexpected analogies which only the visionary can see, the objects very far from each other and absolutely contradictory in appearance.  

Baudelaire is not only a poet but at the same time a seer. He can come out of himself to be in unison with others and the nature around him.

Through Baudelaire’s love poems we come to know that physical relationship is as important as psychic or the platonic. These two kinds of relationship share a mysterious bond with each other. According to
Baudelaire it is from the physical one progress to the psychic. So physical realm is important or even may be called a stepping stone to reach the physic or the platonic level. Another important thing about Baudelaire’s love poems is that the poet brings out the beauty from the ugly and the vulgar to which the physical is often associated with. When the final beauty or the ideal is reached we can see that the transformation or the evolution is already taken place.

In his *Spleen poems* he critically speaks about his thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and behavior. *Chant de Autumn (The Autumn Song)* tells us about what the poet felt with the approaching of the autumn season. The poem begins with the poet bidding farewell to the summer season and lamenting about the approaching winter. He hears the sound of felling logs, which on their part brings a host of images of pain and sorrow to the poet’s mind. He even thinks about the impending death and imagines the final nails being driven into a coffin box. Yet towards the end of the poem the poet is able to see the beauty of autumn and enjoy the yellow gentle rays of autumn tide. However at the same time he also hints at the final transportation to another realm when he finally says-

\[\text{Courte tâche! La tombe attend; elle est avid!}\\Ah! laissez-moi, mon front posé sur vos genoux,\\Goûter, en regrettant l’été blanc et torride,\\De l’arrière-saison le rayon jaune et doux!}^{39}\\(Chant de Autumn; l 25-28)\]

Short task! The tomb awaits; it is avid!  
Ah! let me, with my head bowed on your knees,  
Taste the sweet, yellow rays of the end of autumn,
While I mourn for the white, torrid summer!
(Translated by: William Aggeler)

The task is over and the tomb waits for the final journey and this becomes more definite when we remember the first line of the poem where the poet proclaims of plunging into cold darkness very soon.

Again in La Cloche fêlée (The Cracked Bell) - a similar image of death and decay is portrayed. The faded voice of the bell sounds like the death rattle of a wounded soldier. At the same time despite the bell being old and cracked, the poet says that the bell is still hale and alert. The poet contrasts his state with a healthy bell that can still perform its duty. His own state and his weakened voice resemble the death rattle of a wounded man.

Baudelaire believes in the fallen state of man. He believed vice to be natural and virtue to be artificial. According to him one needs time to attain virtue by going through sins. His concept of fallen state can be seen in many of his poems. The poem L'Irrémédiable (Beyond Redemption) speaks about it in the very first stanza-

Une idee une forme, un etre
parti de l’azure et tombe
dans un styx bourbeux et plombe
On nul oeil du ciel ne penetre,

(L'Irrémédiable; L1-4)

An Idea, a Form, a Being
Which left the azure sky and fell
Into a leaden, miry Styx
That no eye in Heaven can pierce;
(Translated by: William Aggeler)
A fallen being falls into such a place in which no eye of heaven can penetrate, thus making his state utterly dismal. However it is not the end. According to Baudelaire, this is from where the process of rebuilding, evolution and rejuvenation starts.

In the poem *Un voyage a Cythere* (*a Voyage to Cytherea*) Baudelaire tells us about a sea voyage made to the famed island of Venus. He sees a man hung on a gibbet and his flesh being plucked by the birds. The poet identifies himself with the hanged man. Full of despair the poet makes an ardent plea to God—

Ah! Seigneur! dounez moi la force et le courage  
De contempler mon coeur et mon crops digout!\(^4\)\(^1\)

(*Un Voyage à Cythère*; l 59-60)

O! Lord! give me the strength and the courage  
To contemplate my body and soul without loathing!  

(Translated by: William Aggeler)

He is well aware about man’s fallen state, the bitterness of life and the ugliness around him. Yet Baudelaire throughout plunges into this ugliness of life and tries to bring out the beauty embedded in it.

The under dogs of the society who feature in Baudelaire’s works live a life full of pains, sorrows, and are always in a pathetic condition. *Le Vin des chiffonniers* (*The Ragpicker’s wine*) tell us about the rag pickers who have faced life full of sorrows. In *A une Mendiante Rousse* (*A Red Haired Beggar Girl*) Baudelaire describes half naked poor beggar girl. The very shirt tells a lot about her poverty. In spite of this the poet notices an unnatural beauty in her. In the poems like *Le Crepuscule du soir* (*Evening Twilight*) and *L Ame*
Baudelaire writes about the honest men who work and toil doggedly and without complaints in factories and fields.

Baudelaire also writes about Paris the great modern city in which human distress and heartbreaks are to be found in an alarming rate. These poems do not present Paris in all her glory but on the contrary the poet describes prostitutes sleeping open mouthed, debauchers going homewards, numbed beggar women and mothers crying during childbirth. In *Le Crepuscule du Matin (Morning Twilight)* the poet says that daybreak at Paris is a time of sad endings and painful beginnings. In *Le Crepuscule du soir (Evening Twilight)* we find two voices. The first describes the various urban vices. Night itself is compared to a criminal’s accomplice. This is also a time when men become a beast. Gamblers, thieves and prostitutes roam the streets of night Paris. The second voice however tells us that night brings rest to those who have worked hard and suffered long.

So Baudelaire does not merely portray Paris topographically in his poems. He dramatizes the people and the place. The city itself is full of vices yet it also has its own beauty. Baudelaire plunges into the ugliness of Paris and thereafter tries to bring out her beauty.

The title *Les Fleurs du Mal* which Baudelaire chooses for his work tells us about his belief to some extent. The title was suggested by one of his friends Hippolyte Babon. According to F W Leakey it may mean two things-

His poems are products of evil. Like flowers they are adornments of evil. Secondly it may be that he is trying to show that even product of evil may be beautiful like a flower.\(^{42}\)
The second idea about the title stated above explains to some extent Baudelaire’s sense of progression or evolution. He knows about the evil prevalent in his society. He experiences them and tries to seek, and would often find beauty in them. In an incomplete fragment intended for 1861 edition Baudelaire hinted that he had taken up the task of extracting beauty from evil, was in itself a daunting one.

Like Sri Aurobindo the poets have in their poems given importance to both matter and spirit. According to him there cannot be a spiritualistic denial of matter as it is an important factor to understand and bring about the process of evolution. Sri Aurobindo believed that evolution is not a mere isolation of spirit from the matter but a transformation of the latter to the former. So the first and basic important being for the process of evolution is matter. This dictum also points out to the fact that transformation in the process of evolution begins and takes place in the individual materialistic level and not at cosmic level. When we consider the study of different works of Keats and Baudelaire we find this idea propagated by Sri Aurobindo coming true. Both men always takes into consideration both matter and spirit. The evolutions that we see in their works are from the common to the elevated, lesser to the greater and material to the spiritual. The evolution takes place in all the three ways- widening, heightening and integration. By widening we mean providing a greater room for the operation, heightening means ascent from the lower to the higher level and integration means taking up all previous lower grades and transforming them. It is not just an ascent to the higher grade but also implies transformation of all the lower grades. However knowledge through experience is considered important to understand and experience this idea of evolution fully.

As pointed out, both Keats and Baudelaire believed in the importance of matter and spirit. They believed that evolutionary process begins at the
The progression of beauty in Baudelaire is much more complex one than Keats’. Baudelaire’s evolutionary progression reminds us of Dante’s concept of hell, purgatory and paradise. Baudelaire chooses in each of his poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, a quest to progress to the ideal beauty. He seeks to move from the ugly to the beautiful and physical to the spiritual. The images that he takes from this materialistic world are at once ugly and detestable. He gives us ugly pictures of naked women, beggars with tattered clothes, decomposed dead bodies with flies buzzing about it, albatross not at its splendor but in a degraded state, so on so forth. However he does not stop there. At times they are images of erotic and sadistic fantasies. From
these ugly and vulgar descriptions he moves on to an ideal beauty lying beneath them. He chooses not to linger about at the physical level but moves on to the spiritual and the psychic realm. This idea can be seen plentifully in his works like *Les Bijoux, Le serpent Qui Danse, Tout Entiere, Le Poison* and many other poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. In his *Correspondences* the progression is from the finite to the infinite, terrestrial to the divine. They move beyond the physical. This difference might be because of the fact that Baudelaire well understood the fallen state of man. He had gained more experience about life and acquired more knowledge to understand the concept of evolution better. The above discourse clearly points out two distinct kinds of progression of the sense of beautiful that takes place in the Keats’ and Baudelaire’s poems.
End notes:

1. Sri Aurobindo; *The Life Divine*; USA; Lotus Press; 1994 (p.8)
2. Between the lower (body/material) hemisphere's highest reach, and the spiritual worlds of the Absolute lies a zone which was known to the seers, and which Sri Aurobindo calls "Truth Consciousness," or the Supermind.
3. Absolute spirit way higher than supermind in the ladder of evolutionary process.
4. S.K. Maitra; *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*; India; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department; 1965. (p.43)
5. Sri Aurobindo; *The life divine*; USA; Lotus Press; 1994. (Vol 2; p704)
6. S.K. Maitra; *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*; India; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department; 1965. (p48)
7. P. S Sastri, (Introductory notes); *Selected Letters of John Keats*; India: Macmillan India Ltd; 1993(to Bailey on 22nd November, 1817) p.
8. --------------------------( to Bailey on 22nd November, 1817)p.30
9. --------------------------( John Taylor on 30th January 1818)p.45
10.--------------------------( to John Taylor on 24th April 1818)p.45
11.--------------------------( J. H. Reynolds on 3rd May 1818)p.62
12.--------------------------(George and Georgiana Keats 16th December 1818 and 4th January 1819)p. 81
13.--------------------------( B. R. Haydon, on September 28th, 1817)p.20
14.P. S Sastri, (Introductory notes); *Selected Letters of John Keats*; India: Macmillan India Ltd; 1993 ( George and Georgiana Keats written in between 14th February to 3rd May 1819)p.88
15.John Keats; *The Poems of John Keats*; New Delhi; Rupa Paperback; 2000; (Hyperion; BookII; l 229)
16.-------------------------- (Hyperion; book III; 1 113)
18. John Keats; *The Poems of John Keats*; New Delhi; Rupa Paperback; 2000; (*Hyperion; Bk II, l 253-254*)
19. ----------------------------------------------- (*Endymion; Bk 1 L- 1*)
20. -----------------------------------------------(*Hyperion; Bk II; L 212-214*)
21. -----------------------------------------------(*Hyperion; Bk II, l 181*)
22. John Keats; Selected Letters of John Keats (Introduction by P.S.Sastri); Madras; MacMillan India Limited; 1993. (letter to George and Georgiana Keats, September 1819) p. 112
23. John Keats; *The Poems of John Keats*; New Delhi; Rupa Paperback; 2000 (*Hyperion; Bk II, L 212*)
25. John Keats; *The Poems of John Keats*; New Delhi; Rupa Paperback; 2000 (*Hyperion; Bk II, L 202*)
26. -----------------------------------------------(*Hyperion, Book III line 113*)
27. Nicole Ward Jouve; *Baudelaire A fire to conquest darkness*; Hongkong; MacMillan Press Ltd; 1980
28. Charles Baudelaire; *Selected Poems* (With Translations by Carol Clake); Penguin Books; England; 1995 ( *Projet D’Epilogue-Pour la Seconde Edition des Fleurs du mal*; l 33-34)
29. Charles Baudelaire; *Fleurs du Mal*; With Translations by William Aggeler; http://fleursdumal.org; poem # 119; (*Les Bijoux; L 120-24*)
30. -----------------------------------------------(*Les Bijoux; L 7-8*)
31. -----------------------------------------------Poem#125(*Le Serpent Qui Danse; 19-12*)
32. -----------------------------------------------Poem#210(*Chanson d’apres-midi; 137-40*)
33. -----------------------------------------------Poem#135(*Tout Entiere; L 21-24*)
34. -----------------------------------------------Poem # 099(*Le Lectuer; L17-18*)
35.---------------------------------Poem#141(\textit{L’Aube Spirituelle}; \textit{I} 12-14)
36.---------------------------------Poem# 103(\textit{Correspondances}; \textit{I} 1-4)
37.---------------------------------\textit{Correspondances}; \textit{I} 5-8
38. Théophile Gautier; \textit{Charles Baudelaire His Life}; New York; Brentano’s; 1915(p. 67)
39. Charles Baudelaire; \textit{Fleurs du Mal} (With Translations by William Aggeler); \url{http://fleursdumal.org}; poem#208; (\textit{Chant de Autumn}; \textit{L} 25-28)
40.---------------------------------Poem# 163;(\textit{L’Irrémédiable}; \textit{L} 1-4)
41.---------------------------------Poem# 187(\textit{Un Voyage à Cythère}; \textit{L} 59-60)