Evolution of aesthetics in Verlaine and Changampuzha

“The most essential thing of all art, whatever it may be, lies in the connection. This rapport in poetry, is of ideas, pictures, sentiments, and especially of sounds, all stirred up by a particular rhythm, just like colours and lines in the case of painting, of volumes and proportion, in sculpture and in architecture, and of timbre and movement in music.”

Paul Claudel (Preface to The Anthology of Mexican Poetry)

4:1 Influence of Baudelaire

From ancient times, a knowledge or ‘science’ of correspondences existed, a good part of which eventually got lost with time. However, historic myths, art work, hieroglyphics and sacred literature are proof of that knowledge. Plato’s philosophy of ideas is the source of the theory of signatures, the theory of universal analogy and the theory of correspondences. That there are correspondences between the material and the spiritual worlds and that the world can therefore be read like a book, revealing the secrets of the spiritual world - is the most common thread of
this doctrine. Another common thread is that the senses, which diffusely allow us to experience the material world, can be united as one, enabling our complete grasp of spiritual harmony, of the ideal world. In the doctrine of correspondences, the senses have occupied an important place, enabling the leap from the material to the spiritual.

Throughout time, though individual senses have enjoyed varying degrees of attention, the sense of smell has not been very popular, but it is markedly emphasized by two users of the doctrine, the 18th century Swedish scientist, theologian and mystic-Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and the French Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who in his turn was strongly influenced by the writings of the American poet-Edgar Allan Poe. He gave olfaction\(^1\) a unique place in his writings and elevated it to a stature never before seen in the history of poetry. Dubbed ‘un gourmet d’odeurs’ (a gourmet of odours), for him perfume was timeless and much adored. His most original contribution was to render fragrance, a mode of aesthetic perception, evoking poetic inspiration. In his own words-

“My soul floats on …perfumes, as the souls of other men…float on music.”

In Swedenborg’s opinion, there is a correspondence between natural and spiritual levels: each person lives in both levels at once.

\(^1\) Charles Baudelaire: Poet of the Perfumed Word-Marlene Goldsmith in the ‘Perfume’ Magazine’, December 30, 2011’
Eternal life is an inner condition beginning with earthly life: gradual redemption occurs through personal regulation of inner states. In Charles Baudelaire’s poem ‘Correspondences’ (Correspondances) with a direct reference regarding the title to the Swedenborgian concept, the connection between Nature and the metaphysical world is revealed. Synesthesia is said to “put the reader in contact with a forceful sensory presence, a primitive wholeness or synthesis of impression.” Derived from the Greek ‘syn’ (meaning union) and ‘aesthesis’ (sensation), the term synaesthesia is used to signify—“production from a sense impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense impression of another” 2. Baudelaire transfers through synesthesia—in which sounds, colours and scents are tied together to create mental images, and where all senses are stimulated through the mind’s eye, a dramatic French Symbolist impression of Art and Nature on to the reader.

Baudelaire started his career as an art critic, whose erudite appraisals of art exhibitions (Salons) won the admiration of art lovers. His artistic perception enabled him to evolve his own style in poetry writing. In his review of the 1846 Salon, Baudelaire includes a quotation from the German Romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose writings especially the ‘Kreisleriana’ had a great influence upon him in the period before encountering Edgar Allan Poe.

“It’s not just in dreams and in the slight delirium that precedes sleep, but also when I am awake, when I hear music, that I find an analogy and an intimate connection among colours, sounds and perfumes. It seems

2 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
to be that all these things have been created by a single ray of light and that they have to combine in a wonderful concert.

The smell of brown and red marigolds produces a particular magical effect on me. It makes me fall into a deep rêverie, and then it is as if I hear in the distance the deep low tones of the oboe.  

The sense of correspondences is not just linking the physical and the emotional, the concrete and the abstract, but also binding together the different sensations, and is central to Baudelaire’s appreciation of the natural world. It is what infuses, most famously his sonnet ‘Correspondences’. This poem teaches us how, depending upon its fragrance, the perfumed word evokes synaesthesia.

Correspondences(Correspondances)

“Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes utter a babel of words;
Man traverses it through forests of symbols,
That watch him with familiar glances.

Like long echoes merging in the distance
In a deep and stormy unity,
As vast as midnight and as vast as clarity,
So can each scent and hue and sound to each respond.

Some perfumes are as fragrant as an infant’s flesh
Sweet as an oboe’s cry, and greener than the spring
-While others are triumphant, decadent or rich.

Having the expansion of infinite things,
Like ambergris and musk, benzoin and frankincense,
Which sing the transports of the mind and every sense.”

3 Chap.11, 425 -26
Baudelaire’s poem is without doubt a symbolic representation of the connection of the self to its surroundings, taking the reader on a journey through nature’s correspondence with consciousness. The ‘forest’ of symbols that one may walk through one’s entire life is a metaphor for the connection between all things outside of oneself to all things inside oneself: everything that man experiences, perceives and senses, are all a gateway to one’s soul – the key is to observe everything and realize the connection. Synesthesia is used throughout the poem with ‘echoes’ and ‘the living columns’ that breathe ‘confusing speech,’- with ‘perfumes,’ ‘colours’ and ‘sounds’ that correspond, - with ‘odours’ that are as ‘fresh as baby’s skin,’ with green meadows and ‘mellow’ oboes. These ‘infinitely vast sensory experiences sing the ‘sense’ rapture and the soul’s. It is significant that the poem ends with the word ‘sens’(senses). However, by binding word (parole) and symbol (symbole) together through the rhyme, Baudelaire does say that language is neither
transparent nor purely abstract, but that it carries within it the promise of an ultimately decipherable meaning.

In his art criticism, he says that Nature is a dictionary, which the painter consults and transforms into the work of art. The temple here is a temple of words, something less to be worshipped than to be interpreted and translated. The tercets explore an area – the sense of smell–that is central to Baudelaire’s experience, and so demand particular attention. Many hail Baudelaire as the great olfactory poet of France, the one, who most keenly and in the most complex ways both responds to the sense of smell and succeeds in conveying it. The sense of smell, is more limited in comparison with the senses of sight and hearing, and less precise. Yet as insisted by Marcel Proust, the two senses of taste and smell, more fragile and more tenacious than the rest, are those that linger on after all else has gone. All these experiences of synaesthesia bring pleasure, a sense of peace and harmony with the world⁴. There are others which are darker, connected to heavier, more powerful fragrance, and perverse recesses of the human psyche; still others elicit spiritual and creative aspects of existence. Ambergris is a secretion coming from the intestines of the sperm whale. Musk is also a secretion produced in the excretory follicles under the abdominal skin of the male musk deer. These are both fecal, animalic fragrances and evoke decadent instincts and emotions, such as lust, greed and sloth. These fragrances emanating from baudelaire’s ‘flowers of evil’ or from the dark void of existence, and its aroma of absence, open on to an infinite world of boredom and suffering. Benzoin and frankincence are gummy resins, collected as seepage from

⁴ The ‘Perfume’ magazine(December30,2011), article of Marlene Goldsmith.
trees. These scents alter consciousness, culminating in mystical states. Theirs is an ecstatic, luminous, infinite world.

In 1847, Baudelaire happened to come across some of the translations of Poe’s works in French periodicals, and was deeply affected by them as he recognized in him a kindred spirit. In Poe’s ‘Tales of Mystery and Imagination,’ he found ‘an insatiable love of the beautiful’ which had assumed the potency of a morbid passion. For the next seventeen years, Baudelaire applied himself unceasingly to the task of studying and translating Poe. The French literary world owes it to Baudelaire for introducing Poe’s views to it. Following in the footsteps of Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and others adopted the perception of Poe, of appreciating poetry for its own sake, And the principle of poetry demonstrates strictly and basically, the human aspiration towards a superior form of beauty. It is this admirable, this immortal instinct of beauty, which makes us consider the earth and its sights as a glimpse, as a celestial correspondence.

In the chapter ‘Analytic of the Beautiful’ of the “Critique of Judgement,” Kant states that beauty is not a property of an artwork or natural phenomenon, but is instead a consciousness of the pleasure that attends the ‘free play’ of the imagination and understanding. Following closely on his heels, Poe defines beauty as “the pleasurable excitement of the soul as it reaches for a perfection beyond this earth.” In “The Poetic Principle,” Poe says that “in the contemplation of beauty alone we find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation or excitement of the soul,
which we recognize as the ‘Poetic Sentiment’. The beauty that he worships is a *supernal* beauty, a heavenly and unearthly beauty that elevates the soul: An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man is thus plainly a sense of the Beautiful\(^5\). It is no mere appreciation of the beauty before us – but a wild effort to reach the beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone.

According to Eastern philosophers, consciousness is beauty and creation is an expression of consciousness. Beauty is present in all creation. In the eastern perspective beauty is considered as the nature of existence - as Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram, an objective phenomenon, while Western thought sees it as a perception, more or less subjective. Adi Shankara in the ‘Soundarya Lahiri’- (Ecstasies of Beauty), speaks of the god of love- Kama, aiming all five flower arrows at the person before him, in order to awaken the five senses, giving rise to an ecstasy which creates bliss, making one appreciate everything one comes across, from a thorn to a snail to even a sea urchin. The ancient sages or rishis have always adored Beauty or ‘Soundarya’, making it a characteristic of the Divine. Satyam or truth, Shivam or benevolence, tranquility and divinity, and Sundaram or the beautiful, are the traits attributed to divinity.

\(^5\) xiv,273
In the aesthetic movement, the poet as ‘seer’ held the position of high priest in the religion of beauty. “In the beginning was the Word,” (John 1:1) but this word now belonged to the poet. The ‘prophetic tribe’ of poets, in Baudelaire’s phrase, had extra-lucid powers, a belief that led in Rimbaud’s incantations, to the idea that the poet possesses the “alchemy” of the Word. And Baudelaire considered all great artists to be first and foremost, great transfigurators. The artist of genius, like an alchemist knows how to extract from nature the hidden power and harmony. The essence of genius resides in what Baudelaire defines “supernaturalism.” And it is via the imagination -“the queen of faculties,” according to Baudelaire, that the artist is able to perceive and render this supernaturalness. The imagination thus stretched is not fantasy, but a ‘semi-divine’ faculty, which perceives first of all, beyond the frontiers of philosophical methods, the intimate and secret connections of things, the correspondences and the analogies.

According to Baudelaire, the duty of the great artist, if he looks and makes us look towards infinity, is to transform the most prosaic reality by virtue of his imagination. He will know how to extract the poetic dimension and the part of intemporal beauty of contemporary subjects, thus expressing ‘nascence.’ In fact, the term ‘modernity’ has been coined by Baudelaire to designate the fleeting, ephemeral experience of life in an urban metropolis and the responsibility art has, to capture that experience. The notion of the “uncanny” (bizarre) will help the artist to discover beauty in the most mundane or commonplace things. “Beauty is always bizarre” says Baudelaire, “I do not mean to say that it is voluntarily, coldly

6 Alchemy-a medieval form of chemistry aiming at transforming base metals into gold.
bizarre…I mean that it always contains a bit of strangeness, naïve strangeness, not intellectual but unconscious, and it is this strangeness that causes it to be particularly beautiful. That is its trademark, its characteristic. Reverse the proposition and try to conceive of a commonplace beauty.”

4:1:1 **Fleurs du Mal** (Flowers of Evil), Baudelaire’s masterpiece depicts the alchemy of the transformation of evil into sublime beauty. The impact of this work on successive generations of aspiring poets is so deep rooted that it needs to be analyzed in some detail. ‘Fleurs’ or flowers in poetry connote the innocent and pure surge, and invoking often the young and desirable woman, and ‘Mal’ is associated with the dismal, the crude, the hideous. In this work, Baudelaire seems to affirm that there is a beauty characteristic of evil. Wretchedness and beauty, disgrace and purity blend together and unite. The preposition ‘du,’ more than hinting at a sense of belonging, points out also to the origin. Therefore, flowers (poems) are extracted from evil: this reading of the title lays emphasis on the very function of poetry, (or for that matter any art), that of transforming evil or ugliness into beauty. Poetry is thus considered as an ‘alchemy’ of the despicable reality: notion summed up by Baudelaire in a captivating verse (invocation to Paris, capital of ‘evil’):

“You gave me your filth, I made gold out of it!”

(“Tu m’a donné ta boue,j’en ai fait de l’or”)

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Indeed, **Fleurs du Mal** expresses the changing nature of beauty in modern industrializing Paris during the 19th century. In this work, Baudelaire talks about human destiny, and his poems, sometimes realistic, sometimes idealistic, mainly deal with the conflict between good and evil. Challenging traditional dualities, he finds beauty in incongruous things and good in perverted ones. His highly original style of prose-poetry influenced a whole generation of poets including Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé among others. In his dedication of the prose-poem—**The Spleen of Paris**, the poet mused:-

“Who among us has not dreamt, in moments of ambition, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and rhyme, supple and staccato enough to adapt to the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the undulations of dreams, and sudden leaps of consciousness. The obsessive idea is above all, a child of giant cities, of the intersecting of their myriad relations”

The **Flowers of Evil**, which was important in the symbolist and modernist movements, had as subject matter themes relating to decadence and eroticism. Deeply rooted in his Catholic background, Baudelaire’s imagination and moral nature were viewed through his gloomy conception of humanity doomed by original sin and is not alleviated by any assurance of salvation. However, Baudelaire does assign to man’s spiritual nature a dimension of eternity. After Pascal, Baudelaire is seen to ascertain the duality of man. He sees within himself the two tendencies tearing him apart: the one taking him towards the ideal, the other towards worldly matters. Caught between the two, he remains motionless, with the disheartening sentiment that art, beauty, and love (temporary refuges) could restrain only for a moment his will too weak, - that he might find only a fleeting oblivion in the feverish towns and their artificial paradises,
in wine, and debauchery – and that only death can remove from him ‘the annoying sight of eternal sin.’

The 1861 publication of 126 poems was arranged in six thematically segregated sections of varying lengths.

- Spleen and Ideal
- Parisian Scenes
- Wine
- Flowers of Evil
- Revolt
- Death

Baudelaire always insisted that the collection was not “a single album,” but had “a beginning and an end,” each poem revealing its full meaning only when read in relation to the others within the “singular framework” in which it is placed. A prefatory poem—‘Au Lecteur’ (To The Reader) makes it clear that Baudelaire’s concern is with the general predicament, of which his own is representative. The opening lines of the preface, identifying Satan with the pseudonymous alchemist Hermes Trismagistus, and calling boredom (ennui) the worst of miseries, sets the tone of what is to follow:

“If rape or arson, poison or the knife
Has wove no pleasing patterns in the stuff
Of this drab canvas we accept as life-
It is because we are not bold enough!
The preface concludes—

“It’s ennui –his eyes brimming with spontaneous tear
He dreams of the gallows in the haze of his hookah
You know him reader, this delicate monster
Hypocritical reader, my likeness, my brother!”

Though the literal translation of ‘ennui’ is ‘boredom’, it is actually a feeling of deep despair coupled with boredom, leading to a sort of lethargy or inaction. Ennui is Baudelaire’s great enemy, which probably explains why he wrote so slowly. His ‘Spleen’ cycle (spleen in the 18th century meant depression) revolves around this theme, where he describes a human with memories to being like “un cimetière abhorré de la lune” (a graveyard hated by the moon). It is a malaise infecting the individual in spite of depravity or immoral behavior and something that was felt strongly by those decadents influenced by Baudelaire. Also important was the aesthetic sensibilities of Baudelaire’s poems, in which he presented the grotesque as beautiful, of which the most striking example was that of ‘Une Charogne’ (The Rotting Corpse). This poem describes a corpse that he and his lover found on the wayside, while walking one sunny morning in June. In his ‘Hymne à la Beauté,’ (Hymn to Beauty), Baudelaire describes beauty as walking on corpses.

Besides bestowing beauty upon the grotesque, Baudelaire also challenges the traditional relationship between morality and aesthetics that argues that beauty equals goodness. Morality was irrelevant to Baudelaire and to both the decadents and the symbolists that followed; that which is beautiful is simply so, regardless of notions of good and evil. In his
pastorals, Baudelaire turned away from the norm of presenting the countryside as beautiful and instead praised the city, as illustrated in the poem ‘Le Crépuscule du Soir’ (The Evening Twilight), where demons and personified prostitutes mingle with robbers, whores, and swindlers. Urban life and the lower classes scorned by society are presented as alive, vital: the everyday ugliness of human life becomes more beautiful than the emptiness of a pretty countryside landscape.

The collection may best be read in the light of the concluding poem ‘Le Voyage’, as a journey through self and society in search of some impossible satisfaction that eludes the traveller. Opening with a series of poems dramatizing contrasting views of art and beauty, with the artist depicted as martyr, visionary, performer, pariah and fool, focus then shifts to sexual and romantic love, with the first person narrator of the poems oscillating between extremes of ecstasy (‘ideal’) and anguish (‘spleen’) as he attempts to find fulfilment through a succession of women like Jeanne Duval, Appollonie Sabatier, Marie Daubrun, and the like. Describing an erotic cycle, each set of love poems, leads from intoxication, through conflict and revulsion, to an eventual ambivalent tranquility born of memory and the transmutation of suffering into art. Yet, attempts to find bliss through love, finally amounts to nothing. ‘Spleen and ideal’ comes to a close with a sequence of anguished poems, several of them entitled ‘Spleen’, in which the self is shown imprisoned within itself, with only the certainty of suffering and death before it. There are frequent references to blood, corpses and death, especially in the poem ‘A Martyr’ - describing a decapitated female corpse in detail, and ‘A Voyage to Cythère’, in which scavenging birds and animals destroy a human body. The words used to
describe these horrific images are fashioned in such a way that they become almost beautiful, an aesthetic often mentioned by Baudelaire. “It is one of the astounding prerogatives of art that the horrible, artistically expressed becomes beautiful…” Baudelaire often referred to the ugliness of the modern world and the beauty he saw in the bizarre.

The second section “Parisian Scenes”, (Tableaux Parisiens) describes a 24 hour cycle in the life of the city, through which the Baudelairean traveller, now metamorphosed into a ‘flâneur’ (‘stroller’) moves in quest of deliverance from the miseries of self, only to find at every turn, all too vivid images of suffering and isolation that remind him pertinently of his own. Some of Baudelaire’s greatest poems, is included in this section, notably ‘The Swan,’ (Le Cygne) where the memory of a swan stranded in total dereliction near the Louvre, becomes a symbol of an existential condition of loss and exile, transcending time and space. Having gone through the city forever meeting himself, the traveller returns, (in the much shorter sections that follow), successively to drink (‘Wine’), engage in sexual depravity (‘Flowers of Evil’) and in Satanism (‘Revolt’), in quest of the elusive ideal. His quest is useless, as revealed in the final section ‘Death’ (La Mort). Continuing beyond death, his journey is an everlasting, open-ended odyssey that, will take him into the depths of the unknown, always in pursuit of the new, which by definition, is always elusive.
4:1:2 The Saint and the Sinner

Baudelaire always saw himself as a fallen angel. Love meant the loss of innocence—“faire l’amour, c’est faire du mal” (to make love is to cause hurt), he wrote. But at the same time, love is also the highest pleasure, and doing evil intentionally is a source of lust. He felt sympathy for the prostitute, who revolts against the bourgeois family values. That was probably why he had a long lasting relationship with the prostitute Jeanne Duval.

The section entitled ‘Revolte’ (Revolt) depicts rebellion against God. The three poems in this section illustrate the importance of Christian symbolism in Baudelaire’s poetry, not as a positive force, but as a source of contrast between Christianity and Satanism. The last of the three poems ‘Les Litanies de Satan,’(Satan’s Litany), resembles a liturgical formula with its repeated cry to Satan to take pity on the speaker as well as its closing prayer addressed to Satan. Besides, the text glorifies Satan in a language usually reserved for God or Christ.

There are poems from other sections of the collection echoing the worship of Satan, such as the concluding line of ‘Le Possède’ (The Possessed) –

“O mon cher Belzébuth, je t’adore” (Oh, my dear Beelzebub, I worship you).
Baudelaire’s speaker views in these poems, the suffering of humankind as a direct result of God’s inability or unwillingness to defeat Satan. This viewpoint becomes evident in ‘Le Reniement de Saint-Pierre’ (The Denial of Saint Peter), in which Baudelaire writes that God laughed while Christ was crucified, and continually ignores the cries of his followers, and that St. Peter was right to deny Jesus because he failed to rule for eternity. Though not a staunch believer, Baudelaire needed the Christian framework to provide a point from which he could diverge. Without Christian images—which are quite common in his poems, he could not demonstrate the power of evil.

The future Symbolists had already chosen Baudelaire as their inspiration, by the time of his death. In the early 1860s critics began to recognize Baudelaire’s influence in the writings of the next generation of poets, and these younger artists dedicated some of their poems to him. Later, on 1st February 1865, Mallarmé published an article in ‘The Artist’, in which he described the ability of The Flowers of Evil to draw him into a “surprising landscape which lives in my eyes with the intensity of those created by profound opium.” At the end of that same year, Verlaine published his important review of Baudelaire in the magazine “Art”, an article that increased the reputation of both its author and its subject.

In the historical view of French poetry of the 19th century, Baudelaire played a transitional role. Retaining the traditional forms and subjects of the Romantics, his approach to language, novel view of beauty,
and position of persona, signify a departure from Romanticism, preparing French poetry for the Symbolist movement. Baudelaire also avidly promoted ‘dandyism,’ described as “a cult of the self”, giving rise to a “new kind of aristocracy,” which valued elegance and above all distinction. Elegance and distinction involved sexual license as well, along with other freedoms. Actually, Baudelaire began writing the poems that would appear in the Fleurs du Mal, while living a life of self-conscious dissipation in Paris.

In his poem “Enivrez – vous” (Get Drunk – The Spleen of Paris), Baudelaire gives the exhortation to be inebriated with anything that suits one’s taste.

“Always be drunk. Therein lies everything: it’s all that matters,
So as not be feel the dread burden of time breaking your shoulders
And crushing you to the earth, never stop drinking
But what? Whether wine, poetry or virtue, the choice is yours
Whatever it is, get drunk”

4:2 Adaptation of Baudelairean aesthetics by Verlaine

Paul Verlaine came across Baudelaire’s Fleurs du Mal (Flowers of Evil) at the age of fourteen, and needless to say it got him very excited, altering totally his perception of art. Rejecting all social conventions of the time and treating subjects hitherto considered taboo, like lesbianism, it was a complete upsetting of the existing value systems. The irony in the conception that beauty could be derived from the evil and bizarre things in
life, was most fascinating for Verlaine and his peers. Verlaine adopted Baudelaire as his intercessor. “It is to Baudelaire that I owe the awakening of poetic feeling, and what is deep in me,” he wrote, and his youthful discovery of Baudelaire brought sensual craving and artistic ambition surging to the surface. At the age of 21, Verlaine wrote, “It is Charles Baudelaire who presents the sensitive man, and he presents him as a type, or, if you like, as a hero.” He is a seer, “with his sharpened, vibrant senses, his painfully subtle mind, his intellect steeped in tobacco, his blood burned up by alcohol.” And Verlaine abandoned himself to Baudelaire’s heroism. His addiction to drinks, especially absinthe, made him insanely violent. No other poet was so weak to the press of destiny. All his creative virtue is reversed strength; it is weakness.

Verlaine was always only a human being, a weak human being, who did not even know how to “count the transgressions of his own heart.” Probably, it was this very lack of individuality which produced something much rarer – the purely and entirely human. He threw himself into the arms of all dangers – women, religiosity, drunkenness and literature, resulted only in oppression and suffering. The drops of blood, sweat and tears ensuing from this experience got transformed into magnificent poems, imperishable events, primaeval human emotion clear as crystal. Two factors were responsible for this; an extraordinary candour in both virtue and vice, and his complete unconsciousness, which was unfortunately lost in the first waves of fame.
However, it was the genius of Verlaine that discovered a language imbued with music, most suited to wed and translate the discordance of the self and the world inherited poetically from Baudelaire. This “accord discord” is characterized, regarding themes, by a rather unstable but miraculously maintained equilibrium in Verlaine’s poems between anxiety and the love of life as revealed in his work *Fêtes Galantes* (Gallant Celebrations-1869) or familiarity and mystery as in *Poèmes Saturniens* (Saturnien Poems-1866).

In the context, one is reminded of the work ‘Fear and Trembling’ of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard- the father of existentialism. The philosopher draws attention to Christianity’s ‘inverted dialectic’ which demands that we exercise ‘double vision’ to see in worldly things their spiritual opposites, like hope in hopelessness, strength in weakness, and prosperity in adversity. The conflict of duality between the co-ordinates of good and evil, tranquility and anxiety, religiosity and agnosticism seems to be characteristic of all humans and it surfaces with doubled force in Verlaine as well as in Changampuzha.

For example, in this poem from the collection *Gallant Celebrations*, an undefinable anxiety seems to lurk in the shadows, without any apparent cause.

*Clair de Lune* (‘Moonlight’)

“Your soul is a select landscape
Whither goes masks and Bergamasks
Those adorable and delightful masked creatures do not seem to believe in their happiness. At first, one hears certain barely audible sounds, towards the end of the collection, a subtly managed crescendo, bringing about anguish and despair. True to Mallarme’s dictum, the strategy adopted by Verlaine was to use subtle suggestion instead of precise statement (rhetoric was banned) and to evoke moods and feelings by the magic of words and repeated sounds and the cadence of verse (musicality) along with metrical innovations. ‘My Recurring Dream’ from *Saturnien Poems* is a typical poem of this genre:

**Mon Rêve Familiar (My Recurring Dream)**

“Often I dream this poignant fantasy
Strange, of an unknown woman whom
I love and who loves me, and who seems new
Each time and yet who seems the same….”

4:2:1  **Verlaine and cantatas**

Among all the poets to use musical images, Verlaine was the most influential, setting a clear precedent. Verlaine’s poetry contains examples of a musical terminology that have often been cited by scholars: the playing of the lute and singing in a minor key in ‘Clair de lune,’ (Moonlight), the violins of autumn in ‘Chanson d’Automne,’ (Autumn Song), the piano that kisses a fragile hand in the fifth of
the ‘Ariette Oubliée’ (Forgotten Tunes) in Romances Sans Paroles (Songs without Words) and the musical references seen in these titles themselves. By using such terms, Verlaine created vivid images that establish a mood and bring the element of sound to the forefront. To demonstrate the overall effect of the use of music in poetry, blending the auditory and visual senses, the poem ‘Nevermore’ from Saturnien Poems could be analyzed. Incidentally, this title which appears twice in the collection reminds one of Poe’s poem – ‘The Raven’ with its oft – repeated refrain ‘nevermore.’

Nevermore

“Memory, memory, what do you want of me? Autumn
Makes the thrush fly through colourless air,
And the sun casts its monotonous glare
On the yellowing woods where the north winds hum.

We were alone, and walking in a dream,
She and I, hair and thoughts wind-blown.
Then, turning her troubled gaze on me,
‘Your loveliest day?’ in her voice of fine gold,

Her voice, with its angel’s tone, fresh, vibrant, sweet.
I gave her my answer, a smile so discreet,
And kissed her white hand with devotion.

-Ah! The first flowers, what a fragrance they have!
And how charming the murmured emotion
Of a first ‘yes’ let slip from lips that we love!”

(Souvenir, souvenir, que me veux-tu? L’automne
Faisait voler la grive à travers l’air atone,
Et le soleil dardait un rayon monotone
Sur le bois jaunissant où la bise détone

Nous étions seul et marchions en rêvant,
Elle et moi, les cheveux et la pensée au vent.
Soudain, tournant vers moi son regard émouvant:  
“Quel fut ton plus beau jour?” fit sa voix d’or vivant.

Sa voix douce et sonore, au frais timbre angélique  
Un sourire discret lui donna la réplique,  
Et je baisai sa main blanche, dévotement.

-Ah! Les premiers fleurs, qu’elles sont parfumées!  
Et qu’il bruit avec un murmure charmant  
Le premier oui qui sort des lèvres bien-aimées!)

An important feature of this poem is the pervasive use of words that refer not specifically to music, but sound in general. The word ‘monotone’ in the first stanza (‘Et le soleil dardait un rayon monotone”) effectively depicts the steady beating down of the sun. The beloved in the second stanza has a voice of living gold, a sweet and sonorous voice, with an angelic timbre. Mellifluous in their own right these phrases connote singing in such a way that establishes not actual music, but the beauty of the woman being described. The last three lines also contain reference to sound, with the charming tinkling that escapes from the beloved’s lips.

An analysis of the VIIᵉ ‘Arietta’ of the collection Songs without Words, is a good example of the way Verlaine sets the mood of the poem by using certain sound patterns.

“Oh sad, so sad was my heart  
Because, because of a woman.  
My heart flew from her side- but oh!, Je ne suis pas consolé  
I knew no solace for my woe..  

“O triste, triste était mon âme  
A cause, à cause d’une femme.  
Bien que mon coeur s’en soit allée…”
The repetition of words and cadence makes poignant the inner turmoil or ‘angst’ (word introduced by Kierkegaard, denoting fear or apprehension), and the reader is made to empathize with the poet’s sentiments.

4:2:2 Verlaine and Mallarmé

Mallarmé, one of the leaders of the Aesthetic school, and the theoretician of the movement, came under the spell of Baudelaire, when he read The Flowers of Evil at nineteen years of age. No doubt he was profoundly influenced by it. He was of the opinion that like any sacred thing, the art of poetry must be accessible only to those initiated into it. Unlike the spoken language used in daily conversations, the significance of the poetic language should be veiled and implicit. He considered it the task of the poet to purify the language, by means of which he would try to express the inexpressible, the absent, the symbol, and not the thing. Trying to practice alchemy with words, Mallarmé tried to create a kind of poetry, where the word as symbol would have a new mobility and would achieve new intensities and refinements of meaning. In his opinion, each poem, built around a central idea, or symbol, or metaphor, consists of subordinate images that illustrate and help to develop the idea. For him, “To name an object would be to destroy three-fourths of the enjoyment of the poem, which consists of the happiness of guessing little by little: to suggest, that is the dream. Therefore the poet should not paint the object, but the effect that it produces, as there should always be an enigma in poetry, and the aim of literature, it has no other – is to evoke objects”.

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As proved by Baudelaire, the physical universe then is a kind of language that invites a privileged spectator to decipher it. This endeavour might not yield a single message so much as a superior network of associations, in which symbols help to evoke particular states of mind. The nominal subject of Mallarmé’s sonnet - ‘Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui’ (1885), is of a swan trapped in a frozen lake. Significantly, in French, cygne (swan) is a homophone of signe, a sign. The overall effect is of overwhelming whiteness, and the presentation of the narrative elements of the description is quite indirect.

The virgin, vivacious, and beautiful today

“The virgin, vivacious, and beautiful today
Will it fracture for us with a wild wing-blow
This solid lost lake whose frosts haunted below
By the glacier, transparent with flights not made?

A swan of time past remembers it’s he
Magnificent yet struggling hopelessly
Though not having sung a liveable county
From the radiant boredom of winter’s sterility

His neck will shake off this whitest agony
Space inflicts on a bird that denies it wholly
But not earth’s horror that entraps his feathers
Phantom assigned to this place by his brilliance
The swan in his exile is rendered motionless!
Swathed uselessly by his cold dream of defiance.”

(“Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d’aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n’ont pas fui!”)
Un cygnet d’autrefois se souvient que c’est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n’avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l’ennui…”

The recurrent i-sound suggests the barren coldness of the physical scene which runs through all the end rhymes, dominating several of the lines internally, and is of course the vowel of the master-word cygne (swan). It is not merely a subjective reaction to hear the French i-as a desolate sound in itself, made more desolate by the sense –associations of such words as cri, agonie, bise, givre, hiver, sterile, exil, ennui. Most of these words have been introduced in the poem by Mallarmé, in which the words or lines containing the most telling assonances have been emphasized.

The swan’s plight can be considered as an allegory applied to the poet or artist haunted by an ambition he is unable to achieve. When the day dawns each day, he is full of hope that he will finally manage to launch himself toward his goal, but he repeatedly finds that he is not only able to do so, but that the more he hesitates, reflects, ponders, the more he succumbs to a fatal inactivity.

Whiteness being symbolic of woman, this poem can be interpreted also as depicting the helplessness of the woman to rise above the earth to reach great heights.
4:2:3 **Verlaine and Rimbaud**

Verlaine’s consort - the boy poet Rimbaud, avid reader that he was, had fallen under the Baudelairean charm while in his remote village of Charlesville. He was also interested in the occult and alchemy, laying his hands on all available material in this regard. As he reveals in his ‘Alchemy of the word’ (*Delirium II-A Season in Hell*) - “I invented the colours of vowels: A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green, - I made rules for the movement of every consonant, and I flattered myself to invent a poetic verb with instinctive rhythms that would be accessible later to all the senses...”. The extremely personal quality of poetry that he developed is believed to be an after-effect of the prolonged use of absinthe, introduced to him by Verlaine who was addicted to it. The use of absinthe, hashish and opium in the 1860s to intentionally ‘derange the senses’ on behalf of art was quite common among artists. It will be of relevance to consider in the context, the oeuvres of the Russian writer Dostoevsky, which are examples of ‘heightening of reality.’ If poets like Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud purposely adopted means of deranging the senses, writers like Dostoevsky were ‘naturally’ inclined to gain insights into the human existence. He was an epileptic, and the extreme fantasy in his work, especially ‘The Idiot’, has been ascribed to his morbidity- which afforded him potential to achieve unusual insights about the human condition. Rimbaud’s ‘A Season in Hell’ (1873) is considered to be an outcome of the complete disordering of the senses. In his letter to his former teacher Izambard, he says, “I am working to turn myself into a seer... it has to do with making your way towards the unknown by a derangement of all the senses. And it’s wrong to say ‘I think’, one should say ‘I’m thought’ and the entity ‘I’ is another being altogether. (Je est un
autre). By saying so, Rimbaud was being more avant-garde, than the writers of his period, intimating like Hegel before him, that the subjective self, the ‘I’ is constructed, the other constitutive, implying that within it are multiple components opposing sameness, what today we call multiple selves. Rimbaud realized the value of writing not only of internal things, but also of ordinary things as experienced through the unique subjective self, which made it necessary to construct poetry in a new way, including synesthesia, as Baudelaire had done, such that chaos was captured in correct form, as depicted in the poem ‘Drunken Boat’ “-O let my keel split! O let me sink to the bottom.”

A Season in Hell: Delirium II, Alchemy of the Word

“…Poetic quaintness played a large part in my alchemy of the word. I became adept at simple hallucination; in place of a factory I Really saw a mosque, a school of drummers led by angels, Carriages on the highways of the sky, a drawing-room at the Bottom of a lake, monsters, mysteries: the title of a melodrama would raise horns before me Then I would explain my magic sophisms with the hallucinations of words! Finally I came to regard as sacred the disorder of my mind. I Was idle, full of a sluggish fever, I envied the felicity of beasts, Caterpillars that represented the innocence of limbo, moles, the sleep of virginity My temper soured. In kinds of ballads I said farewell to the world.”

The end of his experiments with the thought of inventing “a poetic language accessible someday to all the senses” caused him to write-“As I wept I saw gold- I could not drink” (Rimbaud pp.51-53). It could be said
that Rimbaud sought his own sort of ‘talking cure’, an alchemical transformation of his psyche’s contents to gold through language.

“The Drunken Boat” (1871) is another illustration of Rimbaud’s genius in conveying to the reader the synaesthetic impression of a boat tossed upon the seas, filled with water, and as if inebriated:

The Drunken Boat

“As I was floating down unconcerned rivers
I no longer felt myself steered by the haulers.....
....Lighter than a cork, I danced on the waves-
Which men call eternal rollers of victims.....”

Following in the footsteps of his idol Baudelaire, Rimbaud believed seriously in the vocation of the poet as a ‘seer’ or ‘voyant’, to expose to the reader, the intricacies, the hidden connections of things, as revealed in his “Lettre du Voyant”. (Letter of the Seer- 1870).

The ‘drunken boat’ is a ship that has gone adrift down some American river when its haulers were captured and killed by ‘shrieking red-skins. ’Free and crewless it is carried about the seas, traversing storms, amid seascapes and landfalls of incredible strangeness and beauty. The underwater world and the sky display their terrors and marvels while it drifts for months as almost a part of them. The boat even if ‘drunk’ with sensation, is still a conscious identity. Finally, it grows weary of its incessant wanderings and desires to break up or else to creep into some European water- a puddle, or a toy boat:

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“But truly, I have wept too much!
The Dawns are heart breaking,
Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter:
Sharp love has swollen me up with heady langours
O let my keel split! O let me sink to the bottom
If there is one water in Europe that I want, it is the-
Black cold pool where into the scented twilight
A child squatting full of sadness, launches
A boat as fragile as a butterfly in May.”

The poem could be considered as reflecting Rimbaud’s own life, his breaking away from Charlesville, with the intoxicating adventures of the senses that lay ahead, then the return, sobered and disillusioned after Verlaine’s condemnation, to a life of his own, away from his former associates. However, it is in the evocation of the violence and colours of the sea hitherto unknown to him, that its great strength lies, and what makes Rimbaud a cosmic poet is the concordance with human experience, wrought thus. By his mastery of the image he suggests the unity of all forms of life at an intuitive level which, whether implicit or fully worked-out, is greater than that of any French poet before him, the groundwork for which was laid out by Baudelaire.

4:3 Adaptation of the Baudelairean and Verlainean Aesthetics by Changampuzha

Changampuzha, by virtue of his association with the poetic world beyond his own through translations, was quite aware of the latest trends in the world literary arena. In his quest for a new language and form for poetry,
he came across the works of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and others and was much impressed by them. He translated Baudelaire’s ‘Correspondences’ into Malayalam, under the name ‘Pratheekangalude vanavidhiyil’ (‘Along the forest path of symbols’). The perusal of Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* led him to pen a poem with almost the same meaning – ‘Papathinde Pushpangal’ (‘Flowers of Sin’) from the collection *Srithilakam*, 1944 in which he says:

“…may I embrace you wholeheartedly
….Oh sin, offer me your poisonous
Flowers, let me make a garland of them
And wearing it, I shall proclaim to the world,
My gratitude on your behalf!”

The lure of sin, for Changampuzha seems to be as compelling and attractive as it had been to Baudelaire. The idea is reinforced in *The Singing Devil* (1949) level which, where the inglorious sight of the peacock, the symbol of sin, with its red, gleaming eyes, carrying in its beak a deadly, writhing snake does not at all deter the poet who wishes to-

“Most eagerly clasp to the bosom
Embrace you wholeheartedly…”

After portraying himself as the devil in the guise of the serpent or vulture, the poet depicts the uncontrollable impulse of evil within himself, so much so that one is not prone to think of a singing devil but a singer in the guise of the devil.
“Displaying the dazzling dots of-
Its beautiful blue tail feathers,
Stretching out its slithery neck, resplendent with-
The seven colours of the rainbow,
Pulling out its outstretched hood……
How I long to clasp-
You to my bosom.”

These two compositions are testimonials to the impact of Baudelaire’s ‘Satanism’ (the pursuit of evil for its own sake, with full consciousness of what is right or wrong) on Changampuzha. Perfectly aware of the selfless devotion of his wife, the poet constantly seeks novel adventures in love. The feelings of sadism, masochism and melancholy, inherited from Baudelaire, are also rampantly seen in the works of Changampuzha. To quote from The Singing Devil:

“I shall lull you to sleep, and then
Drain you of your warm blood…”

Then again in ‘My Poem’ of the collection The Throbbing Tomb

“Playing on my veena so harshly,
I almost broke its strings”

Also in the preface to The Tearful Homage:

“Maybe it’s right- this world
Maybe a true haven of delights….
Unfortunate creature that I am, whatever
I set my eyes upon, was a pathetic sight…”

The extent of Changampuzha’s admiration for Baudelaire is to be seen in his act of affixing two of the latter’s verses as a preface to his famous work *Ramanan* (1936);

“…Ah, thou didst not comprehend
The dead wept thus, thou woman frail and weak”

Changampuzha was sure that his mind was ‘degenerate’ enough to create poetry. A willing victim to ‘wine and women’, to say nothing of drugs like ‘ganja’, he aimed at attaining a total ‘disordering of the senses’, even at the expense of forsaking his family, so as to be able to produce great poetry. In an inebriated state of mind as if having a hallucinatory vision, he cries out in his poem ‘*Progress! Progress!*’ (*Amritaveeji/Immortal Vibes* -1945), that he ‘sees’ bliss in the songs of the birds, ‘hears’ it among the constellations, and experiences it through the sensation of touch also, so much so that a synesthetic effect is produced by the intermingling of the senses of touch, smell, sight and hearing.

In the poem ‘Green’ (*The Throbbing Tomb*), Changampuzha lays focus on the colours of the rainbow, probing their significance and hidden connotations.
Among the seven colours, I salute you O green, 
I delight in lauding you…..just like Nature does 
Your place in the middle with three colours 
Flanking you on either side, lends you prominence…”

The poet goes ahead in his derivations of hidden connotations. The ‘dhvani’ of his descriptions, leads one to associate the colour violet as symbolic of Shiva – the patron deity of dance, while indigo represents sculpture. The colour blue is representative of painting. Yellow stands for Vedanta, while orange represents music. The colour red is connotative of danger, as well as of love and marriage. It is also symbolic of revolution. Among all the seven colours, Changampuzha finds however the colour green, symbolic of poetry or literature, the most endearing, as it possesses a miraculous power to heal wounds and scars. It is the most vibrant among all, an oasis in the scorching heat of life’s conflicts! Green, the colour of life, of nature, and while blending with the gold-laced attire of the beloved has a stunning effect!

Also Changampuzha tries to discover the significance of certain consonant or rather phonetic clusters in the Malayalam language. In his poem ‘In a slumber’ (Swararagasudha-1948), he tries to grasp the connotations behind the phonetic clusters like like/ng/nj/nt/nd/mp/ and so on, attributing meaning to them to suit his fantasy. To the poet in his drowsiness, these sounds seem like semi-nude, dancing mermaids, trying to impart meaningful gestures. /nj/ for example, seems to stand for ‘coquettishness’, reminding the poet of the tinkling of anklets, in the
backdrop of the crescent moon viewed fleetingly in the mist. Like the
smile of the midnight flowers in the pale moonlight, /nt/denoting shyness,
seems to beckon him, from behind the door. The phonetic cluster /ng/
stands in shaded radiance, bearing as it were, the bouquet of happiness.
Adorned with a joyousness /nd/is the epitome of art. And last but not the
least comes /mb/lips apart, trembling, in expectancy of a kiss!

Verlaine’s clear perception regarding the form and content of
poetry is set forth in his poem ‘Poetic Art’ (“Formerly and Lately”-1871)

‘Poetic Art’ (Art Poétique)

“Music first and foremost! In your verse,
Choose those meters odd of syllable,
Supple in the air, vague, flexible,
Free of pounding beat, heavy or terse…

Choose the words you use—now right, now wrong—
With abandon: when the poet’s vision
Couples the Precise with the Imprecise
Best the giddy shadows of his song:…..

For Nuance, not colour absolute,
Is your goal: subtle and shaded hue!
Nuance! It alone is what lets you
Marry dream to dream, and horn to flute!…

Take vain eloquence and wring its neck!...

Let your verse be aimless chance, delighting
In good-omened fortune, sprinkled over
Dawn’s wind, bristling scents of mint, thyme, clover…
All the rest is nothing but worthless writing.”
In his treatise ‘Sahithya Chinthakal’ (1945) Changampuzha speaks of being impressed by these words of Verlaine which eventually moulded his own poetic outlook. Keeping in tune with Verlaine’s exhortation on music, Changampuzha dared to make daring innovations in Malayalam poetry, much to the consternation of the poetic doyens of the time. Laying aside the cumbersome Sanskrit prosody, he relied on the Dravidian metre, resorting to the folk tradition of music, making verses more supple and appealing to the taste of the common man.

Changampuzha evolved his own ideas on art as made explicit in his poem ‘Art’ (Diadem):

Art
“What is art? A ‘vigour’ more valuable
Than life dear friend,
Divine zest, flights of imagination, revealing
Celestial dreams surpassing everything,
Nothing more brilliant, more binding
Than that divine love-knot,
Joining hearts- so unfathomable
Its influence on earth….”

Indeed, by virtue of the ‘flights of imagination’, the poet is empowered to expose the splendours of the tomb as expressed in The Throbbing Tomb, where two nightbirds perched on boughs above his sepulchre seem to take stock of the rumblings or rather throbings within, which seem to say:
“In spite of returning to dust,
Each atom of mine, still
Drenched in souvenirs of love
Dances dreamily, oh my Goddess!...”

Continuing in the same vein, the beauty of life beyond the grave is very well brought in the poem ‘Skeletal Flowers’, where the poet describes the phantoms of two lovers coming out of their graves for a stroll in the moonlight, with the woman asking her beloved in an endearing tone whether bones would sprout flowers emanating perfumes like those presently hovering in the air - to which he replies:-

“Bones do not flower usually- but the ones that do
May possess such a magical property…
The fragrance spreading around, my dear,
Is indeed proof of our own bones flowering”

In order to imbibe the art of the great masters of world literature Changampuzha painstakingly studied English, so that he could, through translations acquaint himself with their works. It was this yearning for innovation and improvisation that brought him close to the French Symbolists. The supreme importance that Verlaine gave to music and his exhortation to shun eloquence even to the point of strangulation, turned out to be a clarion call for Changampuzha to do the same in Malayalam poetry.
Indeed our bard unearthed the oral elements in early Malayalam folk poetry by reviving the primordial ‘Pattu’(song) tradition, thereby raising Malayalam verse to dizzy heights of musicality. Little wonder that the noted critic and writer Dr.M.Leelavathy calls him the “Orpheus” of Malayalam verse.

According to the great poet and statesman Leopold Senghor:

“I insist that a poem is only perfect when it becomes a song; word and music combined. Poetry must rediscover its beginnings, the time when it was sung and danced”.

Changampuzha seems to have succeeded in achieving this basic objective of poetry, judging by the popularity of his compositions.

In order to gauge the depth of the aesthetic appreciativeness, the next chapter shall attempt to juxtapose the significant works of both poets. Three important works each of both poets shall be studied in juxtaposition.