The Poetics of Glass in France, 1850-1900

D. Phil. Thesis
Medieval and Modern Languages

Natasha Ryan
St Anne's College

Michaelmas Term 2016
79, 978 words (approx.)

Thesis Acknowledgements

Many people have made the process of writing this thesis not only possible, but enjoyable. First and foremost, my heartfelt thanks go to Maria and David Ferreras-Willetts, who have generously provided support in more ways than one.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Roger Pearson, for his invaluable advice, patience, sharp eyes, and unfailing good humour. I raise a glass to you (wink), Roger. I am also grateful to my examiners, Seth Whidden and David Evans, for their generous readings and helpful counsel.

Thank you to the numerous friends and colleagues who have inspired, advised, and critiqued, as well as to those who have provided some light relief. Collegiate thanks to Geneviève Adams, Geraldine Hazbun, Patrick McGuinness, Anne Mullen, Eleanor Parker, and Daniel Trápaga. Stanner thanks to: Alex Lewis, James Searle, Edward Hicks, Kanta Dihal, Helen Ashcroft, and Thomas Reuss – thank you all for the wine tastings and welfare teas. Thanks to Asha Rogers and the S Club for East Oxford good times, Esther Illman, Molly Joyce and Florence Stuart-Leach for the brunches, and Evi Heinz, Alessandro Cabiati and Ambra Casiraghi for sharing the chaos.

I am also grateful to those who have reminded me that there is life outside the D. Phil.: in particular, thanks to Sarah Shaul, Rhiannon Archer, Katie Allen, Alex Baxter, Marco Brandl, Rob Daly, Natalie Dinham, Paul McDonald, Diamanto Mamuneas, Aimie Bartlett, Polly Rowe, Jo Sykes, and Judith and Bryan Shuttlewood.

Special thanks to my Dix-Neuviémistes for their solidarity and enthusiasm: Valentina Gosetti, Caroline Ardrey, Dan Finch-Race, and Laura Ludtke (honorary Dix-Neuviémiste). Extra-special thanks to Laura for the proof-reading and modernist kindred spiritude.

Finally, I am blessed to have a family that has always supported me 100%, without questioning my ambitions and dreams. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my two Grandads, John Palmer and Ray Ryan, who taught me to work hard and make things. It is also a celebration of my two Nans, Joy and Gloria, who have always encouraged my imagination and curiosity. Love and gratitude to my brother, Wmanji (boil em, mash em, stick em in a stew) and to my parents, Ma and Faj, for making me believe anything is possible. Last, thanks to Lish (Marjorie) and all her chickens for the squeakies and kabungas.

Short Abstract

Natasha Ryan, St Anne's College, Submission for D. Phil. Medieval and Modern Languages, Michaelmas Term 2016

The Poetics of Glass in France, 1850-1900

This thesis examines the representation of glass in French and Belgian poetry associated with the Symbolist and Decadent movements. It incorporates a number of authors, particularly focussing on Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Laforgue, Rodenbach, and Maeterlinck, but also encompassing more minor writers where appropriate, as well as some writers on the periphery of Symbolism and Decadence.

The thesis investigates how the growing use of glass in architecture, technology, and visual art influenced late-nineteenth-century poets, providing these writers with a means by which to understand their social context as well as a multi-faceted metaphor through which to interrogate their own poetic mechanisms. Glass, in its various manifestations – windows, lenses, hothouses, aquariums, Exhibition halls, Art Nouveau glasswork, and stained glass – prompts meditation on such questions as: the interaction between subject and object; the relationship between fiction and reality; the infinite; poetic form; nature and artifice; and aesthetic identity. Ultimately, I combat the traditional understanding of this poetry as being solely concerned with the pure realm of dreams, the soul, and the 'Idée'. Instead, I insist on the material world as a starting point for this poetry, demonstrating that it is not immune to environmental factors, but rather that it uses its environment as a route towards the elusive 'Idée'. Glass is key to this process because its very ambiguity makes it a suitable embodiment of the tension between the material and the unknown, invisible, or ideal.

Long Abstract

Natasha Ryan, St Anne's College, Submission for D. Phil. Medieval and Modern Languages, Michaelmas Term 2016

The Poetics of Glass in France, 1850-1900

This thesis examines the role of glass in late-nineteenth-century poetry of the Decadent and Symbolist movements. The nineteenth century was a period when glass came into its own in France as a material for construction (arcades, Exhibition halls, department stores), decorative art, and scientific instruments. As a result, it became more prominent in the public consciousness, and is associated with a burgeoning culture of display, consumerism, taxonomy, artifice, and exoticism. The abundance of vitreous imagery in the literature of this era is evidence of the material's importance and versatility.

The presence of glass in nineteenth-century literature has not escaped critical attention: there have been studies of glass culture in England, while, in a French context, scholars have pointed out the prevalence of glass in the Realist and Naturalist novel. Where contemporary poetry is concerned, however, studies have been limited to the examination of the literary implications of individual glass objects or structures, such as the aquarium or the hothouse. This thesis is the first study of late-nineteenth-century poetry to bring together the various manifestations of glass in this era as part of a holistic phenomenon, contending that no element of glass culture can be analysed in isolation.

Furthermore, this thesis identifies the parallel between the concerns of glass culture at this time and those of poetry. Glass prompts poetry to meditate on the relationship between the subject and object, mimesis, legibility, the dialogue between industrialisation and mythology, the 'Decadent' aesthetic of decline and regeneration, the sense of *fin-de-siècle* claustrophobia, and the degree to which art should be socially engaged. Moreover, glass offers poetry a means by which to interrogate its own mechanisms, provoking experimentation with form and the development of a new aesthetic approach. Overall, glass contributes to the prolonged anxiety about engagement with the material world that is manifest in poetry throughout the second half of the century.

In his 1899 text, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Arthur Symons associates the movement with the soul, dreams, and the unseen, essentially characterising it as an anti-material aesthetic approach. Many critical responses to Decadence and Symbolism over the twentieth century have tended to do likewise. My research challenges this perception: rejecting the idea that Symbolism eschews materiality, I insist that the material world certainly did resonate with these poets and is manifest in much of their work. I propose a new way of reading this poetry that takes glass as a starting point and traces how an engagement with the world of objects contributed to the Symbolists' understanding of their own aesthetic identity, and ultimately provided them with a route towards the elusive 'Idée' to which they aspired. I show that the qualities of glass found parallels in new verse forms that were emerging at the time, providing these poets with a potent and flexible metaphor for their own work. For too long, the examination of the material world in nineteenth-century literature, including glass, has focussed on the novel while poetry has been side-lined because it is considered anti-material. I argue that materiality, as demonstrated by the use of glass in this poetry, is on the contrary essential to its understanding of its own social and aesthetic context, as well as a tool in the articulation of the Ideal.

Given the nebulous and multiple definitions of both 'Decadence' and 'Symbolism', and the large number of writers associated with these movements, there was a potentially inexhaustible

corpus of poetry that could be incorporated into this study. However, it is my contention that the use of the material as a route to the 'Idée' is, in fact, a helpful tool in assessing how far individual writers conform to the labels they and others ascribe to them, and how far they resist this. Indeed, their approach to materiality, as it differs from, say, the Romantic or Naturalist approach, is part of what *makes* these writers Decadent and Symbolist. Moreover, the existence of a uniquely Belgian strain of Symbolism, related to but distinct from the French movement, and equally interested in glass, adds a further dimension to the question of aesthetic identity at this time. Therefore, by examining the poetics of glass 'in France', rather than 'in French poetry', this thesis incorporates the work of Belgian writers who maintained strong personal and professional connections with France, and many of whom lived there. The writers who recur most frequently in the thesis are those in whose work glass is most prominent and, what's more, those who use the representation of glass in the most innovative ways to extend their understanding of poetry and its milieu. Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire are outlined as two major precursors to the glass poetics of Decadence and Symbolism, while Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue, Georges Rodenbach, and Maurice Maeterlinck are those who develop the Romantic legacy into a new literary identity.

The methodology of this study is twofold. On the one hand, it takes its cue from Walter Benjamin, reading the nineteenth-century literary subconscious through writers' engagement with their material environment. To this end, I take into account various elements of cultural history, ranging from industrialisation to commercialism, the shifting attitude towards religion, and the phenomenon of the International Exhibitions. On the other hand, and given that one of the principle effects of glass was to encourage poetry to reflect on *itself*, as well as the world around it, I engage in close reading of a number of key texts, exploring how those texts show evidence of contemporary literary trends, or how they set such trends in motion.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Introduction

I outline the increased use of glass in nineteenth-century French industry, and the prominence of glass in public architecture in the form of the arcades. I briefly define Decadence and Symbolism, and I interrogate whether such labels are useful and where their potential shortcomings may lie.

Chapter One: Windows onto the Nineteenth Century

I trace the evolving use of the window from the arcades to the emergence of the department store. The window contributed to a fascination with bourgeois commercialism and a blurring of the division between the subject and object. Beginning with Baudelaire and Gautier, I look into how these concerns map onto the tension between reality and fiction. I then show how windows enable the poet's development from observer in the case of Krysinska, to voyeur in the case of Rodenbach. Finally, I consider the relationship between the window frame and the pane of glass in the context of Mallarmé and Laforgue's notion of the infinite.

Chapter Two: The Poetic Lens
This section considers how poetry incorporates lenticular metaphors as a way to interrogate its own mechanisms, taking into account the lorgnette and 'jumelles', scientific lenses such as the microscope and telescope, the photographic lens, the lens of projection (specifically the magic lantern), and the kaleidoscope. Throughout this chapter, lenses prompt poetry to reflect on artifice and reality, the imagination, and poetic form.

Chapter Three: Glass Walls
This section considers the increasingly vitreous architecture of urban France and Belgium in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. I begin with public glass structures, in particular Exhibition halls. I relate these structures back to the commercialism already outlined in relation to the department store, as well as to new attitudes towards classification, the condensation of space and time, a burgeoning interest in the exotic, and the dialogue between industrialisation and mythology. I go on to look at more private glass structures, namely the hothouse and aquarium, examining how these feed into both the 'Decadent' aesthetic and a sense of *fin-de-siècle* claustrophobia.

Chapter Four: Glass Décor
Here I look at domestic glass décor. I begin by discussing how the glass box in Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* manipulates the passage of time in the novel, and contributes to the creation of illusion. I move on to consider vases in the work of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, which represent a new poetics of the absent flower. Finally, I examine the mutually beneficial relationship between glass artists and poets, such as the friendship between Gallé and Montesquiou, concluding that the poetry that responds to Symbolist decorative art is, conversely, anti-Symbolist.

Chapter Five: Coloured Glass
Coloured glass was historically an intermediary between the terrestrial and the divine. Nineteenth-century poetry is confronted with a world from which God is absent, yet the transcendent capacity of glass is retained and a new ideal must be formulated. Coloured glass, as a metaphor for poetry itself, reveals that poetry is the route towards this ideal and, moreover, that art itself is the very ideal to which these writers aspire.

Final Reflections
I conclude that glass is key to understanding the Symbolist engagement with the material as a route towards the ideal, or virtual. This culminated in their theatrical writing, where the question of materiality is given another dimension in the form of a physical stage. I examine glass, and particularly mirrors, in the theatrical writing of Rodenbach, Maeterlinck, and Mallarmé, concluding that it contributes to the fictionalisation of reality in the very real context of an auditorium, making the audience complicit in the fictionalising process.

By examining the material world as a mechanism through which poetry meditated upon itself, I suggest a new reading of a literary movement that was marginalised in its time. These poets' profound engagement with the environment in which they lived is often overlooked in favour of their more abstract and idealised reputation: I demonstrate that their conception of the ideal would, in fact, be impossible without their interaction with the material and that criticism of this movement should place the physical world front and centre.

Table of Contents

Introduction..2
Chapter One: Windows onto the Nineteenth Century 22
Chapter Two: The Poetic Lens 54
Chapter Three: Glass Walls 92
Chapter Four: Glass Décor 132
Chapter Five: Coloured Glass..167
Final Reflections 201
Bibliography 223

Écrire –

L'encrier, cristal comme une conscience, avec sa goutte, au fond, de ténèbres relative à ce que quelque chose soit: puis, écarte la lampe.[1]

[1] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1998-2003), ii, p. 215.

Introduction

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
'That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.'[2]

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', the poem that brought T.S. Eliot to public attention, was hailed by F.R. Leavis as 'a complete break with the nineteenth-century tradition':[3] it is a milestone of Anglophone modernism, radical in form and sentiment. Yet 'Prufrock', which was published in 1915 but which Eliot began as early as 1910, could equally be considered an elegy for the nineteenth century, and many of its motifs are hangovers that readers of nineteenth-century poetry, particularly from the other side of the Channel, will recognise: Lazarus returns from the dead, reminding us of Baudelaire's 'Le Flacon'; Prufrock's balding head is presented on a platter, recalling the Decadent fascination with Salome; Prufrock emphatically declares that he is not Hamlet, in a move that serves more to evoke Hamlet (the quintessential Symbolist anti-hero) than dismiss him; and, in lines that were omitted from the final version of the poem, Eliot refers to gas jets and corsets – technology and fashion that were becoming obsolete as the century turned. Another relic of the previous century is that magic lantern, which projects subjectivity onto a screen that many may see but none can read. And yet, the window yields no more meaning than the lantern, and in a deleted passage Prufrock states: 'I fumbled to the window to experience the world/ And to hear my Madness singing, [...]/ […] And as he sang the world began to fall apart…'.[4] This is embryonic modernism still steeped in nineteenth-century imagery. When Prufrock laments that he 'grow[s] old', we might infer that the poetry that has shaped him is also ageing, and the world

[2] T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp. 6-7.
[3] F.R. Leavis, *New bearings in English poetry: a study of the contemporary situation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 75.
[4] T.S. Eliot, 'Prufrock's Pervigilium', *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-17*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Harcourt Barce, 1996), pp. 43-44.

that he witnesses fall apart is one of magic lanterns and windowpanes, where making one's meaning clear is a constant concern.

The world Prufrock eulogises is that of the poetry of late-nineteenth-century France, where such imagery has yet to '[die] with a dying fall.'[5] For the poets of this period, though, the comfortable acceptance and evocation of the material world which Eliot demonstrates was a source of anxiety: late-nineteenth-century poetry, particularly of the Decadent and Symbolist movements, attempts time and again to resolve the contradiction between the material environment and the search for a nebulous and variable unknown, or 'Idée.'

In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) – a text that influenced the critical reception of Symbolism throughout the twentieth century – Arthur Symons says of the movement's origins:

> after the world has starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and the rearrangement of material things, comes the turn of the soul; and with it comes [...] a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream.[6]

Reactions to the poetry of this period tend to characterise it as anti-material, abstract, and more interested in intuitive suggestion than in physical reality: it is a literature of the soul. Consequently, this poetry is often contrasted with contemporary Naturalist fiction from which, by Zola's own admission, 'l'âme est parfaitement absente'.[7] However, this is a simplification for, in fact, the material world resonated in Naturalist fiction and Symbolist and Decadent poetry alike. This thesis will show that, although nineteenth-century poets may appear to eschew materiality, it is the very foundation of their attempts to reach the ill-defined unknown. Moreover, I will explore how the representation of one particular material – glass – facilitated understanding about poetry's evolving aesthetic and social status.

---

[5] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 4.

[6] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: Dutton, 1919), p. 4.

[7] Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand and others, 21 vols (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2002-2010), iii, p. 27.

Glass complements poetry in a unique and varied way: its reflectiveness can be used to interrogate the relationship between subject matter and voice; its translucidity speaks to the question of legibility, which has natural poetic implications; and its impermeablity, which traps the subject inside, informs the debate between an elitist, isolated aesthetics and social engagement. Furthermore, the varied uses and forms of glass invite poets to reflect on poetic form. As the happily coincidental homophony between 'le vers' and 'le verre' suggests, glass shares a connection with poetry that is true of no other material. While it would be possible to use other common nineteenth-century objects in a similar materialist reading of literature (examples might include lace, fans, or jewellery, which also illustrate aspects of the Decadent and Symbolist sensibility), glass is by far the material to which these poets most frequently turn. Therefore, to speak of a 'Poetics of Glass' is not merely to refer to the portrayal of glass in poetry, nor does it simply denote the 'implicit principles' of glass culture.[8] Rather, it is to point towards a symbiotic relationship between poetry and glass: on the one hand, the evolution of poetry, or indeed 'poetics' (not just poetry but also theories about poetry), which is explored through glass as a figurative device; and on the other, the aesthetic principles of glass itself that carry literary echos. Ultimately, the many vitreous metaphors in the texts we shall examine reveal that the professed abstention from the material world, which is a product of Decadent elitism and Symbolist Idealism is, in truth, heavily invested in materiality.

Glass was the nineteenth century's material of choice. Architects and poets alike prized its ductility, its crystalline precision, its inherent glimmer, and its transparency. That it could be seen through without being moved through meant that glass was both a medium and an

[8] *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)), points to the wide definition of the term 'poetics', which has been 'applied to almost every human activity', but outlines the principally literary history of the term: 'Applied to the works of authors, [...] it means something like "implicit principles"; [...] the most specific sense of "poetics" denotes "theory of poetry".' The *Encyclopedia* proceeds to detail the historic link between 'poetics' and questions of mimesis, poetic form, and critical interpretation. It continues: 'this question about "poetics" really amounts to the question of what, exactly, a *poem* is [...].' See under 'Poetics', pp. 929-938. Therefore to refer to a 'poetics of glass' suggests a contradiction, pitting poetic theory against a non-literary material. However, it is in precisely this respect that glass is illuminating, for it has fundamentally literary implications and, indeed, is a means by which the 'question of what, exactly, a *poem* is' can be answered, or, perhaps more usefully, extended.

obstacle, eliciting and thwarting desire, an ambiguous boundary between subject and object. But transparency, and by extension opacity, are loaded terms, and this is particularly true in the context of Decadence and Symbolism, which have been criticised as 'obscure'.[9] The transparency of glass is compromised with the mere lighting of a lamp, and it is a concern both of these poets and their critics that language might also be subject to the faultline between transparency and opacity. What distinguishes the Symbolists from their critics is that the former turn this faultline to their advantage.

The use of glass proliferated in the nineteenth century. As construction incorporated more glass in the public sphere, a preference grew for thick, polished glass ('glace'), as opposed to traditional 'verre à vitre', which was thin and brittle. According to Jean-Pierre Daviet, the Compagnie de Saint-Gobain, the oldest glass-making company in France (active since 1665), recorded a boom in the demand for 'glace' in the 1820s, when sales reached 26,000m² annually.[10] Daviet notes that, despite a temporary drop in the early 1830s, sales continued to prosper over the following decades, reaching an average of 30-35,000m² in the 1840s. Similarly, Jean Choffel demonstrates that share values in the company increased from 750 francs in 1860 to 1,300 francs in 1868.[11] These figures suggest that, despite social and economic upheavals like the July Revolution, the American Civil War (which reduced the demand for exported glass), and the Commune, the glass industry thrived throughout the century.

This was partly because of industrial progress. Although there was no sudden 'industrial revolution' in France, owing to the constant political turbulence and the disruption of the Napoleonic wars, industry did develop, albeit gradually.[12] While glass-making techniques did

[9] Proust criticises Symbolism for its 'double obscurité […], obscurité des idées et des images, d'une part, obscurité grammaticale, de l'autre.' See *Contre l'obscurité et autres articles* (La Nerthe, 2012), p. 30.

[10] Jean-Pierre Daviet, *Une multinationale à la française: Histoire de Saint-Gobain*, 1665-1989 (Paris: Fayard, 1989), p. 88.

[11] Jean Choffel, *Saint-Gobain: du miroir à l'atome. Histoire des grandes entreprises* (Paris: Plon, 1960), p. 56.

[12] Daviet states: 'révolution politique et révolution industrielle […] ne pourraient avoir lieu en même temps [...], les énergies d'un pays se concentrant sur l'une ou l'autre' (*Une multinationale*, p. 58).

not change vastly, the mechanisation of some of the process, for example the polishing stage, meant that production costs decreased. Consequently, glass could be made more cheaply and quickly.

Furthermore, the public attitude towards glass shifted. Until the French Revolution, Saint-Gobain virtually monopolised the market on account of its royal 'privilège', which prevented other companies from producing 'glace'. However, during the Revolution most 'privilèges' were abolished in the interest of social equality. When Saint-Gobain's 'privilège' expired in 1822, more glass companies were established, widening the market and allowing for more competitive pricing.[13] While glass largely remained unaffordable for the poorest of the population, for the middle class it became readily available: glass ceased to be exclusively aristocratic.

However, despite its wider availability, glass retained its luxury status. Indeed, Saint-Quirin (Saint-Gobain's rival company) worried that lower prices might deter customers who considered glass a mark of opulence. Daviet notes that 'Saint-Quirin pense que la glace est un objet de luxe dont la consommation est liée à une mode des classes aisées; en avilir le prix annulerait la psychologie ostentatoire et risquerait de faire perdre le marché.'[14] Glass still connoted extravagance, and glass companies faced the challenge of providing a luxury material at an affordable rate. Saint-Gobain recognises this in their 'Rapport du Conseil d'administration de l'exercice' in 1861:

> Fondée autrefois à l'ombre du monopole pour fournir des objets de grand prix à un petit nombre de grandes fortunes, [Saint-Gobain] se trouve obligée aujourd'hui de faire face à travers les hasards de la concurrence aux besoins multiples d'une société où la richesse très divisée a fait naître partout le désir de luxe.[15]

Glass occupied an ambiguous place in the nineteenth-century consumer's psychology, being associated still with the aristocracy, yet affordable by the middle classes. It thrived in an age

[13] See Daviet, *Une multinationale*, p. 70.
[14] Daviet, *Une multinationale*, p. 88.
[15] Quoted by Choffel, *Saint-Gobain*, p. 4.

of increasing consumerism, and demand for glass in both public and private construction grew. The material became ubiquitous.

During the first half of the century, glass architecture was most visible in the Parisian arcades, which were built largely in the 1820s to house networks of shops, a precursor to department stores. The 'passages couverts', as their name attests, were glass-covered walkways constructed across Paris, described in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* as 'the residues of a dream world'.[16] Benjamin is among the first critics to note the arcades' significance, reading into them a retrospective explanation of the nineteenth-century mindset. His is, as Susan Buck-Morss states, a 'materialist philosophy of history', informed by 'the historical material itself, the outdated remains of [...] nineteenth-century buildings, technologies, and commodities.'[17] For Benjamin, patterns in social behaviour and modes of thought are revealed as 'an endless series of facts congealed in the form of things'.[18] In a sense, this thesis takes its cue from Benjamin, adhering to his materialist methodology with a view to glass in particular. If Isobel Armstrong suggests that 'the material object is endowed with a legible semantics and vocabulary'[19] – and is thus, in some respect, a *text* – then we are here occupied with deciphering that text, drawing cultural and literary conclusions from the world of objects, and locating the material in what may have been the nineteenth century's most anti-materialist movement.

Benjamin attributes the rise of the arcades to developments in glass and iron construction, which are linked:

> The second condition for the emergence of the arcades is the beginning of iron construction [...]. It undergoes an evolution whose tempo will accelerate in the course of

---

[16] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 13.

[17] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), p. 3.

[18] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 14.

[19] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 15.

> the century [...]. At the same time, the range of architectural applications for glass expands[...].[20]

Glass is key to the construction of the arcades, and the arcades are prime examples of the kinds of objects through which Benjamin reads nineteenth-century culture. This is because they relate to several contemporary concerns. First, as a network of shops, they contribute to the increasing commercialism of the period. Second, contemporary society was obsessed with looking, perhaps because of increasingly crowded urban co-habitation, or perhaps as a result of new media, particularly the press, which brought the details of private life into the public eye. The display culture fostered by the arcades, both through the shop windows they house and through the panoramas with which they are decorated, complements this visual society. And finally, the arcades, in Benjamin's words, 'serve transitory purposes':[21] functioning as passageways, they allow individuals to pause and reflect, away from the hustle of the traffic-filled streets.

This latter point is especially pertinent because it is at the heart of *flânerie*. Benjamin demonstrates that the *flâneur* came into being partly as a result of the arcades, which allowed him to stroll through Paris without exposure to inclement weather and chaotic traffic. The arcades protected the public from the conditions of the street; glass made this protection possible while still allowing for the transmission of natural light, thereby effecting the phenomenon of *flânerie*. If the arcades speak to a central aspect of nineteenth-century culture, so, by extension, does glass.

Of course, the other condition for *flânerie* is the interaction between the individual and the crowd. In the arcades, citizens intermingle without prolonged contact. Facilitating both dawdling and transition, arcades are the milieu of the passer-by. *Flânerie* occurs in the covered walkway because that is where the crowd is found, and the crowd is where the

---

[20] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, pp. 3-4.
[21] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 16.

flâneur is in his element. The quintessential observer, the *flâneur* enjoys watching from the margins. According to Baudelaire's definition:

> La foule est son domaine [...]. Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Être hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartiaux [...]. L'Observateur est un *prince* qui jouit partout de son incognito.[22]

These are precisely the conditions the arcades cultivate. In addition to the glass roof, shop windows were ubiquitous in the arcades, creating walls of simultaneously transparent and reflective surfaces. Consequently, every member of the crowd at once sees and is seen. Benjamin quotes Charles Blanc, who remarks that women of the time (1872) dressed as though mindful of being seen *in profile*, 'for the profile is the silhouette of someone [...] who passes, who is about to vanish from our sight.'[23] Baudelaire's 'A une passante' springs to mind here. This is a culture in which the *flâneur* applies his keen eye and his speculative imagination to every passer-by. Surrounded by types, his self-assigned role is to individualise them, put a history to a face. Indeed, this describes the plot of Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), which is often considered the first appearance of the literary *flâneur*, and we might note that the narrator of this text initially observes the object of his fascination, an old man, through a window.

The arcades, then, are instrumental in the evolution of an entire sensibility, and it is a sensibility that has come to dominate criticism of mid-nineteenth-century literature. *Flâneur* has practically become a byword for the Parisian poet, with Baudelaire singled out as the prime example. Undeniably, the arcades captured the literary imagination: we see this in texts as diverse as Zola's *Nana* (1880) and Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926). But their real

---

[22] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-6), ii, pp. 691-692 [Baudelaire's emphasis].

[23] Quoted by Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 74.

importance is that they elevated glass in the literary consciousness, laying the foundations for a more widespread union between poetry and glass culture that blossomed during the second half of the century. As we shall see, this union covered diverse forms and functions of glass, from optical instruments to aquariums, and from vases to stained-glass windows. Throughout this period, glass offered poets a flexible and potent metaphor by which to interrogate their own creative process. Baudelaire may have been among the first to capitalise on the fertile analogy between glass and poetry, but the poets who succeeded him were no less eager to do so.

This thesis spans the second half of the nineteenth century and is bookended by two International Exhibitions that featured glass strikingly in their architecture: the Crystal Palace in 1851 and the Grand Palais in 1900. In poetic history, this period is one where literary identities were fluid and constantly in the process of being forged – the process often more important than the conclusion. It is a time of '-isms', manifestoes, and rebellion – as much an era of fragmentation as of cohesion. Throughout this period, numerous movements emerged and attempted to delineate themselves by emphasising their differences.[24] Nonetheless, the reality is that allegedly competing movements overlapped substantially because, ultimately, they all engaged with the same concerns: materiality and the abstract; reality and fiction; aesthetics and social engagement; clarity and obscurity. In poetry, two major movements that dominated the *fin de siècle* were Decadence and Symbolism, and this study concentrates largely on the poets associated with these movements, although it does encompass poets on the periphery of these circles.

First to appear was Decadence, a movement broadly characterised by a taste for exoticism, artifice, and self-interested hermeticism.[25] Spearheaded by Anatole Baju, whose revue *Le*

[24] These include Naturalism, the Parnassian poets, Decadence, Symbolism, and the *école romane*.

[25] Jean Pierrot's *L'Imaginaire décadent (1880-1900)* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2007) and Jean de Palacio's *Figures et formes de la décadence* (Paris: Séguier, 1994) are useful overviews of Decadence. Noël Richard explores Baju's activities in *Le Mouvement décadent* (Paris: Nizet, 1968). Pierre Jourde's *L'Alcool du silence: sur la Décadence* (Paris: Champion, 1994) emphasises the dialectical nature of Decadence.

Décadent, was one of many small publications created by and for Decadent and Symbolist writers,[26] the movement united, and later divided, many of the most prominent – as well as many less prominent – poets of the period.[27] These poets claimed first Verlaine, then Mallarmé, as leaders of the new approach to poetry, although neither Verlaine nor Mallarmé formally attached their names to Decadence and Symbolism.[28] While Verlaine is more typically associated with Decadence, the later Symbolists increasingly saw Mallarmé as their role model, believing that he represented a more theoretically coherent doctrine. René Ghil, in particular, attempted to build on Mallarmé's ideas in his *Traité du verbe* (1886), and the latter wrote the preface to this text. This said, Ghil later broke away from Mallarmé in turn, and subsequent editions of *Traité* did not include Mallarmé's contribution.[29]

Ghil and his followers saw Symbolism as an absolute break with Decadence, and some criticism has posited 1885-1886 as the year this break occurred – both Ghil's *Traité* and Jean Moréas' 'Manifeste du Symbolisme' came out in 1886.[30] Certainly, the newly formed 'Symbolists' encouraged this perspective. However, to a certain extent the two movements are concurrent, with Decadence continuing to exist after the advent of Symbolism. Furthermore, many of the writers associated with Symbolism had once declared themselves

---

[26] For detail on *Le Décadent* and other important publications, see Louis Marquèze-Pouey, *Le Mouvement décadent en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986).

[27] Palacio comments: 'il n'y a pas d'auteurs *majeurs* et d'auteurs *mineurs*. […] Il y a seulement une prodigieuse activité d'écriture qui s'exerce fébrilement dans toutes les directions, bouleversant les hiérarchies, ébranlant les catégories, bousculant les genres' (*Figures et formes*, p. 13). Nonetheless, posterity has favoured some writers above others.

[28] Verlaine supported the young Decadents and lauded Baju for coining the term 'décadisme': 'Bravo! *décadisme* est un mot de génie, une trouvaille amusante' (quoted by Marquèze-Pouey, *Le Mouvement décadent*, p. 17). Likewise, Mallarmé contributed to so-called decadent revues, but he resisted the labels of these movements and, upon sending some of his work to *La Décadence* (contemporary with but distinct from *Le Décadent*), is reported to have commented: 'quel titre abominable que *la Décadence* et comme il serait temps de renoncer à tout ce qui y ressemble!' (quoted by Richard, *Le Mouvement décadent*, p. 81). On the difference between 'Décadence' and 'Décadisme' see Patrick McGuinness, *Poetry and Radical Politics in* fin-de-siècle *France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 38-39: 'An *–isme* implies a method or a system whereas an *–ence* suggests an atmosphere.'

[29] See Marquèze-Pouey, *Le Mouvement décadent*, pp. 207-208.

[30] Guy Michaud sees Decadence as an early iteration of Symbolism, claiming that 1886 is a definitive turning point between the two movements. See *Le Message poétique du Symbolisme* (Paris: Nizet, 1951), p. 346. Similarly, Richard states: 'L'année 1885-86 peut être considérée comme la ligne de partage entre la décadence et le symbolisme, du moins si l'on considère la décadence comme le stade préliminaire du symbolisme', *Le Mouvement décadent*, p. 8.

Decadent and a number of these – including Moréas himself – even went on to oppose the Symbolist doctrine they had once propagated and form the *école romane*.[31] Decadence and Symbolism are fraught with complications and overlaps, too numerous and complex to detail here. The tradition of pitting these movements against one another, as was initiated by the artists themselves and perpetuated by critics, is enlightening, not because it is necessarily true but because it exposes the uncertainty of the artists' self-identification, and the shifting borders they drew and redrew.

The term 'Décadence' suggests decline and, indeed, the Decadent movement was associated with a decaying civilisation and a decline in artistic expression, which was seen as the inevitable consequence of a taste for luxury and excess. This notion was articulated most famously by Max Nordau in his *Entartung* (1892), published in French as *Dégénérescence* in 1894. Framing his opinions as a scientific study, Nordau blames social and environmental conditions (toxic stimulants, urbanisation) for the degenerative state of contemporary art. He portrays aesthetic, social, and racial decadence as the disease of modern life.[32] Nordau was not alone in this opinion, and comparisons between late-nineteenth-century France and ancient civilisations were common: Paris was held to be the equivalent of ancient Rome, debauched and on the brink of collapse. To an extent, this perspective was corroborated by the Decadents themselves:

> Se dissimuler l'état de décadence où nous sommes arrivés serait le comble de l'insenséisme.
>
> Religions, mœurs, justice, tout décade, ou plutôt tout subit une transformation inéluctable.
>
> La société se désagrège sous l'action corrosive d'une civilisation déliquescente.
>
> L'homme moderne est un blasé.
>
> Affinement d'appétits, de sensations, de goût, de luxe, de jouissances; névrose, hystérie, hypnotisme, morphinomanie, charlatanisme scientifique, schopenhauérisme à outrance, tels sont les prodomes de l'évolution sociale.[33]

---

[31] McGuinness analyses the politics and poetry of the *école romane* in *Poetry and Radical Politics*, pp. 182-273.

[32] See Max Nordau, *Dégénérescence*, trans. Auguste Dietrich, 2 vols (Paris: F. Alcan, 1894).

[33] 'La Rédaction', *Le Décadent littéraire et artistique* (10 April 1886), p.1.

This decadent sensibility is connected to a sense of anxiety that accompanied the imminent turn of the century, an anxiety which was prompted not just by social concerns about a declining civilisation, but also by the literary concerns of a canon that was weighed down by tradition and was struggling to define its future.

However, taking decline as the predominant characteristic of Decadence would be a simplification. For, coupled with this sense of degeneration was an effort towards renewal: on the one hand, the renewal of verse through innovative poetic forms such as *vers libre* and prose poetry; and on the other hand, a renewal of language. Decadent poetry favoured unusual vocabulary: highly specialised scientific or botanical terminology; archaic words that were rarely used in popular discourse; even neologism.[34] The use of such vocabulary led to accusations of obscurity from critics – accusations that continued to plague the Symbolists long after Decadence had faded. Yet these poets were more concerned with clarity than obscurity, with using language so precisely that it became more, not less, comprehensible. This is expressed by Charles Morice in 1889:

> Les Décadents, en écrivant dans une langue reprise à ses sources étymologiques et qui, par amour – exagéré, dit-on – du mot rare, témoignaient surtout de ce sentiment très légitime de ne laisser dormir aucune des richesses de la langue, réagissaient contre la dépravation et l'appauvrissement, contre la 'décadence' de la langue française.[35]

'Decadence', then, is not so much a defining characteristic of this poetry as a motivation to renew literature, an effort to 'rajeunir des vocables tombés en désuétude' (Baju).[36] Thus, a contradiction is exposed in the identity of the Decadent movement: decline is accompanied by regeneration, decay and nurture are inseparable.

---

[34] This became such a feature that Paul Adam, under the pseudonym Jacques Plowert, published the *Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes* (1888), a tongue-in-cheek text that collects the most extraordinary Decadent vocabulary.

[35] Quoted by Pouey, *Le Mouvement décadent*, p. 172.

[36] Quoted by Patrick McGuinness (ed.) in *Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes* by Jacques Plowert [Paul Adam] (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998), p. xv.

This is not the only contradiction in the movement. Tied in with the renewal of the French language is a concern with national identity, a desire to protect what was French and exclude external influence – this was the strand of Decadence that would become the *école romane*. Yet, there is also an element of Decadence which celebrates the exotic and glamorises oriental mythology. This is the Decadence glimpsed in the fascination with Salome, and epitomised in des Esseintes' love for unusual flora and perfumes. Moreover, the movement cannot be characterised as strictly *French*, given how many of these writers were Belgian. The domestic and exotic coexist: poetry at once draws on oriental sources for inspiration, seeking something that the domestic literary scene lacks, and, in a preservative effort, it isolates itself from the exterior world, looking inwards for inspiration. For some, this introspection proved fruitful, but for others it provoked a feeling of claustrophobic stagnation that was both a symptom of and contributing factor in the *fin-de-siècle* anxiety.

The protective instinct apparent in Decadence is associated with a hermetic tendency – again exemplified by des Esseintes – which was linked to a high-minded elitism. Thus, Jacques Plowert (Paul Adam) remarked on the 'pernicieuse difficulté de lecture pour quiconque n'est point initié au prestige hermétique des vocables'.[37] Similarly, in response to complaints about typographical errors in *Le Décadent*, Pombino (Baju) stated : '[*Le Décadent*] se fie à l'intelligence de ses lecteurs pour reconstituer la pensée de l'auteur'.[38] In this way, Decadence is a reformulation of the ivory-towered poet of old: literature is on a pedestal, accessible only to the intelligentsia. That both Adam and Baju make these statements under pseudonyms adds to the Decadent inaccessibility.

Nonetheless, Decadence was not an altogether isolated movement: for all their literary snobbery, these poets were interested in the wider world, many writing for contemporary newspapers and taking an interest in politics, society, biology, and medicine. Moreover,

---

[37] Plowert, *glossaire*, p. 3.
[38] See Richard, *Le Mouvement décadent*, p. 131.

despite the movement's apparent aloofness, in both Plowert and Pombino's statements there is a tone – ironic and hyperbolic in Plowert's case, blustery in Pombino's – that belies their words and betrays a concern with how Decadence was received. However much they may profess indifference to public reaction, there is an attempt at self-marketing in their copious manifestos and periodicals. Both the Decadents and the Symbolists (the former more inept than the latter) are brand-conscious: their constant efforts to define themselves speak to this.

And it is hardly surprising that the movement is so intent on manufacturing itself, for it is the product of an environment in which the importance of the manufactured item is heightened. Artifice has become a hallmark of Decadence, evident in des Esseintes' artificial flowers, and anticipated by Baudelaire's extolment of make-up in 'Éloge du maquillage'. While Decadent texts revel in nature, particularly rare plants and animals, they are also fascinated by the unnatural, the supernatural, and the falsely natural. This reverence for manufacture and artifice has literary ramifications: as Philippe Hamon explains, late-nineteenth-century writers were concerned that literature was overly superficial.[39] Naturalism was seen as a surface movement, which overexposed the world and erased depth. We might regard the Decadent glorification of artifice as a perverted attempt to combat this by exaggerating surface value, exalting in the fake and building upwards from the surface rather than downwards. Depth is reached by the creation of more surface.

For its part, a definition of Symbolism is, if possible, even more elusive. Developing Baudelaire's theory of 'correspondances', the Symbolists took Mallarmé's aim to 'peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit'[40] as doctrine, aiming to establish a poetry of suggestion and to revitalise language and poetic form. Mallarmé expressed his own position regarding the 'symbole' in his reponse to Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891):

---

[39] Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle* (Paris: J. Corti, 1989).
[40] Mallarmé, letter to Cazalis (30 October 1864), *OC*, i, p. 663.

les jeunes sont plus près de l'idéal poétique que les Parnassiens qui traitent encore leurs sujets à la façon des vieux philosophes et des vieux rhéteurs, en présentant les objets directement. Je pense qu'il faut, au contraire, qu'il n'y ait qu'allusion. La contemplation des objets, l'image s'envolant des rêveries suscitées par eux, sont le chant: […]. Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d'âme, par une série de déchiffrements.[41]

However, as we have noted, Mallarmé staunchly opposed literary labels ('j'abomine les écoles et tout ce qui y ressemble', he continues),[42] and the 'symbole' did not correlate, in his eyes, with a 'symbolisme'. Nonetheless, the poets who admired him were determined to invent a movement apart from Decadence and produced a number of 'manifestoes' of Symbolism. Ghil's *Traité du verbe* builds on Mallarmé's prioritisation of the 'Idée', stating:

Aux ordinaires et mille visions […] où l'Immortelle se dissémine, le logique et méditant poète les lignes saintes ravisse, desquelles il composera la Vision seule digne: le réel et suggestif Symbole d'où, palpitante pour le rêve, en son intégrité nue se lèvera l'Idée prime et dernière [.][43]

Meanwhile, Moréas' manifesto, which was published in *Le Figaro*, equally aims to define Symbolism:

Ennemie de l'enseignement, la déclamation, la fausse sensibilité, la description objective, la poésie symbolique cherche à vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'Idée, demeurerait sujette. L'Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures; car le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la concentration de l'Idée en soi.[44]

Ghil and Moréas attempt to articulate Mallarmé's aesthetics in prescriptive terms: the 'Idée' as the poetic goal; the emphasis on suggestion above description; the interest in dreams and the soul. However, despite Moréas' claim to authority, his manifesto met with resistance from

[41] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, pp. 699-700.
[42] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 700.
[43] René Ghil, *Traité du verbe* (Paris: Giraud, 1886), p. 21.
[44] Jean Moreas, 'Le Symbolisme', *Le Figaro. Supplément littéraire du dimanche* (18 September 1886), p. 150.

other self-proclaimed Symbolists. Gustave Kahn, reflecting retrospectively on the movement's origins in 1902, explains that the Symbolist movement quickly 'se vulgaris[ait]', splitting into a number of smaller sub-groups, before commenting:

> MM. Jean Moréas et Paul Adam, s'en furent trouver, au *Figaro*, M. Marcade et obtinrent l'insertion d'un manifeste littéraire quelque peu égoïste, où ils dépeignaient le mouvement symboliste à leurs couleurs, en assumaient, de leur propre mandat, la tâche et tentaient de se constituer chefs d'école. On leur en adressa de justes reproches […].[45]

That said, Kahn struggles to furnish his own definition, preferring to delimit Symbolism by outlining the movements it reacted against:

> L'union entre les symbolistes [...] était surtout faite par un ensemble de négations des habitudes antérieures. Se refuser à l'anecdote lyrique et romanesque, se refuser à écrire à ce va-comme-je-te-pousse, sous prétexte d'appropriation à l'ignorance du lecteur, rejeter l'art fermé des Parnassiens, le culte d'Hugo poussé au fétichisme, protester contre la platitude des petits naturalistes, retirer le roman du commérage et du document trop facile, renoncer à de petites analyses pour tenter des synthèses […], tels étaient les points communs.[46]

While not marked by the volume and intensity of inner contradictions that characterised Decadence, Symbolism was nonetheless ambiguous and ill-defined. If Kahn's account is to be believed, Symbolism was the *via negativa* of literary movements, defined only in relation to what it was not. Yet there were far more areas of overlap between Symbolism and its literary predecessors than these poets were willing to admit, and a reliance on the material world was, as Moréas' manifesto makes clear, one such area.

Broadly speaking, therefore, the scope of this thesis extends to a number of poets who were connected – whether intentionally or by association – with the Decadent and Symbolist movements. The poetry covered largely originates in France and was published by French publishers and periodicals. Nonetheless, certain Belgian writers merit consideration on account of their treatment of glass and because of their close ties with French literature. The

---

[45] Gustave Kahn, *Symbolistes et décadents* (Geneva: L. Vanier, 1902), p. 46.
[46] Kahn, *Symbolistes,* pp. 51-52.

Belgian strain of Symbolism shares many of the concerns of French Symbolism – including its fascination with glass – but it relocates these concerns to quieter, more claustrophobic Flemish towns. Many Belgian writers left Belgium to travel extensively – and in the case of both Rodenbach and Maeterlinck, move permanently – to France. For Rodenbach, the move to Paris in 1888 was formative, rendering him *more* rather than less able to write about Belgium:

> On n'aime bien que ce qu'on n'a plus... Pour bien aimer sa petite patrie, [...] le mieux est qu'on s'en éloigne, qu'on s'en exile à jamais, qu'on la perde dans la vaste absorption de Paris, afin qu'elle soit lointaine au point d'en sembler morte.[47]

Rodenbach produced much of his major work, including *Bruges-la-Morte* and *Les Vies encloses*, after he moved: having absorbed the metropolitan restlessness of Paris, he translates this into the calm, enclosed stillness of Bruges or Ghent. Patrick McGuinness sees Rodenbach's Bruges as an 'anti-Paris', existing parallel to but at odds with the French city: 'we may see Rodenbach himself as the bridging figure, interpreting Belgium for the French and France for the Belgians, imagining Bruges from the "exile" of Paris, and viewing Paris through the lens of his "petite patrie".'[48]

There are strong links between French and Belgian Symbolists: Belgians contributed to French reviews and vice versa, and personal friendships developed between, for instance, Mallarmé and Rodenbach, or Maeterlinck and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Despite the fact that they did not write about Paris itself, the influence of the Parisian literary scene on Belgian writers of this period was important, if not because it defined Belgian Symbolism then because Belgian Symbolism defined itself against its Parisian cousin. Paul Gorceix, studying the relationship between them, concludes that Belgian writers 'ne voulaient plus être tenus pour des suiveurs à l'écoute des cénacles parisiens dans lesquels ils avaient quelque peine à se

[47] Quoted by Paul Gorceix in *Réalités flamandes et symbolisme fantastique: Bruges-La-Morte et Le Carillonneur, de Georges Rodenbach* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1992), p. 11.

[48] Patrick McGuinness, 'Belgian Literature and the Symbolism of the Double', *From Art Nouveau to Surrealism: Belgian Modernity in the Making*, ed. Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, and Patrick McGuinness (London: Legenda, 2007), 8-22, p. 9.

reconnaître'.[49] Belgian writers identified with French Symbolism but they could not assimilate it unquestioningly; they adapted the French movement to their own sensibility, feeding off Paris but also resisting it. This tension helped shape the Belgian literary identity.

The remit of this study, therefore, is wide but certain poets feature more frequently by virtue of their prolonged fascination with glass: Mallarmé, Laforgue, Rodenbach, and Maeterlinck are the poets to whom glass most evidently appealed, while the work of Baudelaire and Gautier figures often as precursory to the later glass poetics. Given this range, this thesis is not structured according to writers, chronologies, or movements: to do so would be to emphasise their divisions and differences. As I aim to explore the way glass held such widespread interest and was a point of convergence rather than divergence, the thesis is instead divided according to the different forms and functions of glass itself: beginning with windows as the simplest manifestation of glass, I move to consider lenses, glass architecture, glass décor, and finally coloured glass. Several themes recur throughout these chapters. A preoccupation with the *clair-obscur* is evident and raises questions about legibility and truth: reading is seen as analogous to light moving through glass, illuminating meaning, but the transparency of glass shifts with the interplay between shadow and light. The discrepancy between glass as a straightforward viewing pane onto the world and as a reflective surface is another key theme, highlighting the uncertain boundary between subject and object: the image of the subject, reflected in the pane is overlaid on that of the object, seen through the pane, and thus the imagination is projected onto reality. Glass also illuminates social and cultural concerns, such as consumerism, national identity, industrialisation, and democracy. Moreover, it speaks to aesthetic concerns, such as the fictionalisation of reality, the formation and abandonment of literary movements, the relationship between literature and visual art, and between literature and religion. Glass even relates to questions of poetic form and it is

[49] Paul Gorceix (ed.), *Fin de siècle et symbolisme en Belgique: Œuvres poétiques* (Brussels: Complexe, 1998), p. 73.

interesting that throughout this poetry we encounter an impulse to break glass – poetic form destroying itself, so as to rebuild from the broken pieces. Overall, glass is revealed as an intermediary material, a means to interrogate the relationship between the tangible world and the 'Idée', and a metaphor through which language reflects on itself.

Some work in this area has already been done. Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* examines glass in Victorian England, providing a cultural history that considers the labour conditions under which glass was produced, new glass technologies, and the social, political, philosophical and literary implications of the material. This thesis considers many similar historical factors, but recognises that important distinctions between nineteenth-century English and French literature mean that the aesthetic implications of glass in France at this time were a separate phenomenon.

A number of studies analyse aspects of glass culture in France at this time and provide a methodological framework to which this thesis is indebted. Anne Green's *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* demonstrates a reading of literature through major advances in technology, industry, and architecture during the second empire, including rail travel, photography, and the International Exhibitions.[50] Philippe Hamon's *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle* traces the correlations between nineteenth-century literature and architecture, beginning with the Romantic attraction to the ruin and moving towards a modern sensibility embodied in the glass-walled Exhibition halls. Hamon focuses largely on the novel, although he devotes his final chapter to poetry. Rae Beth Gordon has examined ornament and literature in *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*: Gordon relates decorative concerns such as marginalisation, illusion, harmony and pattern to literary concerns with the frame, the 'trompe l'œil' effect, and the relationship between presence and absence.[51] Hannah Scott's *Broken*

[50] Anne Green, *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011).

[51] Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Glass, Broken World: Glass in French Culture in the Aftermath of 1870 analyses glass in many forms, including Exhibition halls, arcades, and decorative glass, and focuses on the destructive connotations of broken glass in the work of Zola, Maupassant, and Huysmans.[52]

The relationship between nineteenth-century literature and material culture, then, has been broached, and the role of glass has been partially discussed, particularly regarding the novel. However, no study has yet explored the significance of glass, in all its forms, to nineteenth-century poetry, asking what a poetic engagement with the material can teach us about how poetry viewed itself. I argue that this engagement is central to our understanding of the poetry of this era. Glass was not merely an increasingly common feature of modern life that fortunately coincided with Decadence and Symbolism: it was the fundamental analogy by which poetry learned to understand not only its social and material environment, but also itself.

Mallarmé's 'Don du poème' (written in 1865) evokes 'l'enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée' – the poet's child – which has been delivered through a window ('Par le verre brûlé d'aromates et d'or,/ Par les carreaux glacés, hélas! mornes encor').[53] The poet's creation, his text, enters the world through the medium of glass. This image has wider implications for the decades that followed this poem, for it is not merely a single poem that is realised through glass but an entire poetic culture, revealed to be vitreous, prismatic and self-reflexive. This is the culture of a particular era: the fascination with glass was peculiar to the *fin de siècle*. By the time Prufrock stumbles to his window a decade into the twentieth century, the fascination has waned and the poetics shaped by glass are beginning, like the world outside the window, to fall apart.

[52] Hannah Scott, *Broken Glass, Broken World: Glass in French Culture in the Aftermath of 1870* (Oxford: Legenda, 2016).

[53] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 17.

Chapter One: Windows onto the Nineteenth Century

> Glass [...] is eminently, in its nature, transparent. If you don't want transparency, let the glass alone. Do not try to make a window look like an opaque picture [...].
>
> (Ruskin, 'The Work of Iron in Nature, Art, and Policy', 1858)[1]

> Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée.
>
> (Baudelaire, 'Les Fenêtres', 1863)[2]

In 1864, Zola theorises that the work of art is a 'fenêtre ouverte sur la création',[3] identifying three screens which inform our perception of the world:

> L'Écran classique est […] un verre grandissant qui développe les lignes et arrête les couleurs au passage. L'Écran romantique est une glace sans tain, […] colorée des sept nuances de l'arc-en-ciel. […]
>
> La création que nous donne cet Écran est une création tumultueuse et agissante. […]
>
> L' Écran réaliste est un simple verre à vitre, très mince, très clair, et qui a la prétention d'être si parfaitement transparent que les images le traversent et se reproduisent ensuite dans toute leur réalité. […] L'Écran réaliste nie sa propre existence. […] Si clair, si mince, si verre à vitre qu'il soit, il n'en a pas moins une couleur propre, une épaisseur quelconque; il teint les objets, il les réfracte tout comme un autre. D'ailleurs, je lui accorde volontiers que les images qu'il donne sont les plus réelles; il arrive à un haut degré de reproduction exacte. […] Somme toute, l'Écran réaliste, le dernier qui se soit produit dans l'art contemporain, est une vitre unie, très transparente sans être très limpide, donnant des images aussi fidèles qu'un Écran peut en donner.[4]

Zola's theory posits the window as illustrative of artistic creation, in which Romantic coloured glass enhances the portrayal of the object whereas Realist clear glass strives to produce an exact copy, while nonetheless revealing the impossibility of perfect mimetic representation.

Zola is not alone in figuring the window as analogous to art, for, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, writers returned time and again to this metaphor. The clear-glass window would appear to be glass at its most transparent, neither distorted nor distorting.

---

[1] John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), xvi, p. 386.

[2] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 339.

[3] Zola, *OC,* i, p. 393.

[4] Zola, *OC,* i, pp. 396-398.

But the transparent window is a double bind: while it grants the subject visual access, physical access is denied, and it is as much a barrier as an aperture. Furthermore, transparency is vulnerable to exploitation: what may appear real through the glass may be fiction hiding in plain sight. The poets we are concerned with tackle transparency in diverse ways: some project a subjective opacity onto the transparent surface; others probe the discrepancies between material and linguistic transparencies. The trait they share, however, is the recognition that transparency is not straightforward, and the willingness to manipulate it. This chapter will discuss the role of windows in Symbolist and Decadent poetry, querying the relationship between language and aperture, and how language functions *as* aperture. I will explore the dichotomy between an interpretation of windows as unmitigated openings onto reality, and one which sees them as screens on which the imagination is overlaid. I will also discuss the window's liminality, examining why its status as a threshold object was important to the Symbolists who, themselves, were often positioned on the boundaries between things.

As Zola's analogy suggests, windows frequently feature in nineteenth-century novels of Realist and Naturalist strain; in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, for example, Emma often sits at her window, dreaming or watching the exterior world from the comfort of her home; or in Zola's *Au bonheur des dames*, the dazzling windows of the department store fixate Denise, representing a luxury she has never encountered. Windows appeal to these novelists because they *appear* to be openings onto the world and, as such, function similarly to the novel itself, as a means to portray reality, ostensibly as seen through glass. In texts which aim to depict the details of contemporary living, how better to figure this than through a transparent window?

This is without doubt a simplification, and it would be wrong to claim that these novelists envisaged the window as denoting a purely unmodified vista. But they count on precisely this simplification: our assumption that the view through the window is true allows them to manipulate it. Thus Flaubert can position Emma behind a window and suggest the discrepancy between her imaginative understanding of the world as seen through glass and

the reality beyond. Or Zola can undercut the shop window's dazzle with the grim reality of the working conditions that lie unseen. The window's 'realistic' connotation is why it appeals to these writers: because they can adhere to this, subvert it, or enhance it.

But what of Symbolist windows? Late-nineteenth-century poetry makes no claims to Realism; it is interested in the imagination, the individual, thought and sensation. In this respect, it inherits the Romantic tradition, and in particular, the wide-eyed exuberance of Victor Hugo, who puts his own energetic slant on that tradition. This is the Hugo who evokes the 'brouhaha' he hears through his 'Fenêtres ouvertes'; who, in his 'A la fenêtre, pendant la nuit,' states that 'L'homme n'est qu'un témoin'; and who elsewhere says: 'Poète, ta fenêtre était ouverte au vent.'[5] For Hugo, the window is married to an embracing gesture; he opens it wide so as better to breathe the air. The crucial difference between Hugo and the Symbolists is that the Symbolists' windows remain firmly closed, the glass pane as important as that which it reveals or obstructs.

*

If the Realist window ironically interrogates the relationship between fiction and reality, this is also true of the window in contemporary poetry. The image of the poet behind his window recurs often during this period, and two early iterations of it are found in Gautier's work: first, in the preface to *Albertus* (1832), where he states that 'L'auteur du présent livre [...] n'a vu du monde que ce que l'on voit par la fenêtre, et il n'a pas eu envie d'en voir davantage';[6] and second, in the preface to *Émaux et Camées* (1852), when he declares that 'Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan/ Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées,/ Moi, j'ai fait *Émaux et Camées*.'[7] Gautier establishes the window as a protective and idealising pane, behind which the poet cloisters

[5] Victor Hugo, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Seebacher and others, 15 vols (Paris: Laffont, 1985): 'Fenêtres ouvertes', iii, pp. 726-727; 'A la fenêtre, pendant la nuit', ii, pp. 496-498; 'Pendant que la fenêtre était ouverte', i, pp. 848-849.

[6] Théophile Gautier, *Albertus: Légende théologique*, (Paris: Le Phénix, 1930), p. 7.

[7] Théophile Gautier, *Émaux et Camées*, ed. Jean Pommier and Georges Matoré (Lille: Librairie Giard; Genève: Droz, 1947), p. 3. Discussing poetic engagement with politics, McGuinness compares this poem to Hugo's 'Réponse à un acte d'accusation', *Radical Politics*, pp. 8-25.

himself, wilfully oblivious to social and political realities (in this case, the 1848 insurrection), and only selecting the aspects of the world outside that nurture his art.

This is an image that Baudelaire picks up in his ‘Paysage’, the opening poem of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Claiming that he wants to ‘composer chastement [s]es églogues’ from the safety of his *mansarde*, the poet surveys the city and the ‘grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité.’ From this vantage point, he witnesses ‘l'étoile dans l'azur,’ the ‘pâle enchantement’ of the moon, and the changing seasons. He continues:

> Et quand viendra l’hiver aux neiges monotones,
> Je fermerai partout portières et volets
> Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais.
> Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,
> Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
> Des baisers, des oiseaux chantant soir et matin,
> Et tout ce que l’Idylle a de plus enfantin.
> L’Emeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
> Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre;
> Car je serai plongé dans cette volupté
> D’évoquer le Printemps avec ma volonté
> De tirer un soleil de mon cœur, et de faire
> De mes pensers brûlants une tiède atmosphère.[8]

Ross Chambers reads this poem as an ironic reply to Gautier’s *Émaux et Camées* preface: while Gautier’s poem manifests an escapist desire, Baudelaire’s is a more socially committed aesthetics.[9] Indeed, although ‘Paysage’ appears to conform to Gautier’s paradigm of the idealising and protective window, Baudelaire parodies the Romantic tradition. The tone of the poem is *too* ideal, the hallmarks of Romanticism are exaggerated: the verb ‘rêver’ appears three times, ‘chanter’ twice; the vocabulary suggests a fairy-tale atmosphere (‘enchantement’, ‘féeriques’, ‘Idylle’); the imagery of gardens and songbirds stands in stark contrast to the ‘Emeute’ outside the window; and even the poem’s title, along with the allusion to the

[8] All quotations from ‘Paysage’ are from Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 82.

[9] See Ross Chambers, *Mélancolie et opposition: les débuts du modernisme en France* (Paris: José Corti, 1987), pp. 131-132. Chambers later returns to the two poems to argue that ‘Paysage’ and ‘Le Soleil’ illustrate the poet’s descent away from the idealising windowpane and onto the street. *An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 34-43.

'églogues', strikes us as oddly pastoral given that this is supposedly a 'tableau parisien'. In fact, Baudelaire rejects Gautier's windowpane, and subtly calls for the poet to engage with the storm outside. As Christopher Prendergast frames it, 'Paysage' is an allegory of naivety,[10] and the poem ultimately 'show[s] the price that has to be paid in order to sustain this sort of imagery':[11] in other words, it illustrates the flaws in Gautier's abnegation of reality.

Baudelaire returns to the closed window in his prose poem 'Les Fenêtres' (1863). In this poem, the speaker looks through a closed window at an old woman and invents her 'légende':

> Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu'une fenêtre éclairée d'une chandelle. Ce qu'on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre. Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie.
>
> Par-delà des vagues de toits, j'aperçois une femme mûre, ridée déjà, pauvre, toujours penchée sur quelque chose, et qui ne sort jamais. Avec son visage, avec son vêtement, avec son geste, avec presque rien, j'ai refait l'histoire de cette femme, ou plutôt sa légende, et quelquefois je me la raconte à moi-même en pleurant.
>
> Si c'eût été un pauvre vieux homme, j'aurais refait la sienne tout aussi aisément.
>
> Et je me couche, fier d'avoir vécu et souffert dans d'autres que moi-même.
>
> Peut-être me direz-vous: 'Es-tu sûr que cette légende soit la vraie?' Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?[12]

Again, the poet is separated from the object he views by a pane of glass but, in this instance, rather than turning away from reality to indulge in fantasy, he enhances reality *with* fantasy, inventing a fiction (the woman's story) that he projects onto her image. In a sense, this window expands upon the *flânerie* fostered in the arcades, as discussed in the Introduction. Although this poem does not deal with the endless boutique windows of the passageways, or the relentless crowd located there, the same principal concern – the visibility of the unknown individual – applies, but the focus has shifted towards the personal windows of people's homes. We might speculate that the *flânerie* Baudelaire explores in the prose poems

[10] Prendergast discusses the irony of 'Paysage' in *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 60-66.

[11] Prendergast, *Paris*, p. 61.

[12] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 339.

originated in his experience of the arcades but found its way outwards onto the city streets. Indeed, the prose form, with its mix of complex and simple sentences, embedded clauses ('ou plutôt sa légende'), parallel phrases (the repetition of 'plus', or the tripling of 'vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie'), reflects the freedom of the meandering spectator: 'Les Fenêtres' allows the gaze to wander.

Sima Godfrey reads this poem as a painting, with the spectator's role being to aestheticize and frame the scene before him:

> Baudelaire here affirms [...] a subjective investment in the framed film of glass that separates "voyeur" from "vu", and calls into question any kind of simple equation between object and representation.
>
> The experience of Paris that the *flâneur* encounters as he stares into anonymous windows is given then as an analogue to the self-conscious artist-critic's encounter with visual scenes – prospective paintings that are framed behind glass before the fact.[13]

Baudelaire's window is a painting, suggesting a prioritisation of the imagination over the real scene. We might note the shift in voice from an impersonal third-person speaker to a self-interested first person: as the poem develops, the tone becomes more introspective, despite the fact that the speaker is looking outwards, until the view before him is an extension of his own existence. He conforms to the *flâneur's* habit of individualising members of the crowd. However, this individualisation is limited: as he says, there is nothing special about the old woman and he might easily have done the same with an old man. He does not discriminate between the people he sees (they could, perhaps, multiply like the figures of 'Les Sept Vieillards'). The *voyeur* makes the *vu* individual, but in a contrived way; really, he is only further individualising himself. Baudelaire plays with the window's status as a barrier between inside and outside, using the external to reflect, supplement, and define the internal while, in turn, the internal determines the representation of what is outside.[14]

---

[13] Sima Godfrey, 'Baudelaire's Windows', *L'Esprit créateur*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1982): 83-100, p. 90.
[14] Prendergast analyses the nebulous border between self and other in 'Les Fenêtres'. See *Paris*, pp. 31-45.

At the same time it is important to note the relationship between the glass and the frame. The act of writing is, itself, an act of framing in this poem, the means by which the writer focuses his vision as well as that of his reader. In a letter to Armand Fraisse, Baudelaire underlines the importance of the window frame: 'Parce que la forme est contraignante, l'idée jaillit plus intense. […] Avez-vous observé qu'un morceau de ciel, aperçu par un soupirail […] donnait une idée plus profonde de l'infini qu'un grand panorama vu du haut d'une montagne?'[15] Although Baudelaire was referring to the strict prosodic form of the sonnet in this analogy, and we might object that prose poetry is far less constrained, the action of framing something is applicable to this prose poem because it resonates with the process at the heart of *flânerie*: by homing in on individuals, framing his vision, the spectator inevitably explores aspects of his own personality, blurring the self/other boundary – at once focussing and *focalising*.

As for the glass itself, being transparent, this surface should allow for legibility – both for the spectator to read the scene through the glass pane, and for the reader to interpret the scene of the poem. However, in this poem, transparency is far from simple. Baudelaire's narrator allows his imagination to override reality, the glass becoming a stimulus to fiction, the poet rejecting the real and delving into the recesses of his own fantasy.

But the glass pane has further implications for the understanding of reality and fiction in this text. As a site where reading takes place, the glass pane parallels the poem itself, begging the question: is the prose poem, like the window it depicts, 'ténébreux'? The answer, of course, is yes because, like the window, it fails to tell the truth. Something of the irony we noted in 'Paysage' is apparent in 'Les Fenêtres' too, for there is a feigned nonchalance behind Baudelaire's question, 'Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité [...]?', which suggests that reality may be more important than the narrator claims. As the prompt for the poet's

[15] Baudelaire, letter to Armand Fraisse (18 February 1860), *Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), i, p. 676.

imaginative fantasy, reality is, in fact, of paramount importance and this poet, like the one in the verse poem, must not disregard it. This is why Baudelaire's window must be closed, for the presence of the glass not only allows the spectator to prioritise the product of his own imagination, but also alerts us to the irony of Baudelaire's position. The old woman's window, lit by a candle, appears to present a scene which is almost theatrical, thus encouraging a fictionalisation of reality. However, in emphasising that the glass is 'ténébreux', Baudelaire signals that, within the poem itself, everything is not as it seems. In turn, the poem becomes, like the window again, 'éblouissant', revealing something dazzling – its own ambiguity: the act of privileging fiction above reality is, itself, a fiction.

Unlike Hugo, Gautier and Baudelaire both insist that windows be closed.[16] However, while for Gautier the closed window is a protective screen, allowing him to reject reality in favour of art, for Baudelaire the significance of the closed window is that, by drawing attention to the glass, he exposes the ambiguity of the closed-window trope. The image of the poet behind glass, he says, cannot be trusted: it is, itself, the very fiction it claims to facilitate.

In the 1872 edition of *Émaux et Camées*, Gautier inserted a later poem, 'La Mansarde', which is reminiscent of Baudelaire's 'Paysage'. In this text, the poet sees a distant attic window and imagines the picturesque scenes which might take place within: there is Rigolette laughing into her mirror; Margot watering her plants; Suzon chatting with love; there is also a poet looking out across the city. These scenes are all imagined, and it is onto the window that Gautier projects his vision:

> Pour la [la mansarde] parer d'un faux bien-être,
> Si je mentais comme un auteur,
> Je pourrais faire à sa fenêtre
> Un cadre de pois de senteur.[17]

---

[16] For Gautier, this window is his own whereas in Baudelaire's poem it is the old woman's window that is closed. In the first instance, Gautier chooses to position himself behind a protective glass pane, while for the Baudelairean *flâneur*, someone else's window is both an obstacle to his gaze and the instrument of his fictionalisation.

[17] Gautier, *Émaux et Camées* pp. 114- 116.

This appears to be the Gautier we know: gazing through a window, he contemplates a fantasy scene, as is his right as an author. However, he continues:

> Par malheur, ma mansarde est vraie;
> Il n’y grimpe aucun liseron,
> Et la vitre y fait voir sa taie,
> Sous l’ais verdi d’un vieux chevron.
>
> [...]
>
> Et l’on ne voit contre la vitre
> Qu’une vieille au maigre profil,
> Devant Minet, qu’elle chapitre,
> Tirant sans cesse un bout de fil.

The window facilitates the projection of Gautier’s imagination. However, this is less than straightforward as the glass ‘fait voir sa taie’, its blemishes and blind spots becoming apparent. This move resembles Baudelaire’s ‘Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité [...]?’ It is a twist in the poem that reveals the poet’s deception. As with Baudelaire, Gautier, having speculated as to what might be behind the glass or reflected in it, points directly towards the glass itself. His acknowledgement of his own trickery is a self-conscious rupture of the illusion (the point at which the speaker becomes aware of the glass pane), which draws attention to the poem’s mechanism. In doing so, he questions the fiction he has just created, thus moving towards a poetry that is self-reflecting and interrogative of its own workings.

In these window poems, transparency and legibility are questioned by the fiction that is prioritised over reality, casting an opaque sheen across the glass surface. But this opacity is seen to be unreliable also: the text is no more transparent, or legible, than the glass it describes. Kate Rees, writing on Charles Fenestrier, links the clarity of glass in the nineteenth-century text to journalism.[18] While journalism is not the focus of our discussion here, it is worth remembering that the ever-growing number of periodicals speaks to a

---

[18] Kate Rees, ‘Scenes of Debris in Charles Fenestrier’s *La Vie Des Frelons*: The Conflict and Convergence of the Newspaper and the Novel at the Fin de Siècle’, *Dix-Neuf* 17, no. 3 (November 1, 2013), 251–264.

burgeoning culture of observation and information-gathering; knowledge was becoming more easily accessible; it was also becoming a commodity. For the press, it was important to maintain, at least, a convincing illusion of transparency, honesty and clarity. But we might consider that, for poetry, and literature in general, this new form of writing was competition. Literature could decide either to compete in the quest for transparency, in the Naturalist vein, or, as we have seen here, to manipulate it.

*

Paris change!
(Baudelaire, 'Le Cygne', 1859)[19]

Torrent sans fin des boulevards,
Femmes fraîches lorgnant au soleil les vitrines
Et passants quêtant leurs regards.
(Laforgue, 'Guitare ', c. 1880)[20]

When Baron Haussmann became prefect of the Seine region in 1853 he renovated Paris, widening the streets to create large boulevards and sweeping perspectives. This was partly in order to preclude the erection of street barricades (as had happened in the 1830 revolt) and provide direct military access from the barracks to the poorest neighbourhoods,[21] and partly to relieve congestion, which had led to poor air circulation and hygiene. In this respect, the arcades were a particular target for eradication: while they provided shelter for pedestrians from the weather, they also created a hothouse environment in which the air became stale and the light murky.[22] Consequently, Haussmann demolished many arcades to make way for his boulevards. His remodelling met with mixed reactions, some believing he had ruined the character of Paris, others welcoming his modernising vision, but even his critics acquiesced

[19] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 86.
[20] Jules Laforgue, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Debauve, 3 vols (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1986-2000), i, p. 412.
[21] Benjamin discusses Haussmannization, *Arcades Project*, pp. 120-149.
[22] Benjamin quotes Jules Claretie, who remarked: 'The arcades have one great defect for modern Parisians [...] they're in need of air', *Arcades Project*, p. 121.

that his plan was, literally, a breath of fresh air. Thus Jules Simon, who staunchly opposed the Second Empire, conceded: '[Haussmann] nous donnait, […] par ses intelligentes percées, l'air, la santé et la vie'.[23]

One result of this project was that the *flâneur's* natural habitat disappeared: the crowds with which he mingled moved to the street, and his modes of interaction had to adapt to a new, less enclosed but no less commercial, environment. Edmond Beaurepaire noted in 1900: 'nos rues plus larges […] ont rendu aisée la douce flânerie impossible à nos pères, ailleurs que dans les passages'.[24] The demise of the arcades, then, was not the demise of *flânerie* and, although writers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century paid attention to the changes occurring in the city, the *flâneur's* literary prominence did not diminish. *Flânerie* simply moved outside an arcade context.

But what did this mean for glass? It too was removed from its original context and applied to a new milieu. Although the arcades vanished, Paris remained vitreous; in fact, glass surfaces multiplied. As we have noted, there was an increased demand for glass in construction: in this age the window, already so important to Gautier and Baudelaire, came into its own.

This is evident across the poetic spectrum. The window was inspiration for countless poets, and certainly caught the eye of Marie Krysinska, whose 'Les Fenêtres' (1883) is a long, meandering *vers libre* poem, which describes a proliferation of Parisian windows and their appearance throughout the day. Krysinska's poem is interesting for several reasons: first, she personifies windows extensively; second, she depicts the effect of changing light on the perceived depth of the window's surface; and third, she breaks the prosodic mould:

Mais il s'éveille bientôt le Paris noctambule;
Il ouvre ses millions d'yeux aux ardentes prunelles;
Et dans la prestigieuse atmosphère du soir, les fenêtres revivent

[23] Jules Simon, quoted in Georges Eugène Haussmann, *Mémoires du Baron Haussmann*, 3 vols (Paris: Victor Havard, 1890), ii, p. xi.
[24] Edmond Beaurepaire, *La Chronique des rues* (Paris: Sevin & Rey, 1900), p. 67.

Le long des boulevards et le long des rues.

La lampe suspend son globe familier: doux soleil qui fait fleurir les heures intimes;
Les bougies des lustres reflètent, dans les glaces, leurs grappes joyeuses,
Et sur la vitre qui est d'opale, on voit glisser des ombres fugitives, aux rythmes de musiques plus vagues que des souffles;
Auprès, les fenêtres des maisons en construction s'ouvrent comme des bâillements de perpétuel ennui;
Sous les combles, la pauvre chandelle grelotte, – cependant que le gaz braille aux entresols des restaurants.[25]

Krysinska invests windows with human qualities: they are coupled with dynamic verbs (revivre); they are not opened by human agency but open *themselves* (that reflexive verb, 's'ouvrir'); they experience emotions, here 'ennui', elsewhere in the poem sadness or radiance; and they are compared to eyes. The degree of personification suggests that the windows are key to the physiognomy of the city: as organs of sight, capable of moving and feeling, they are associated with the preoccupation with vision that characterises the era. Glass, now removed from the arcades and prevalent in the streets, continues to be associated with the nascent voyeur, a descendant of the *flâneur*. Moreover, Krysinska notes that candles render the glass 'opale', and shadows appear on the glass, undefined and fleeting. The variations in light that alter the glass surface render vision fragile: the visible becomes distorted and shifting and, as with Baudelaire's poem, we cannot trust the object as seen through glass.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of the poem is its form. There has been much debate over the history of *vers libre*: while Gustave Kahn claimed that it originated with his *Palais nomades*, it has been suggested that Krysinska, in fact, pioneered this form a few years previously.[26] Regardless of which is true, the important thing to note is that, in 1883, this was an unusual and avant-garde choice. As a form, *vers libre* was still being established, testing

[25] Marie Krysinska, 'Les Fenêtres', in *Rythmes pittoresques*, ed. Seth Whidden (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003), p. 36.

[26] Clive Scott traces the origins of *vers libre* in *Vers libre: The Emergence of Free Verse in France 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). See pp. 67-70 for Krysinska's role in this. Seth Whidden analyses the fierce debate between Kahn and Krysinska on this subject in his Introduction to *Rythmes pittoresques,* see. pp. 11-19.

and defining itself. Indeed, this poem was subtitled ‘poème en prose’ when it initially appeared in *Le Chat Noir*. Although it falls into the category of what we now consider *vers libre* (while prose poetry might be more akin to Baudelaire’s ‘Les Fenêtres’), in its original conception Krysinska was still experimenting with the blurred lines between verse and prose.

It is an experiment that is appropriate to this poem, for the looser structure of *vers libre* suits the *flâneur’s* new, more open, environment, letting the eye roam. The punctuation confirms this, delaying full stops to leave lines suspended, the poem remaining fluid and forward-pushing.[27] Moreover, the line ‘le long des boulevards et le long des rues’ is a refrain throughout the poem, uniting the different sections but also emphasising the poem’s length and the distance between one instance of the refrain and the next. Although there is no human *flâneur* figure, the text itself enacts the *flâneur’s* movements, wandering down streets and peering into windows, reading emotion into the material environment. The prose form creates the impression of the *flânerie* of the absent *flâneur*. The fact that the boundary between prose and verse was being tested suggests an awareness that poetry was inclining towards expansiveness, a freedom to travel literally, intellectually, and prosodically. The window plays into this question; its association with observation is linked to formal concerns in the poetic consciousness.

Krysinska demonstrates the abundance of windows in nineteenth-century Paris. Among the most impressive and public windows were those of department stores, a descendant of the arcades, which appeared in the mid-century as an indirect result of Haussmannisation. The wider streets allowed for these vast corner buildings, with their large window displays that were not possible in the narrow streets that had formerly characterised the city.[28] Department stores were conglomerations of commercial services which seduced the crowd and nourished

[27] Yann Opsitch says of the poem: ‘le point virgule, la virgule et le tiret dominent dans la ponctuation. On sent continuellement que tout est en mouvement,’ ‘Étude comparative et intertextuelle sur le thème des “fenêtres” dans quatre poèmes de Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Marie Krysinska et Guillaume Apollinaire’, Master’s thesis, University of North Texas, 2011, p. 45.

[28] See Alison M. K. Walls, *The Sentiment of Spending: Intimate Relationships and the Consumerist Environment in the Works of Zola, Rachilde, Maupassant, and Huysmans* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 7.

a taste for display, both of the coveted object and of the exhibitionist spectator. They gained prominence as the arcades disappeared, and several were even featured in contemporary guidebooks. The late nineteenth century saw a flourishing of such stores: La Samaritaine (1869); Printemps (1874); Galeries Lafayette (1896); and, most famously, Au Bon Marché (1852), upon which Zola based *Au bonheur des dames*.

Glass was central to the architecture of the department store. Display windows enticed the consumer into a glittering paradise of fantasy and illusion. Furthermore, where shop windows had once been brittle 'verre à vitre', they were now made from thicker, polished 'glace'; shopkeepers deliberately exploited the seductive dazzle of glass in their window displays. Alison Walls states: 'This new importance of window displays exemplifies the fact that *les grands magasins* were not simply an enlargement and centralization of the existing market, but a phenomenon that changed the psychology of shopping'.[29] Glass contributes to a new mentality during the late nineteenth century, one which prioritised display and seduction, the first awareness of what is a commonplace attitude to commercialism today – the notion that sex sells.

Windows are linked to the manipulation of desire. Benjamin identifies during this period what he calls 'commodity fetishism', the sexualisation of the inorganic object on display. But this idea was not limited to material objects; at this time, commercial and romantic desires overlapped. Women, and occasionally men, were aligned with the objects displayed in windows and subjected to the same assumption by the spectator – that they were consumable, obtainable; this is objectification in the truest sense. The fact that women in the stores were often glimpsed through glass, whether through windows or in the many mirrors adorning the buildings, emphasised this. Déterville, a contemporary commentator, said of the shop girls: 'vous les voyez à travers les vitres [...] Vous les regardez librement [...]'.[30] Women were

[29] Walls, *Sentiment of Spending*, p. 8.
[30] Déterville, *Le Palais-Royal ou les filles en bonne fortune* (Paris: Chez l'Écrivain, 1815), p. 68.

placed behind glass for the special purpose of being observed. Consequently, they were rendered inorganic and frozen, becoming living mannequins. The department stores encouraged the belief that women were material objects who could be bought. Furthermore, in putting women on display, the department store window echoes the brothel window, in which prostitutes were exhibited, priced, and sold. Not for nothing does Larousse gloss the phrase 'faire la fenêtre' as 'une femme qui, de sa fenêtre, attire les hommes'.[31] The department store was a rare public space into which women could venture alone. Typically, unchaperoned women in public were unrespectable figures – actresses and prostitutes; in the store, the lines between respectability and scandal blurred.[32] Concern about increasing prostitution was concurrent with the rise of these stores where morals were distorted.

Department store windows coaxed fantasy and desire through display, encouraging the spectator to believe that everything was obtainable. However, the barrier that glass constitutes between consumer and product means that, while desire is encouraged, it is rarely satisfied. Walls sums up the situation neatly:

> shops became more concerned with the intensification and provocation of desire than with its satisfaction [...]. With the pull of consumerism now occupying the emotional realm of fantasy and desire, consumerist attitudes are manifestly merged with relational ones – human sentiment thus subconsciously mirroring consumerism [...].[33]

Paradoxically, glass becomes the marker of what can be possessed and also the very thing that prevents possession, allowing only the gaze to infiltrate. The consumer exerts scopic power over an array of available products. He can, and is encouraged to, look eternally; nonetheless, this power is compromised by the glass barrier which, if anything, renders the unsatisfied desire more intense. Thus, Armstrong notes: 'Provoked by the prohibitive aura of glass, the

---

[31] Under 'Fenêtre', *Grand Larousse encyclopédique*, 10 vols (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1960) iv, p. 953.
[32] For further discussion see Walls, *Sentiment of Spending*, p. 73.
[33] Walls, *Sentiment of Spending*, p. 127.

consumer encounters a deliberate barrier generating wants, and manipulating unfulfilled desire for possession. It is the thwarted gaze that seduces.'[34]

So let us return to our *flâneur*, who has left the arcades for his new home in the department store. The *flâneur* is, by Baudelaire's definition, an observer who moves through the crowd incognito. He wants to see – for him, seeing is possessing – without being seen. The increasing use of glass as display-cum-barrier helped the *flâneur* develop into a *voyeur*, sexualising his gaze. When considered in a literary context, this is interesting: given the *flâneur's* prominence in nineteenth-century poetry, the move from a disconnected observer to a desirous spectator is a telling one, and speaks to the Symbolist fascination with veiled desire and seeing without touching. But how does the nascent *voyeur* manifest in Symbolist writing? Symbolism does not engage with the department store directly, but it distils the themes I have discussed into its own peculiar elegance. Women under glass feature, mannequin-like figures who seem attainable yet are rarely attained, but they are removed from the store's hustle and placed in quieter environments, every domestic window becoming a private *étalage*.

This is most apparent in Rodenbach's work, where similar themes to those explored by Baudelaire and Krysinska are applied to his native Flanders, and particularly to Bruges. Bruges and Paris were vastly different environments but both were, in distinct ways, cities of glass. Bruges may not have glittered as Paris did, but it was nonetheless a city in which, in Rodenbach's imagination at least, windows proliferated, women were placed under glass, and scopic seduction was rife. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Bruges-la-Morte*, which tells the story of a widower, Hugues, who moves to Bruges to mourn and whose house is a shrine to his dead wife. In the street one day he spots a woman, Jane, whom he believes to be the double of his wife, and spies on her, pursuing her and eventually becoming her lover, until Jane breaks his illusion and Hugues strangles her with a lock of his wife's hair.

---

[34] Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 22.

Glass is ubiquitous in this novel, from the 'vitres comme des yeux d'agonie',[35] which line the streets, to the mirrors ('espions') with which the Bruggian citizens spy on one another, and the glass box in which Hugues preserves his wife's hair. Unlike the dazzling glass of Parisian window displays, this glass is aligned with the stagnant canal waters that trap and still. The display culture is subtler, more menacing, less exhibitionist. Reflective or transparent surfaces are integral to the architecture of Bruges, and the city itself shapes the novel. Rodenbach comments in the *Avertissement*:

> nous avons voulu aussi et principalement évoquer une Ville, la Ville comme un personnage essentiel, associé aux états d'âme, qui conseille, dissuade, détermine à agir.
>
> [...]: la Ville orientant une action; ses paysages urbains, non plus seulement comme des toiles de fond, comme des thèmes descriptifs un peu arbitrairement choisis, mais liés à l'événement même du livre.[36]

Rodenbach describes the city meticulously, his topographical details so precise that, in other contemporary texts, they would seem Naturalist. Here, however, this is a question of Hugues' very soul. Hugues is drawn to the city's 'tristesse', with which he identifies; Bruges is his reflection (both literally and figuratively), and the reflection of his dead wife ('Bruges était sa morte. Et sa morte était Bruges.').[37] There are numerous parallels between Hugues' character and the city, which mirrors his misery with its misty climate and torpid canals. Moreover, the city exerts power over him, increasingly influencing him as his relationship with Jane deteriorates: '[La Ville] recommença à gouverner Hugues et à imposer son obédience'.[38] His actions and emotions are determined by his feelings towards Bruges.[39] Rodenbach states that Hugues feels a 'pénétration réciproque de l'âme et des choses!'[40] The city and Hugues are

[35] Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 70.

[36] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 49-50.

[37] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 69.

[38] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 197.

[39] Philip Mosley discusses this in 'The Soul's Interior Spectacle: Rodenbach and *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Mosley (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 17-40.

[40] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 193.

mutually defining, the landscape at once the cause, result, and representation of Hugues' mental state; this landscape is chiefly one of glass and water.

In *Bruges-la-Morte*, the material world is crucial but it is not left in raw form; it is dematerialised and transposed onto a subject so that reality becomes a slave to Hugues' vision. Rodenbach takes a phenomenological approach, one in which the individual at once shapes reality and is represented by the reality he perceives. As with Baudelaire's 'Les Fenêtres', the world is defined by the beholder.[41] The novel is governed by analogies, between Bruges and Hugues, Bruges and 'la morte', 'la morte' and Jane – analogies that are made because of the ways in which the protagonist and, ultimately, the narrator *see* the world, identifying common traits between things and, in the process, transferring those traits between things.

This is why vision is important in *Bruges-la-Morte*. Characters are forever spying on each other: Barbe, the servant, watches Hugues; Hugues watches Jane; and across the city 'tout le monde se connaît, s'enquiert des nouveaux venus, informe ses voisins et se renseigne auprès d'eux'.[42] The world the characters inhabit shapes who they are and is shaped by what they see. Vision is how they understand their world, how they network, exert power, and create their environment. The novel is less a record of perception, than a record of perception*s* and of the act of perceiving. And the text itself is the tool which facilitates a certain kind of perception. We might see it as a window, or *espion*, offering us a framed glimpse from a particular perspective. But if the novel is a pane of glass, we should beware its illusive capacity for, as we have seen, glass may deceive, distort or enlarge. We are encouraged, for instance, to believe in Jane's similarity to 'la morte' until the point when she proves otherwise and breaks the illusion. However, its illusory trickery only proves the novel's point – that perception applies a lens to reality, but that that lens might not be trustworthy.

---

[41] Paul Gorceix remarks that, in *Bruges-la-Morte*, 'le monde n'existe qu'à travers la représentation que nous en avons, c'est le moi qui donne au réel sa vérité.' *Réalités flamandes*, p. 19.

[42] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 93.

Glass also influences the power dynamics in *Bruges-la-Morte.* As we have noted, the characters are constantly observing and being observed, often through glass, and power shifts accordingly. Barbe spies on her master, subverting the traditional power structure between master and servant; the citizens of Bruges watch Hugues through their windows and theatre *jumelles*, fuelling gossip and social exclusion; Hugues takes a secret, sexual pleasure from stalking Jane through streets lined with 'fenêtres embéguinées de rideaux de mousseline derrière lesquels des femmes [...] l'épièrent'.[43] This is not the authoritarian manipulation of power through glass of Foucault's panopticon:[44] rather it is a subtler, sneakier power play, one which looks around corners and from behind curtains. Nonetheless, as with Foucault's panopticon, in Bruges seeing equals knowledge, and knowledge equals power.

This is true of Hugues and Jane's relationship. Jane is the quintessential woman-under-glass. A version of the store mannequin, she becomes an object, which can be petrified, preserved (as Hugues preserves his wife's hair, under glass), and bought. Jane is a commercial character, always buying clothes and spending money, heedful of the latest fashions, illuminated by lit *vitrines* as she walks. She is also an actress, a public figure who is observed by profession and is often categorised alongside prostitutes – unrespectable women whose affection can be purchased. Therefore, Hugues can control Jane by financing her: she is a *kept* woman in both senses of the word. Jane is Rodenbach's version of the Parisian shop girls of Zola and Rachilde's novels; she is a fetish-commodity, sexualized and treasured by the *voyeur* but inaccessible. Philip Mosley notes that '[t]he morbid eroticism of Rodenbach's novel manifests itself chiefly in images of voyeurism and fetishism'.[45] This is true, and glass enables the marriage between voyeurism and fetishism. Windows, as barrier and access-point, appear often in *Bruges-la-Morte*. Hugues frequently dreams at his window, and Jane's

---

[43] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 86.

[44] See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). For Foucault, Bentham's glass-walled panopticon symbolises an imbalance of power between prisoner and guard, because of the unequal gaze.

[45] Mosley, 'The Soul's Interior Spectacle', p. 33.

opening a window precipitates her murder (Hugues, ashamed, fears she will be seen). In opening the window, Jane would expose herself to the world, revealing her true colours and breaking Hugues' illusion that she is 'la morte' reborn. She threatens to pierce the smooth surface that had kept her intact as an object. After her death, Hugues returns to his solitary window-gazing: the original manuscript of the text ended with 'Les fenêtres étaient restées ouvertes...'.[46]

Similarly, windows dominate Rodenbach's poetry, constituting the central image in his collections *Le Soir dans les vitres* and *Les Malades aux fenêtres*. Rodenbach's poetry explores similar themes to *Bruges-la-Morte*. Here also, women are inseparable from glass ('Vieilles filles, le front collé contre la vitre!', 'Des visages de femmes ennuyés sont collés/ Aux carreaux, contemplant le vide et le silence')[47] and people watch through glass ('Les vitres sont déjà comme des crêpes morts/ [...] rien à faire au dehors/ Où les passants s'en vont monotones et tristes').[48] But in Rodenbach's poetry the voyeurism is not the fetishist, stealthy observation of Hugues, nor the prying curiosity of the Bruggian citizens. Here, watching becomes an act for the solitary poet: as he stares into his window, his gaze pierces the glass but is also rebuffed by it, forcing him to examine himself. Whereas windows in *Bruges-la-Morte* are largely transparent, in the poetry they are more opaque, and therefore reflective. This is evidenced by Rodenbach's interest in the way light alters glass. As evening falls, the window surface darkens into obscurity ('Le soir quotidien descend/ Dans les vitres qu'il décompose'),[49] shadows and starlight compete against the glass, which becomes 'glauque' and 'noir'.[50] The opaque glass returns the speaker's image to him, revealing a mixture of his own reflection and the external view. The poetic voice is solipsistic and self-scrutinising as the poet at his window is both watcher and watched, the subject and the object of his gaze. A

[46] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 273.
[47] Georges Rodenbach, *Œuvres de Georges Rodenbach*, 2 vols (Paris: Mercure de France, 1923-5), i, p. 254 and p. 108.
[48] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, i, p. 248.
[49] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 33.
[50] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, pp. 26-27.

version of the outside is born of the poet himself and mingles with his own reflection, the two images superimposed in the glass. That is why the poet looking through windows is absorbed in dreams: 'Grandissant toute chose au symbole, voyant/ Dans chaque rideau pâle une communiante/ [...] Qui communie au bord des vitres...'.[51] As the poet stares through the window he converts the world into a symbol, perceiving the elusive analogies between matter and spirit that evade the ordinary eye.

Rodenbach's choice of form emphasises the difference between the types of voyeurism he demonstrates. *Bruges-la-Morte* is narrative prose, it meanders like the canals it depicts but is always moving forwards. In this passage, Hugues stalks Jane through the streets:

> il alla à la même heure du soir, vers les parages où il l'avait vue [Jane]; il arpenta le vieux quai aux pignons noircis, aux fenêtres embéguinées de rideaux de mousseline derrière lesquels des femmes inoccupées, vite curieuses de son va-et-vient, l'épièrent; il s'enfonça dans les rues mortes, les ruelles tortueuses, espérant la voir déboucher, brusque, à quelque angle d'un carrefour.[52]

The embedded clauses and parallel constructions mirror Hugues' action grammatically. As his path and gaze wander, so too does the sentence structure. This is not dissimilar to Krysinska's poem; the formal freedom suggests that the text itself is a *flâneur*, the reader's gaze following the twists of the fluid syntax. In contrast, Rodenbach's poetry, in which the poet-onlooker is stiller and often gazes from the inside outwards, generally adheres to traditional verse forms. His early work maintains the alexandrine, and throughout his œuvre he employs strict rhyme. Consequently, his poetry is more enclosed and self-reflective than his prose: lines are paired, trapping each other into quasi-crystalline formal rigidity. The rhyme creates a mirror effect within couplets, each line ending casting forwards or backwards to meet its corresponding sound and reminding us of the anagrammatic relationship between 'rimer' and 'mirer'. In the poetry, the image is thrown back onto itself whereas, in the novel, the image gives way to further and further images.

---

[51] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, i, p. 180.
[52] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 85-86.

Rodenbach's interest in the variances of light, transparency, and obscurity point towards another aspect of the relationship between glass and language:

> Quel orgueil d'être seul à sa fenêtre, tard,
> Près de la lampe amie, à travailler sans trève,
> Et sur la page blanche où l'on fixe son rêve
> De planter un beau vers tout vibrant, comme un dard
>
> [...]
>
> L'orgueil qu'ont les amants, les moines, les poètes,
> D'être en communion avec l'obscurité,
> Et d'avoir à leur cœur des vitraux de clarté
> Qui ne s'éteignent pas pendant les nuits muettes.[53]

This poet is at his window at night, composing verse. The darkness outside clouds his window but the poet combats this obscurity with the 'clarté' within. Two glass images are juxtaposed: the darkened window and the light *vitrail*. We are reminded of the *clair-obscur*, a common concern among the Symbolists, whose poetry was criticised on the grounds of 'obscurity', but who, as we have seen, strived for poetic clarity with their elevation of the word as symbol – the pure, unadulterated crystallisation of an idea. We might read this poem as a mini-exposition of Symbolism: Rodenbach's imagery evokes the poet's need for individual clarity despite the obscurity with which he communes. Poetry is in a double bind: it shies away from transparency because opacity – the poet's imagination – is more interesting than the direct view of the world; however, accused of obscurity, it must insist on its own clarity, infusing the glass with a new light that stems from language itself.

*

Il faut agir, il faut s'objectiver!
(Laforgue, 'Hamlet', 1886)[54]

[53] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, i, pp. 133-134.
[54] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 386.

Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées

(Mallarmé, 'Les Fenêtres', 1863)[55]

The window, as both obstacle and visual channel, is a threshold object. As the space that interrupts the wall's solidity, it gives the illusion of a gap leading onto that most symbolist of preoccupations, *l'infini*. However, it is anything but a space, and its presence as an invisible but tangible material, presence masquerading as absence, is what fascinates these poets. The infinite must be visible but inaccessible to the poet, and its edges must be defined by the pane through which it is observed and the frame which is applied to it.

Laforgue's Hamlet faces this dilemma. This version of Shakespeare's anti-hero is a comical, self-explicating aggrandisement of the Rodenbachian figure at the window. Like *Bruges-la-Morte*'s Hugues, he endeavours to see without being seen, even hiding behind a hedge to elude Polonius's funeral procession (whose death occurred when Polonius himself spied on Hamlet). This Hamlet retreats from the world: a self-styled *poète* who cloisters himself in his 'tour paria' (recalling the ivory tower of Romantic cliché), he spends his days watching from his window. The text ('Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale') opens with this image:

> De sa fenêtre préférée, si chevrotante à s'ouvrir avec ses grêles vitres jaunes losangées de mailles de plomb, Hamlet, personnage étrange, pouvait, quand ça le prenait, faire des ronds dans l'eau, dans l'eau, autant dire dans le ciel. Voilà quel fut le point de départ de ses méditations et de ses aberrations.[56]

Hamlet's thoughts begin and end at the window, from which he observes the water below – another image reminiscent of Rodenbach's poetry. The relationship between vision and action underpins the plot of *Hamlet*, which hinges on the shifting dynamics of knowledge and secrecy. Who sees and knows what, and at which point, determines the characters' perception of guilt and blame, in both Shakespeare's and Laforgue's texts, the overriding (dramatic)

[55] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 9.
[56] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 379.

irony being that the audience always knows more than the characters, precisely because they are able to *see* everything. In Laforgue's case, this dramatic irony is compounded by the fact that the reader is already aware of the plot of the source-text, Shakespeare's play, and so, in a way, *fore*sees the action. Hamlet, who spends so much time gazing through his 'vitres jaunes', is the incarnation of the self-reflective poet, meditating and plotting as he confronts the abyss. And by 'plotting' I mean not only that he is scheming against his uncle, but also that he literally plots his own text – the play that will expose his uncle's trickery. Indeed, the play-within-the-play adds a further dimension to the correlation between knowledge and vision: it is the moment when Hamlet's knowledge of his uncle's deeds is revealed, and this knowledge is confirmed by his uncle's reaction upon *watching* the play. The play-within-the-play is Hamlet's own poetic œuvre, conceived against the backdrop of his yellowed windows.

The window is a middle ground; in Armstrong's words, it 'turns inward and outward. Instigating both transitive vision and obstruction, it is a faultline [...] At its intersection, trauma, crisis, and epiphany occur.'[57] Consequently, it is an appropriate location for Hamlet's intro- and extrospection because Hamlet is a threshold character, eternally poised on the point of action, postponing and soliloquising. This is why Mallarmé considers him the perfect symbolist dramatic persona, 'le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir': the ultimate procrastinator who perpetually confronts the 'acte inachevé'.[58] Laforgue's Hamlet demonstrates just this; like Shakespeare's and Mallarmé's, he aspires to action but finds it impossible. Time and again he proclaims 'Il faut agir!', yet he cannot act, and Laforgue snidely tells us: 'Hamlet, homme d'action, perd cinq minutes à rêver devant son drame...'.[59]

Hamlet waits in the between-space of action and inaction, plotting fruitlessly. Temporally he is equally poised, standing at his window 'après le ciel d'hier, et en attendant celui de demain',[60] and spatially he inhabits a 'chambre tiraillée', caught between his 'deux fenêtres

[57] Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 115.
[58] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 167.
[59] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 385.
[60] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 380.

vitrées de jaune, dont l'une montre en gris souillé les ciels, le large et l'existence sans issue, et l'autre est ouverte à la plainte perpétuelle du vent'.[61] All of this speaks to Hamlet's threshold status; he is 'enjambé' in every respect. In this, he resembles Mallarmé's 'pitre châtié', who has 'troué dans le mur de toile une fenêtre' and who, in the 1864 draft of the poem, has 'enjambé la fenêtre'.[62]

Hamlet and the clown equally fascinated Laforgue and Mallarmé. Laforgue wrote numerous poems about Pierrot, the sad mime of Commedia dell'Arte, and he returned frequently to *Hamlet* for inspiration, taking lines from the play as epigraphs in *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté*. Meanwhile, Mallarmé muses on Hamlet in 'Crayonné au théâtre' and in the later version of 'Le Pitre châtié.' While not identical, there is certainly a correlation between Hamlet and the clown, both tragic characters at once performing and fleeing – we might even notice a similarity between the 'Yeux, lacs' in which Mallarmé's clown immerses himself, and Laforgue's Hamlet whose heart is submerged 'dans cette mare de pauvres yeux crevés immortellement pensifs'.[63] A key characteristic these figures share is their liminality and it is therefore unsurprising that Mallarmé and Laforgue relate them to windows (albeit, in Mallarmé's case, a cloth window, rather than glass): the clown astride a window he has forged, Hamlet returning to his window to meditate.

Mallarmé's use of the word 'enjambé' in the early draft is telling as it suggests an awareness of changing poetic conventions. Mallarmé was writing during a period when poetry was increasingly interested in questions of form (from Baudelaire's prose poetry to the *vers libre* debate) and the tension between tradition and innovation. Gautier even attributed the furious reactions to the premiere of Hugo's *Hernani* to 'cet enjambement audacieux' with which the play opens.[64] Enjambement was the mark of the radical modernisers of verse, as opposed to the staunch classicists who respected the alexandrine. Symbolist poets witnessed

[61] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 380.
[62] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 8. See pp. 1150-1151 for the earlier draft.
[63] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 387.
[64] Théophile Gautier, *Victor Hugo* (Paris: Charpentier, 1902), p. 43.

this conflict, and we might consider Symbolism itself an 'enjambed' movement, heir to Romantic tradition but precipitating modernism, an indecisive Hamlet trying to position his art on an aesthetic threshold. Mallarmé was both master of the tightly controlled sonnet, and innovator extraordinaire with *Un coup de Dés* – he was well aware of the debate on form and played both sides. 'Le Pitre châtié' is itself a poem that employs enjambement; thus the window seems the perfect representation of a poetry that is half in and half out.

Indeed, windows generally resonate with liminal genres and forms. As we have seen, Krysinska's poem is an early example of *vers libre*, and *Bruges-la-Morte* may be considered an extended prose poem. Even later, Apollinaire's 'Les Fenêtres' demonstrates his modernist approach to formal experimentation with his simultanist poetics. It is surprising how often the window appears in these formally innovative hybrid texts. Intriguingly, Huysmans' des Esseintes, who rejects traditional verse in favour of Symbolism (in *A rebours*, which, itself, marks its author's move away from his Naturalist roots towards burgeoning Decadence) at one point collapses, 'presque mourant, sur la barre d'appui de la fenêtre'.[65]

But the window is an existential as well as an aesthetic threshold that provokes meditation on the relationship between the infinite and the self. Laforgue's Hamlet says: 'J'ai de l'infini sur la planche.'[66] Infinity occupies his mind and is also the content of his literary work, the play he writes (which will be staged on the theatre's 'planches'). For Hamlet, infinity is what lies beyond the subjective self, it is the 'quelque chose au delà d'ici-bàs'.[67] While the subject can strive towards meeting the infinite, this is impossible because the infinite is unbounded while the subject, on the other hand, is always looking to define its own boundaries. Hamlet says: 'Et au fond, dire que j'existe! Que j'ai ma vie à moi! L'éternité en soi avant ma naissance, l'éternité en soi après ma mort.'[68] As he conceives it, infinity exists before and after his lifetime, but the very fact that he is alive prevents his convergence with it. He

[65] J.K. Huysmans, *A rebours,* ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p. 157.
[66] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 394.
[67] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 389.
[68] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 385.

acknowledges the infinite, saying ‘J’ai cinq sens qui me rattachent à la vie; mais, ce sixième sens, ce sens de l’Infini!’,[69] but despite this sixth sense he cannot deny that he is ‘attached’ to life, in all its finitude, by his five regular senses. These senses subjectivise him, turn him into a thinking and feeling creature, but they also place him in a paradox: as a thinking subject he can conceive of the infinite; however, he can also conceive of his own finitude, which is what prevents his communion with eternity.

The Symbolists yearn to blend the self and the outer world, assimilating reality into their own fictionalising processes, and the ambiguous presence of glass allows them the illusion of doing so; however, the glass also reinforces the barrier between the subject and the world, turning the subject inwards. This is precisely Hamlet’s dilemma. As he stands at his window he recognises the infinite world outside of himself, yet his very sense of himself is an obstacle. The window permits and prevents simultaneously, which is why it perfectly embodies the Symbolist paradox of infinity. Hamlet longs to ‘s’objectiver’, to renounce his subjectivity and to deny himself thought, but he is trapped in a philosophical, physical, and textual hiatus. ‘L’Infini est […] à nos fenêtres!’, says Laforgue elsewhere.[70] The window delineates the infinite, but its very existence separates us from it, its edges delineating the infinite in a way that reflects both the subject’s own perception and the role of the text as a frame.

The relationship between the subject and the window was controversial during this period. It is central to the debate between the architect Auguste Perret, who favoured a traditional vertical window, and his one-time disciple, Le Corbusier, who preferred the modern horizontal window. Perret’s preference is partly practical: one of the principal reasons glass was prized architecturally was that it transmits light. Indeed this, according to the *Grand Dictionnaire universel*, was the very definition of ‘fenêtre’ in the nineteenth century:

[69] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 386.
[70] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, p. 197.

‘Ouverture pratiquée dans le mur extérieur d’un bâtiment pour y laisser pénétrer l’air et le jour.’[71] As Paris became more densely populated and construction had to accommodate more people within a small area (resulting in multiple-storied buildings and lowered ceilings), the importance of windows as a light source grew. Although, from the 1820s, this was the age of gas-lighting, both public and private,[72] for those who could not afford this, and for others who remained suspicious of gas (Maxime Du Camp, chronicler of Parisian daily life, laments that ‘on ne reçoit pas [le gaz] dans le salon. Pourquoi? Il fane les tentures’),[73] windows remained key. The vertical window was the best means of lighting a room naturally.

However, Perret’s preference was also ideological:

> La fenêtre n’encadre-t-elle pas l’homme? N’est-elle pas d’accord avec sa silhouette? Et si nous voulons […] entrer dans le domaine de la psychologie, nous constaterons que la ligne horizontale est triste, c’est la ligne du sommeil et de la mort. La verticale est la station debout, c’est la ligne de la vie.[74]

The vertical window is subjective, aligned with the human form, whereas the horizontal window, according to Armstrong, ‘crossed the subject-object divide, creating “mute dialogues” between the finite and the infinite’.[75] Moreover, the horizontal window is associated with death and sleep, whereas the vertical window is life. For Hamlet, life is finite while death and sleep, the subject of his famed soliloquy, are the eternity that exists only beyond life. The vertical window, in corroborating the subject’s shape, affirms the sense of boundary, of beginning and ending. Regardless of whether we agree with Perret, it is important to note that there was a remarkable consciousness of the relationship between the window, the subject, and infinity during this period. Architecture and poetry shared many

---

[71] Under ‘Fenêtre’, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe Siècle*, 17 vols (Geneva: Slatkine, 1982), viii, p. 288.

[72] Jane Brox discusses the ‘gasification’ of Paris in *Brilliant: The Evolution of Artificial Light* (London: Souvenir Press, 2010), pp. 71-75.

[73] Maxime Du Camp, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle*, 6 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1875), v, p. 309.

[74] Auguste Perret, quoted by David Dekeyser, ‘Béton armé et logement collectif en région parisienne/ cinq exemples: 1930 – 2000’, Master’s thesis, École d'architecture de Paris-Belleville, 2003, p. 8.

[75] Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 118.

concerns at this time, such as the tension between classicism and modernism, the importance of rhythm, and the connection between truth and beauty.[76] It is not unreasonable to assume that late-nineteenth-century writers were also preoccupied with the shifting relationship between the window and the subject.

This relationship is epitomised in Mallarmé's 'Les Fenêtres', which describes a hospital patient reaching for infinity, pressed to his window. Mallarmé's poem was written in 1863, before most of the poetry I have discussed, but it is no less modernist than anything by Rodenbach or Krysinska. It was published in *Le Parnasse contemporain* in 1866, and we might speculate that Mallarmé's vision of windows influenced many younger Symbolists. The themes treated by later poets are present in 'Les Fenêtres': infinity is beyond the glass; the glass is the work of art; the sunlight turns the transparent pane into an opaque mirror:

Las du triste hôpital, et de l'encens fétide
Qui monte en la blancheur banale des rideaux
Vers le grand crucifix ennuyé du mur vide,
Le moribond sournois y redresse un vieux dos,

Se traîne et va, moins pour chauffer sa pourriture 5
Que pour voir du soleil sur les pierres, coller
Les poils blancs et les os de la maigre figure
Aux fenêtres qu'un beau rayon clair veut hâler,

Et la bouche, fiévreuse et d'azur bleu vorace,
Telle, jeune, elle alla respirer son trésor, 10
Une peau virginale et de jadis! encrasse
D'un long baiser amer les tièdes carreaux d'or.

[…]

Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées 25
D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie, et, béni,
Dans leur verre, lavé d'éternelles rosées
Que dore le matin chaste de l'Infini

Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j'aime
– Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité 30
A renaître, portant mon rêve en diadème,
Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté!

---

[76] Le Corbusier claimed that architecture is founded on 'le volume, le rythme et la proportion', while Perret noted that 'Caractère, style, harmonie jalonnent le chemin qui, par la verité conduit à la beauté.' See Dekeyser, 'Béton armé', pp. 6-9.

Mais, hélas! Ici-bas est maître: sa hantise
Vient m'écœurer parfois jusqu'en cet abri sûr,
Et le vomissement impur de la Bêtise 35
Me force à me boucher le nez devant l'azur.

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté
Et de m'enfuir, avec mes deux ailes sans plume
– Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité?[77] 40

This poem is a comment on – and demonstration of – the state of poetry. The sun transforms the patient's window into '[des] carreaux d'or', opaque panels that deny the view and reflect the man's image, allowing him to 'se mirer' within. We have seen this idea in Rodenbach's poetry, but Mallarmé adds an extra layer of reflection with his poetic form. This is the argument made by Roger Pearson when he describes 'Les Fenêtres' as a 'mirror-poem', which is structurally self-reflective: the last five quatrains structurally parallel the first five; the alexandrine and the rhyme reiterate the formal symmetry; the poem itself functions as a sun-kissed pane, each half reflected in the other.[78] Furthermore, the poem has a central pivot (l. 25), at which point the voice switches from a third- to first-person address, from an objective to a subjective perspective. Consequently, it is not just a mirror but also a window in that it incorporates a threshold between the two halves of itself: the first half is written about a figure external to the poet, on the other side of the glass; the second is through the eyes of the 'je', from behind the glass.

In 'Les Fenêtres', glass is not just a barrier which the poetic figure confronts, it is the poetry itself. Glass is salvation, which is why the poet states: 'Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées' – it is his means of resurrection and the patient kisses the glass rather than his crucifix. 'Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité –' (l. 30), says the poet, feigning dismissiveness, and throughout the poem he incorporates religious terminology ('crucifix',

[77] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, pp. 9-10.
[78] Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 45-47.

‘sainte’, ‘ange’), appearing to argue for glass as a metaphor for religion (we will encounter this metaphor again in Chapter Five). However, in the process, he is really demonstrating that the glass is art, for it is the poem itself that saves him. And Mallarmé’s lexis reiterates the metaphorical connection between poetry and glass. Mallarmé often has recourse to the *vers/verre* homophony, but in this poem this is accompanied by *cygnes/signes* so that the patient stares at signs, by the rhyme *cygnes/lignes* (evoking the traditional image of the line-forging poet as swan), and by the word ‘croisées’, which refers to the window frame but also points towards the poem’s *rimes croisées*. ‘Les Fenêtres’ is a window through which we might see signs but which, ultimately, sees only itself.

That word ‘croisées’ is important, for, although it has become synonymous with ‘fenêtre’, it suggests not the whole window but its cross-shaped frame (which parallels the crucifix). Mallarmé breaks the window (less literally than he hopes) into its constituent parts, first the ‘carreaux’, then the ‘croisées’. This is relevant to the fact that he sees eternity, ‘le matin chaste de l’Infini’, as existing beyond the window. We might think of Mallarmé’s notion of the infinite as akin to his concept of absence, or the ‘blanc’ in textual terms. We can align the blank page as pure space, unadulterated by text, with the infinite – vast and full of potential, it would be the poet’s view if he were to look through a boundless piece of glass. However, such a view is impossible, and it is up to both writer and reader to break that blank. For the writer, this is to cast the dice (in an alteration to ‘Les Fenêtres’ Mallarmé changed ‘Ici-bas est roi’ to ‘Ici-bas est *maître*’(l. 33)[my emphasis], ‘maître’ being that prominent word in ‘Un coup de Dés’), breaking the blank with language that at once violates the purity of the page and defines it. For the reader it is also a cast of the dice, the need to ‘appuyer, selon la page, au blanc’, in a motion that mirrors and resists that of the writer.[79] In either case, the page is shaped, or *framed*, the absence only finding validity when it is eclipsed by presence, the margins defined by the text.

---

[79] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 234.

We have seen that Baudelaire stated that the sky 'aperçu par un soupirail [...] donnait une idée plus profonde de l'infini que le grand panorama vu du haut d'une montagne' and this assertion applies to Mallarmé's poetics, in which the (window) frame defines the infinite. The same concern shapes 'Une dentelle s'abolit', another poem about absence and windows in which

> Cet unanime blanc conflit
> D'une guirlande avec la même,
> Enfui contre la vitre blême
> Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit.[80]

Here, Mallarmé presents another metaphor for the interdependency of presence and absence. In the lacework, holes and material combine in a pattern that creates beauty. The lace (another Symbolist trope) resembles the window in that the gap and the frame converge to bestow meaning. This framing is both textual and conceptual, the poem itself constituting the frame that, with the reader's help, shapes the glass and defines the whiteness of the page. With his attention to the symbiosis of glass and frame, Mallarmé highlights the reader's role in constructing the poem.

The closed window, then, brings together many of the concerns that recurred throughout Symbolist and Decadent glass poetry. It is, however, a distinctly nineteenth-century phenomenon. Indeed, when the modernists arrived they threw their windows open. Apollinaire's 'Les Fenêtres' (1913) exclaims: 'Et maintenant voilà que s'ouvre la fenêtre',[81] and Cendrars echoes this with: 'Les fenêtres de ma poésie sont grand' ouvertes sur les boulevards' ('Contrastes', 1919).[82] We have come full circle, reminded perhaps of Hugo's exuberant windows wide open onto life. But such exuberance was uncharacteristic of the Symbolists, who preferred to examine not the life beyond the window, but the window pane itself.

---

[80] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 42.
[81] Apollinaire, 'Les Fenêtres', in *Calligrammes*, ed. Vincent Vivès (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 23.
[82] Blaise Cendrars, 'Contrastes', in *Du monde entier*, ed. Paul Morand (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 74.

Chapter Two: The Poetic Lens

> A l'heure qu'il est, en littérature, [...] le tout est d'inventer une lorgnette avec laquelle vous faites voir les êtres et les choses à travers des verres qui n'ont point encore servi, vous montrez des tableaux sous un angle de jour inconnu jusqu'alors, vous créez une optique nouvelle.
>
> (Edmond and Jules Goncourt, 1874)[1]

For the Goncourt brothers, the lorgnette is an apt metaphor for how they expect literature to develop: figuring the literary work as a lens, they connect writing and reading to modes of vision, in which the text represents an optical device through which the world is perceived as different from how it appears to the naked eye.

Optical devices are a familiar part of our critical vocabulary, both within the literary field and generally – we might describe something as seen 'par le petit bout de la lorgnette' or analysed 'à la loupe', for example. The Goncourts' remark draws on this common trope of analytical language, but also points towards a more specific practice of linking literature to ways of seeing, which was particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century for numerous reasons. It may have been the result of a cultural emphasis on display, as touched upon in Chapter One; it may be due to the conceptual overlap between literature and painting (and later, photography), which was central to many nineteenth-century aesthetic debates; it may be the effect of important scientific advances in optics which had occurred in the previous two centuries.[2] For whatever reason, literature became linked to visual perception; it is natural, then, that instruments which aid or influence visual perception also became aligned with literature. The lorgnette, perhaps the least complicated of such instruments, represents a wider tradition of seeing literary language as a lens, with the ability to magnify, clarify, distort, or project – a tradition which ranges from the simple *jumelles* and *lunettes*, to the more

[1] Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire,* 4 vols (1866-1886), ed. Robert Ricatte (Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956), iii, p. 576.

[2] Important developments included Descartes' explanation of the law of refraction (1637), Newton's observations about the colourous properties of light (1704), Goethe's discovery of the after image (1810), and Schopenhauer's purely physiological theory of colour (1815). See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

specialised telescope and microscope, and allows even for the fantastical nature of the kaleidoscope and magic lantern.

While many of these instruments were not new inventions, they were put to new uses during the nineteenth century and gained prominence in the public consciousness.[3] So much so, that in 1826 *Le Bazar parisien* prefaces its directory of over fifty manufacturers of optical instruments by stating: 'La construction des instruments d'optique est portée aujourd'hui en France à un ordre de perfection'.[4] Improved technologies allowed for greater refinement of lenses, while discoveries in science (the development of germ theory, for example, to which the microscope was key), aesthetics (the invention of photography), and entertainment (innovative optical toys like the kaleidoscope) alike called for new uses of the lens. This combination of transformations in technology and use meant that the public had never been more aware of lenses than in the mid-nineteenth century.

Despite this, references to lenses in nineteenth-century poetry are relatively few. This does not mean to say that the poets with whom we are concerned were unaware of lenses; it simply means that those texts in which lenses do appear are worth attention because they reject more common glass tropes like the window and mirror, and emphasise the specialised capacity of the lens. Consequently, this chapter will analyse what lens-related poetry there is, and speculate as to why some lenses do not merit the attention of Decadent and Symbolist poets. The chapter has a broad remit, encompassing numerous optical instruments, including: the theatrical *jumelles* or lorgnette; the scientific lenses of the microscope and telescope; the photographic lens; the magic lantern; and the kaleidoscope. The purpose is to draw together the many different ways in which late-nineteenth-century poets thought about looking through

[3] See Thomas F. Glick, 'Eyeglasses', *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas F. Glick, Steven John Livesey, and Faith Wallis (New York: Routledge, 2005), 167-168, p. 167: 'The first eyeglasses [...] for the correction of presbyopia (farsightedness) were apparently invented in Tuscany in the early 1280s.'

[4] Charles Malo, *Bazar parisien, ou Annuaire raisonné de l'industrie des premiers artistes et fabricants de Paris: offrant l'examen de leurs travaux, fabrications, découvertes, produits, inventions, etc.: ouvrage utile à toutes les classes de la société* (Paris: 1826), p. 449.

glass, to trace an uncertain and evolving relationship between reality and artifice, and to examine how the optical instrument, in its diverse manifestations, constituted a means by which literature's constant adaptations could be represented and through which writers could process their reaction to both the world and their own creative output, their place on the spectrum of the 'optique nouvelle'.

*

The most common use of the lens has always been in everyday eyeglasses, a fact which was no less true of the nineteenth century than it is today. Much like the wider glass industry as examined in the Introduction, 'lunetterie' in France prospered in the mid-nineteenth century. The history of one of the most prominent eyewear specialists, *L'Amy*, illustrates this point: in 1796, near Morez, Pierre-Hyacinthe Caseaux, a local metalworker, began to manufacture eyeglasses. The practice was picked up by his godson, Pierre-Hyacinthe Lamy and his father, Louis-Félix Lamy, founders of the *L'Amy Lunettes* Company. The business flourished and, between 1826 and 1848, production increased from 3,000 to 720,000 pairs of eyeglasses annually, eventually reaching eleven million in 1882.[5]

The use of eyeglasses – both simple spectacles and their close cousins, the lorgnette and the 'jumelles' (binoculars or opera glasses) – became so common that literary references to them in this period are often unremarkable. However, one environment in which this type of eyewear is particularly important is the theatre. One of the more memorable references to theatrical glasses occurs in Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte*, at the moment when Hugues, the protagonist, is searching for Jane, the elusive double of his dead wife, in the theatre. Desperate to catch sight of Jane, the reclusive Hugues scans the audience for her, only to find that the spectators' lenses are trained on himself:

---

[5] Typhaine Le Foll, Conservatrice du Musée de la Lunette, 'Histoire de la lunette: Deux siècles d'histoire industrielle à Morez' (2009) <http://www.lunetiers-du-jura.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=18&lang=fr&limitstart=1> [accessed 18 December 2016].

> Son œil fouilla vite toutes les places, les rangs de stalles, les baignoires, les loges, les galeries supérieures [...]. Il ne la retrouva pas, tout déconcerté, inquiet, triste. [...]
> Il commença à regretter son action irréfléchie. D'autant plus qu'on avait remarqué sa présence et qu'on s'en étonna en une insistance de jumelles qu'il ne fut pas sans apercevoir. Certes, il ne fréquentait personne, n'avait noué de relations avec aucune famille, vivait seul. Mais chacun le connaissait de vue, au moins, savait qui il était et son noble désespoir, en cette Bruges peu populeuse, si inoccupée, où tout le monde se connaît, s'enquiert des nouveaux venus, informe ses voisins et se renseigne auprès d'eux.[6]

The *jumelles* are the perfect symbol of a society that is obsessed with spying. As Hugues gazes at the audience, he himself becomes the target of a gaze. As we have seen, glass is associated with surveillance in this novel – the windows, the 'espions' – and here that association is rendered more explicit as the glass instrument reveals to Hugues the fact that, even as he looks, he is looked at, in an environment designed for looking. Furthermore, the linguistic curiosity of the *jumelles* – always feminine, usually plural – underlines the patterns at the heart of the plot.[7] There is a doubleness, both structurally and grammatically, to this instrument in which, not merely two lenses, but two *pairs* of lenses, operate – a doubleness that is appropriate to a novel in which doubling (between Jane and la Morte, Hugues and Bruges) is key. The novel's central themes are represented in the *jumelles*.

Jumelles are also highlighted by Mallarmé in a theatrical context. In 'Le Genre ou des modernes', part of *Crayonné au théâtre*, Mallarmé pictures Gautier watching the stage:

> Mis devant le triomphe immédiat et forcené du monstre ou Médiocrité qui parada au lieu divin, j'aime Gautier appliquant à son regard las la noire jumelle comme une volontaire cécité et *'C'est un art si grossier.. si abject,'* exprimait-il, devant le rideau; mais comme il ne lui appartenait point, à cause d'un dégoût, d'annuler chez soi des prérogatives de voyant, ce fut encore, ironique, la sentence: *'Il ne devrait y avoir qu'un vaudeville – on ferait quelques changements de temps en temps.'*[8]

Mallarmé envisages Gautier's disgust with the clumsy, vaudevillian art that characterises contemporary theatre. And yet it is an art from which Gautier cannot look away, pressing his

[6] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 90-93.
[7] Joyce O. Lowrie observes that 'jumelles' means both 'twins' and 'opera glasses'. See 'Ophelia becomes Medusa: Reversals and Ambiguity in *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, 41-62, p. 58.
[8] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, pp. 179-180.

eyes to his binoculars, a willing spectator. Paradoxically, the binoculars aid in a voluntary blindness: the glass lens, which should clarify sight, is associated with not seeing as Gautier, persistent in his attendance at the Vaudeville, shuts his eyes to the crudeness of the art, his *jumelles* only helping him to see that which he would prefer not to. In seeing better, Gautier is (voluntarily) blind to the truth.

We might note a parallel between Gautier's imagined attachment to his opera glass and his self-professed attachment to the windowpane: as we have seen, he prefaced *Albertus* by stating that 'L'auteur du présent livre [...] n'a vu du monde que ce que l'on voit par la fenêtre, et il n'a pas eu envie d'en voir davantage.'[9] The glass screen offers protection from the spectacle, while nonetheless allowing the gaze to pass unhindered. The gaze – whether through the window or through the binoculars – is interrupted but not obscured, even if the result of this shielded but clarified vision is an obscuring of the truth in another sense (in Mallarmé's imagining, the obscuring of Gautier's aesthetic values). The scene on stage is rendered bearable by the glass lens, which at once enables and protects the gaze.

And in a theatrical environment, the idea of a glass screen between spectator and spectacle is particularly significant. Theatrical glass held a certain fascination for the Symbolists and is something we will return to later. It includes Maeterlinck's glass scenery and Mallarmé's mirrors in his 'virtual theatre'.[10] But, for Mallarmé, the recurring link between glass and theatre is also evident in the theatrical lens. In addition to the *jumelles* of 'Le Genre ou des modernes', lenses appear in the prose poem 'Un spectacle interrompu', in which Mallarmé describes a clown's performance which is interrupted by a bear. In the opening paragraph,

---

[9] Gautier, *Albertus*, p. 7.

[10] Evlyn Gould develops a theory of virtual theatre, taking Mallarmé as a principal example. She defines 'virtual' as 'a term borrowed from optics which refers to the potential or energetic existence of optical counterparts for objects that only occur within a psychical or mental space but give the impression of existing in a physical reality.' *Virtual Theater from Diderot to Mallarmé* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 1.

Mallarmé states his intention to report the incident he witnesses as a poet, rather than a journalist:

> Artifice que la *réalité*, bon à fixer l'intellect moyen entre les mirages d'un fait [...]. Je veux [...] écrire comme elle frappa mon regard de poète, telle Anecdote, avant que la divulguent des *reporters* par la foule dressés à assigner à chaque chose son caractère commun.[11]

He goes on to describe the interrupted performance before revealing that the audience has watched the spectacle – interruption and all – through the lenses of their lorgnettes:

> Un soupir, exempt presque de déception, soulagea incompréhensiblement l'assemblée: dont les lorgnettes, par rangs, cherchèrent, allumant la netteté de leurs verres, le jeu du splendide imbécile évaporé dans sa peur [...].[12]

A glass barrier separates the spectators from the performance. Consequently, when the performance – artifice – is interrupted by the bear – reality – the audience sees the interruption as a continuation of the performance. The lens through which the gaze is applied equally to the fictional and the real, blurring the distinction between the two. Mallarmé has already established an antagonistic relationship between artifice and reality in the poem's opening, in which he provocatively declares that reality is, itself, artificial. The rest of the poem enacts this statement by positing the real as spectacle, a notion underlined by the fact that the audience have not put down their lorgnettes. Mallarmé's declared intention to report the incident as a poet, rather than a journalist, corroborates this prioritisation of the artificial over the real. Again, a kind of blindness is in play, as entertainment is privileged over reality, and the instrument that aids vision does so selectively. Vision is clarified but this does not allow for a clearer picture of reality; rather, it is the artificial, the aesthetic, that is perceived through the lens.

---

[11] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 90 [Mallarmé's italics].
[12] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 92.

This connection between artifice and glass is what makes the material important in Mallarmé's lens poetry. The lens elevates fiction over reality, acting as a screen which not only separates the poet from the spectacle, but also enables him to project his imagination onto that screen. The individualising nature of the hand-held lorgnette and *jumelles* means that, even as the poet engages in a public spectacle, he sees through a personalised lens, which allows his own creative vision to be transposed onto the real. The virtual field perceived through these lenses is a manipulated version of the material world, to which glass is instrumental. We have seen Gautier's imagined complicity with the fictional world of vaudeville, witnessed through his *jumelles*; we have also seen the blurring of artifice and reality through the lorgnette in 'Un Spectacle interrompu'; this meeting of fiction and reality is something Mallarmé will return to time and again. It will prove central to the way he conceives of virtual theatre, where glass will be figured as the boundary point between reality and artifice.

*

> Poursuivre le réel, c'est chercher l'introuvable.
> Le réel, ce fond vrai d'où sort toute la fable,
> C'est la nature en fuite à jamais dans la nuit.
> Le télescope au fond du ciel noir la poursuit,
> Le microscope court dans l'abîme après elle [.]
>
> (Hugo, 'A l'homme', 1877)[13]

From the theatrical gaze to the scientific, lenses were put to more than just social use in the nineteenth century: their application in telescopes and microscopes contributed to important scientific discoveries. The precise origin of these optical instruments is uncertain, although early versions of the compound (multiple-lens) microscope are often credited to Hans or Zacharias Jansen in the late sixteenth century, while the first known telescope patent was applied for by Hans Lippershey in the early seventeenth century. Galileo is famed for

[13] Hugo, *OC*, iii, p. 551.

developing both devices, around 1609. Over the following two centuries, new technologies and a greater understanding of how light and the eye function allowed for improvements to these instruments and, by the early nineteenth century, they occupied a key place in the fields of geology, astronomy, biology, and chemistry.[14] Technological progress continued throughout the nineteenth century: notable figures like Joseph Jackson Lister and William Nicol in the 1820s, Henry Fox Talbot (an early inventor of photography) in the 1830s, and Ernst Abbe in the 1860s and 1870s, advanced lens technology to allow for more accurate images.[15]

As a consequence, the microscope and telescope became vital to several rapidly advancing scientific fields. Work in microbiology was already under way with Hooke's discovery of cells under the microscope, about which he wrote *Micrographia* (1665). Robert Brown (1773-1858) contributed to this field with his observation of the cell nucleus, and of particles in fluids.[16] Later, Louis Pasteur's observations of tartaric acid led to his fundamental work on bacteria and disease, which has shaped immunology.[17] And in geology, Henry Clifton Sorby (1826-1908) studied iron and steel under the microscope, his findings contributing to the use of steel in industrial construction.[18] Meanwhile, although astronomy was hardly a new science in the nineteenth century, the refinement of the telescopic lens allowed for greater clarity in

[14] For detail about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century advances in optical science, see Crary, *Techniques*, pp. 25-66. Important developers of telescopic and microscopic technology include: Antony van Leeuwenhoek (1623-1732), who used microscopes to produce early descriptions of microorganisms; Chester Moore Hall (1703-1771), who invented an 'achromatic telescope lens', reducing colour distortion; John Dolland (1706-1761), who commercialised the achromatic lens; and David Brewster (1781-1868), who experimented with reflection and refraction, invented the kaleidoscope, and refined the stereoscope. A fuller history of the microscope is William J. Croft's *Under the Microscope: A Brief History of Microscopy* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2006). For historical detail on the telescope, see Peter Grego and David Mannion, *Galileo and 400 Years of Telescopic Astronomy* (Springer: New York, 2010).

[15] Lister reduced spherical aberration in the compound microscope; Nicol invented the 'nicol prism', which reduces reflection; Fox Talbot applied a polariser to the microscope; and Ernst Abbe theorised about the refractive index of glass, which determined the microscope's resolution limits. On Lister, see Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 403. On Nicol, Talbot, and Abbe, see Croft, *Microscope*, pp. 18-20, and p. 33.

[16] Croft, *Microscope*, pp. ix-x.

[17] Croft, *Microscope*, pp. 38-39.

[18] Croft, *Microscope*, pp. 34-49.

cosmic observation, enabling more defined categorisations of nebulae, such as that produced by William and John Herschel at the turn of the nineteenth century.[19]

Nevertheless, despite their undeniable scientific importance, microscopes and telescopes are rarely mentioned in the poetry of the late nineteenth century. Certainly, both instruments caught Hugo's attention,[20] but they failed to secure a place of honour in the Symbolist repertoire of motifs. Given that these poets took such an interest in other forms and uses of glass, the absence of these scientific lenses strikes us as odd and it is worth interrogating possible reasons for it.

One probable explanation is that these lenses did not appeal to the Symbolists precisely because they have such a strong scientific association. The fact that their domain is so resolutely astronomic, anatomic, and atomic, means that they connote a level of detail in which the Symbolists were not generally interested. This is not to say that these poets were not fascinated by the celestial world – on the contrary, stars and planets frequently inspire them – nor that they were uninterested in the human body or the natural world; rather, that they did not choose to break these things down into their minute, mechanistic, constituent parts. Despite their insistence on linguistic clarity, they favour more nebulous imagery – misty climates, veils, lace curtains – to which the precision of telescopic and microscopic lenses is not appropriate.

---

[19] See Grego and Mannion, *Galileo*, pp. 196-197. Herschel's forty-foot telescope was overshadowed by the fifty-five-foot telescope built by Lord Rosse in Parsonstown. The astronomer Fulgence Marion (pseudonym for Camille Flammarion) describes the significance of this latter telescope: 'on lui doit la découverte des plus belles nébuleuses et des plus splendides créations sidérales que l'œil mortel ait jamais entrevues dans les campagnes inaccessibles du ciel' (*L'Optique* (Paris: Hachette, 1869), pp. 182-187).

[20] Hugo recounts using a telescope at the Paris Observatory in 1834, in *Promontorium Somnii* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961), pp. 6-15. In *Les Misérables*, Hugo meditates: 'Où finit le télescope, le microscope commence. Lequel des deux a la vue la plus grande? Choisissez. Une moisissure est une pléiade de fleurs; une nébuleuse est une fourmilière d'étoiles. Dans les vastes échanges cosmiques, la vie universelle va et vient en quantités inconnues, [...] dissolvant tout, excepté ce point géométrique, le moi; ramenant tout à l'âme atome; épanouissant tout en Dieu' (*OC*, vi, p. 702). Telescopes feature in several of Hugo's poems, notably 'La Comète' and 'A l'homme'. See *OC*, iii, pp. 423-430 and pp. 551-556. Finally, in *Postscriptum de ma vie* (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1961), Hugo states: 'Nous voyons le temps passé au télescope et le temps présent au microscope. De là les énormités apparentes du temps présent' (p. 80).

These particular optical instruments sit more aptly in the domain of Naturalism, with its fascination with the effect of the environment on humanity. The Naturalists are more inclined towards scientific detail than the Symbolists are: the Goncourt brothers, in their preface to *Germinie Lacerteux*, state that 'le Roman s'est imposé les études et les devoirs de la science';[21] while Zola's preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* explains the scientific method he used in writing the novel: 'J'ai choisi des personnages souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang [...]; mon but a été un but scientifique avant tout.'[22] And Zola is more explicit still in his description of the 'roman expérimental':

> Et c'est là ce qui constitue le roman expérimental: posséder le mécanisme des phénomènes chez l'homme, montrer les rouages des manifestations intellectuelles et sensuelles telles que la physiologie nous les expliquera, sous les influences de l'hérédité et des circonstances ambiantes [...].[23]

Zola and his fellow Naturalists base their writing framework on physiological mechanisms, priding themselves on their scientific approach. We can conjecture that the microscope's precision, with its connection to chemical and physiological understanding, would have appealed. Consequently, they provide us with a useful alternative to the Symbolist approach, which rejects such pronounced scientific detail. It is possible that the Symbolists, endeavouring in some way to define themselves *against* Naturalism, deliberately avoid allusions to optical instruments whose use was primarily scientific, while the Naturalists, taking inspiration from science, were interested in precisely those things visible through the microscope and the telescope. Ultimately, the late-nineteenth-century novel is more appropriately figured by these optical instruments than contemporary poetry is.

---

[21] Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, ed. Philippe Desan (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), p. 5.

[22] Zola, *OC*, iii, p. 27.

[23] Zola, *OC*, ix, p. 332.

Indeed, the rare instances where microscopes and telescopes do occur in the poetry of this period only corroborate their scientific connotation. Émile Verhaeren is one of the few poets to refer to these instruments, as he does in ‘La Recherche’:

> Chambres claires, tours et laboratoires,
> Avec, sur leurs frises, les sphinx évocatoires
> Et vers le ciel, braqués, les télescopes d’or.
>
> [...]
> Instruments nets et délicats,
> Ainsi que des insectes, 10
> Ressorts tendus et balances correctes,
> Cônes, segments, angles, carrés, compas,
> Sont là, vivant et respirant dans l’atmosphère
> De lutte et de conquête autour de la matière.
>
> C’est la maison de la science au loin dardée, 15
> Obstinément par à travers les faits jusqu’aux idées.
>
> Dites! quels temps versés au gouffre des années,
> Et quelle angoisse ou quel espoir des destinées,
> Et quels cerveaux chargés de noble lassitude
> A-t-il fallu pour faire un peu de certitude? 20
>
> C’est la maison de la science au loin dardée,
> Vers l’unité de toutes les idées [...].[24]

Even here, Verhaeren’s attitude is ambivalent. On the one hand, scientific research is a positive development: the means by which mankind will conquer the material world and construct an ideal, unified, coherence. On the other hand, Verhaeren points out the frustrations inherent in this process: the anguish, the time lost, the effort wasted. His attitude towards science is at once plauditory and cautionary.

But, perhaps more importantly, we should note that this poem is atypical of the Symbolist canon. Verhaeren, although well-acknowledged as Symbolist royalty, distinguishes himself from his contemporaries with his attention to industry and technology. His landscapes, particularly in this collection (*Les Villes tentaculaires*), are more likely to feature factories and ports than the dreamy canal scenes of his compatriots, Rodenbach and Maeterlinck; and

[24] Émile Verhaeren, ‘La Recherche’, *Les Villes tentaculaires* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1917), pp. 195-199.

he takes greater interest in urbanism and progress. It is unsurprising that he should be the only Symbolist poet to tackle scientific lenses directly.[25] Moreover, Verhaeren readily acknowledges his debt to the material world, in a way that many of his fellow poets do not. In his article 'Le Symbolisme' (1887), in which he admits the difficulty of attempting to define Symbolism but does so nonetheless, Verhaeren states: 'On part de la chose vue, ouïe, sentie, tâtée, goûtée, pour en faire naître l'évocation et la somme par l'idée.'[26] If ever there were a Symbolist to whom the optical instruments of research would appeal, it is Verhaeren. However, in the same article, Verhaeren notes that there is a difference between the Symbolist method as he describes it and Zola's approach, which 'donne la vue directe.' He continues: 'L'évolution vers le symbolisme s'est faite presque inconsciemment d'abord, puis lentement accentuée par réaction directe contre le naturalisme. Celui-ci était l'émiettement descriptif, l'analyse microscopique et minutieuse [...]. Le symbolisme fera le contraire.'[27] Verhaeren is unusual among the Symbolists in his ready acceptance of the material world as inspiration, but he nonetheless emphasises the turn away from the Naturalist 'microscopic' method towards the 'Idée'.

The microscope and telescope resonated strongly with the Naturalists because of their inclination towards detail and their fascination with biologically-determined temperaments. For the Symbolists, however, these lenses held limited interest. Laforgue summarises their position neatly: describing his 'Dimanches' as 'bannis/ De l'Infini/ Au delà du microscope et du télescope', he connects these instruments to the laws of scholarship, but concludes 'Mais, c'est pas les Lois qui fait le bonheur, hein l'Homme?'[28]

*

[25] Vera Castiglione records that Verhaeren visited the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris, which featured a giant telescope. 'La Recherche' predates this, suggesting Verhaeren's consistent fascination with science and technology. See 'A Futurist before Futurism: Émile Verhaeren and the Technological Epic', *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 101-124, pp. 109-110.

[26] Émile Verhaeren, 'Le Symbolisme', *De Baudelaire à Mallarmé* suivi de *Parnassiens et Symbolistes*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Baronian (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2008), p. 75.

[27] Verhaeren, *De Baudelaire à Mallarmé*, p. 76.

[28] Laforgue, *OC*, ii, pp. 170-171.

Avec ce mutin casque blond
C'est votre oubli que je défie
Et j'offre à ceux qui déjà l'ont
Dans le cœur, ma photographie.

(Mallarmé, 'Photographies')[29]

The world of scientific discovery was not alone in making use of the lens; the lens also proved the key to one of the most important social and technological developments of the nineteenth century – photography.

In 1816, Joseph-Nicéphore Niépce fitted his small camera obscura, in which he had placed sensitised paper, with the lens of a solar microscope and produced the first negative. Thus, Laurent Mannoni notes: 'in the mid-1810s [...] the principle of photography was well and truly established', and it was an innovation made possible by the glass lens.[30] During the late 1820s, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, already renowned in Paris for his dioramas, became Niépce's collaborator, bringing to the photographic project his reputation and financial security. Niépce died in 1833, leaving Daguerre to refine the process they had developed, and the 'daguerreotype' was revealed publicly in 1839.[31]

Photography is complexly embedded in the history of theories of vision, and the fascination in which it was held by the nineteenth-century public meant that its effect on contemporary aesthetics was inevitably profound. The poets of this period were attuned to the growing popularity of the new medium and many refer to photography in their work.[32] In

[29] Mallarmé, 'Photographies', *OC*, i, p. 283.
[30] Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 193.
[31] Mannoni, *The Great Art*, pp. 191-197.
[32] These include: Verlaine in 'Assonances Galantes', which begins 'Tu me dois ta photographie', see Paul Verlaine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Octave Nadal and others, 2 vols (Paris: Le Club de meilleur livre, 1959-60), ii, pp. 1315-1317; Rimbaud, who allegedly wrote a lost sequence of poems entitled 'Photographies du temps passé', recounting French history, see Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 122; and Mallarmé, whose 'Photographies' appear in *Vers de circonstance.*

particular, Baudelaire famously decries its increasing popularity,[33] while Charles Cros worked extensively towards ways of realising colour photography.[34]

In spite of this evident awareness, there are few poems in which the photograph features in a direct and in-depth manner. Like the microscopic and telescopic lenses, the photographic lens is something the Symbolists are wary of. However, their reasons, in this instance, are more complicated and multiple. The intricate and difficult relationship between photography and poetry during this period warrants an entire study of its own – a study that would have to take into account the convoluted tradition of rivalry that has long existed between writing and visual art.[35] Here, I will sketch out a number of possible overlaps or points of tension between poetry and photography at this time.

First, there is the question of mimesis. A frequent argument against photography is that its alleged ability to capture perfectly an image promotes a Realist aesthetic. As with the transparent window, this is a misconception, but one that nineteenth-century writers were not universally immune to. This argument is advanced by Baudelaire in his 1859 Salon:

> le *Credo* actuel des gens du monde [...] est celui-ci: 'Je crois à la nature et je ne crois qu'à la nature (il y a de bonnes raisons pour cela). Je crois que l'art est et ne peut être que la reproduction exacte de la nature [...]. Ainsi l'industrie qui nous donnerait un résultat identique à la nature serait l'art absolu.' Un Dieu vengeur a exaucé les vœux de cette multitude. Daguerre fut son Messie. Et alors elle se dit: 'Puisque la photographie nous donne toutes les garanties désirables d'exactitude [...] l'art, c'est la photographie.' A partir de ce moment, la société immonde se rua, comme un seul Narcisse, pour contempler sa triviale image sur le métal. [...] D'étranges abominations se produisirent.[36]

---

[33] See Baudelaire, 'Le Public moderne et la photographie', *OC*, ii, pp. 614-619.

[34] See Charles Cros, 'Procédé d'enregistrement et de reproduction des couleurs, des formes et des mouvements', 'Solution générale du problème de la photographie des couleurs', 'Sur la photographie des couleurs', and 'Sur la classification des couleurs et sur les moyens de reproduire les apparences colorées par trois clichés photographiques spéciaux', in Tristan Corbière and Charles Cros, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Forestier and others (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 493-510, p. 577, pp. 583-586.

[35] Aspects of this topic have been addressed in several critical works: Gayle Zachmann explores the relationship between Mallarmé and photography in *Frameworks for Mallarmé* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Larry Ligo discusses Baudelaire and photography in *Manet, Baudelaire and Photography* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006); and Andrea Schincariol examines photography in Naturalism in *Le Dispositif photographique chez Maupassant, Zola et Céard: Chambres noires du naturalisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014).

[36] Baudelaire, *OC*, ii, pp. 616-617.

In this polemical text, Baudelaire articulates a common, if naïve, attitude towards photography: that its very mimetic quality prevents it from being art. This point of view had implications for the 'ut pictura poesis' tradition – how far should poetry imitate visual art when faced with this new, mimetically unrivalled medium? It may be that the Symbolists, taking their cue from Baudelaire, rejected this interdisciplinary tradition in favour of a less representational art, one which aimed to 'peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.'[37] Moreover, Gayle Zachmann, in her study on Mallarmé and the photographic, argues that social and political factors under the Second Empire such as censorship of the press and increased scrutiny of writers, and the promotion of referential art, conversely reinforced this aesthetic move away from mimetic representation and towards *l'art pour l'art.*[38] The photograph emphasises the link between representation and referent: the scarcity of allusions to this medium in Symbolist literature may stem not from an ignorance of photography's popularity, but rather, a high-mindedness that caused the Symbolists to elevate their art above the popular taste for the referential. This is to simplify the case, however: if anything, Symbolism could hardly have existed without the mimetic tradition against which it defined itself for, as Jonathan Crary, points out, 'the essential continuity of mimetic codes is a necessary condition for the affirmation of an avant-garde breakthrough.'[39]

Indeed, it would be a mistake to align photography with mimesis so neatly, as it belies Realism in numerous ways. First, this technology allowed for an artistic manipulation of light and shade which is not necessarily realistic and, instead, privileges aesthetics. This manipulation of light was an important influence on Impressionism, a visual movement with which Symbolism is often associated. As we have noted, late-nineteenth-century French poetry is preoccupied with the *clair-obscur*, so in this respect it might derive something from the photographic method. The Symbolists' frequent analogies between light and language

[37] Mallarmé, letter to Henri Cazalis (30 October 1864), *OC*, i, p. 663.
[38] Zachmann, *Frameworks*, pp. 23-25.
[39] Crary, *Techniques*, p. 4.

suggest a discernible link between a visual art which simultaneously emphasises and questions referentiality, and a poetic movement which challenges the relationship between the linguistic sign and the signified. Even if poetry resisted the mimetic turn, that is not to say that it took nothing from photography.

Second, photography dispels the mimetic illusion because it decontextualises the image, framing and isolating a snapshot in a way that does not resemble the continuity of the human gaze. In Chapter One we saw the importance of the frame in window poetry: a similar argument applies to the photographic lens. The image is selected, defined, by the textual apparatus: the lens delineates and fixes a moment or scene, rendering it indelible and thereby isolating it by the simple fact that it will henceforth persist while all around it is lost. Photography captures and distils an experience into a split second. This is contrary to the mimetic quality typically attributed to photography. It speaks to the photograph's capacity not to describe a scene, but to portray it in an instant and, for this, poetry might envy the photographic medium. Mallarmé's autograph-poem illustrates this point of intersection between poetry and photography:

> Voici, lieu des instants élus,
> Que tu connais le photographe,
> Il reproduit jusqu'à ton plus
> Flottant songe et, moi, je paraphe.[40]

Mallarmé underlines the paradox of photography – that it is both instantaneous and eternal. The rhyme photographe/ paraphe aligns photography with the act of writing, which takes place in a similarly privileged nook of time, a reproduction of the here and now, framed. This instant portrayal complements the modernist method of representing a complex emotion through the momentary. We might think, for example, of Ezra Pound's concept of the 'Image': 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.'[41]

[40] Written on the back of a photograph of Mallarmé. Quoted by Zachmann, *Frameworks*, p. xiv.

[41] Pound outlines the principles of the Imagiste movement in 'A Retrospect', *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), 58-68, p. 59.

This is not dissimilar to the impulse revealed in Mallarmé's poem. Photography, therefore, may have been influential in steering late-nineteenth-century poetry towards a more modernist approach (the brevity of this poem even calls to mind some of Pound's own poems, like 'The Bathtub' or 'In a Station of the Metro'). Although they resisted the photograph's mimetic tendency, the poets of the late nineteenth century simulated the photographic eye in different ways, using the text as a lens by which to capture an instant.

As Armstrong says, 'To "take" a photograph is to "take" something from time.'[42] There is a temporal juxtaposition embodied in the photograph, one highlighted by Susan Sontag when she says that 'photographs are *memento mori.* To take a photograph is to participate in another person's [...] mortality [...]. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.'[43] Although photographs preserve the past by capturing a moment forever, they also turn the present into past instantaneously: they are both proof of prior time and a reminder of time's inevitable passing, preservation and loss combined. As a result, their relation to memory is complicated, as they are at once the physical embodiment of memory and, as Barthes suggests, a 'contre-souvenir', blocking the original and replacing it with an image.[44] For this reason, the photograph interested the Symbolists, who are attentive to memory and the interplay between permanence and ephemerality. Thus, when Verlaine says 'Tu me dois ta photographie/ [...] Cette image que tu me dois/ [...] je/ L'ai là, dans mon cœur [...]', [45] he suggests that the photograph is less important as a physical object than as a conceptual image, the essence of a person, more akin to memory than artefact. Likewise, this temporal ambiguity might explain the title of Rimbaud's lost series of prose poems 'Photographies du temps passé'. We might conjecture that, envisaging the text itself as a photograph, Rimbaud may have been attempting to

[42] Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 346.
[43] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 15.
[44] See Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma; Gallimard, 1980), p. 142.
[45] Verlaine, *OC*, ii, pp. 1315-1317.

capture, in language, something of photography's ability to bring the present into contact with the past. It is an unfortunate irony that these poems have not been preserved. Photography is simultaneously the evidence of existence and the fabrication of memory. The photographic lens preserves the image (later also printed on glass plates): however, in fixing the image, the opposite result is also achieved and, as Barthes points out, what a photograph really testifies to is the absence, simultaneous with the proof of presence, of the object depicted – and that is a very Symbolist notion indeed.[46]

Furthermore, photography may have influenced late-nineteenth-century poetry in terms of the relationship between the subject and the object. There is a tendency to see the camera as a logical continuation of modes of vision dictated by the use of the camera obscura in painting.[47] In this tradition, the spectator's body is united with the apparatus for seeing – the camera obscura – and the act of observation occurs within the 'camera'. However, Crary argues that photography instigates a new theory of vision and the body, in which the apparatus for seeing – the camera – is, unlike the camera obscura, independent from the spectator.[48] When studying poetic windows, we saw that glass represented a transparent yet impermeable liminal point between subject and object and yet, at the same time, the placement of something under glass objectivises it, as happens in the department store window. These concerns are relevant here also. Photographing something is another method of objectification and the extension of objectification – appropriation.[49] The camera itself, however, is merely an instrument; the subjective gaze that directs it is responsible for the appropriation of the object being photographed. If we transfer the analogy to poetry, figuring the text as equivalent to the lens, we might question whether the text is merely a blind

---

[46] Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 177.

[47] Zachmann analyses connections between 'Igitur' and photography, linking Igitur's 'chambre' to both the camera (as apparatus) and the darkroom. See *Frameworks*, p. 67.

[48] Crary, *Techniques*, p. 136.

[49] On the photograph's ability to turn subject into object see Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 29. On the photographer appropriating the object see Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 24.

instrument, poised between subject and object, or whether in representing an object, the text in some way claims it for its own.

Moreover, if, as Barthes claims, the photograph itself is an object (in addition to being the representation of another object), then we should question the status of the text in relation to that which it represents: at what point does the instrument for portrayal become more interesting than the thing portrayed?[50] Barthes claims that 'une photo est toujours invisible: ce n'est pas elle qu'on voit' – in other words, the referent is the primary object – and yet, he also acknowledges that the photograph becomes *itself* the object, it '[s'annule] comme *medium*, [n'est] plus un signe mais la chose même'.[51] In interdisciplinary terms, can this duality of purpose – as sign *and* as referent – be transferred to writing? This question resonates particularly with a self-conscious poetics like Mallarmé's, which begins to turn the text itself into the object, the focus of the gaze, even as it remains the instrument through which the gaze is directed.

Finally, looking forwards from Symbolism towards early-twentieth-century writing, Sontag suggests that the camera is the quintessential instrument for Surrealism. This is partly because photography, which requires less human intervention than painting does, comes closer than other arts to automated reproduction.[52] Furthermore, in capturing an 'unposed slice of life' (Sontag's characterisation of mid-nineteenth-century photos of Paris), the photographer takes everyday life as material for his art.[53] Both of these qualities are central to the Surrealist aesthetic, which takes the everyday as its subject matter and favours an automated method. Sontag identifies photography as the artistic form in which Surrealism best succeeds because photographs 'have the status of found objects'.[54] Photography draws on

[50] See Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 77.
[51] Barthes, *Chambre*, p. 18 and p. 77.
[52] See Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 52: 'Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of [...] a reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision.'
[53] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 54.
[54] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 69.

the material world in a way that no other art form can: it isolates, and thereby privileges, the trivial and the quotidian: the ordinary, decontextualised, becomes an artistic resource.

In this way, photography contributes to a collage form of art that was echoed in twentieth-century Surrealism, which juxtaposed images of the ordinary, removing them from context in order to render them surprising. The everyday is hyperactivated, charged with a new energy derived from its new context, or its lack of context: thus, the real becomes *sur*real. I suggest that the roots of this collage form lie in the work of certain late-nineteenth-century poets, who were themselves beginning to experiment with assemblage and collection. Examples include: Rimbaud, who piles images in quick succession, particularly in his prose poetry; Cros, who in his *Coffret de Santal*, envisages the poetry collection as a jumbled trunk full of everyday items which he offers to the reader;[55] or even Mallarmé's *Vers de circonstance,* which illustrate snapshots of everyday life, including the 'Photographies' poems. These poets took the initial steps down a path that would lead, via the pared-down, snapshot poetry of Pound and T.E. Hulme's Imagisme, to the Surrealist poetry of the 1920s, and to Francis Ponge's object-centric poetry.

We might conclude, then, that although photography is rarely mentioned in Symbolist poetry, some of the issues it raises, particularly in the field of theories of vision, and the role of the observer in the modern age, affected this poetry in indirect ways, prompting late-nineteenth-century poets to emulate the lens selectively.

On a final note, it is important to mention another invention in the history of photography: the stereoscope. Based on binocular vision, the stereoscope is arguably *more* realist than the photograph because it offers a three-dimensional image, rather than a flat one.[56] The stereoscope was the result of early-nineteenth-century theories of the perception of space,

---

[55] In the sonnet which prefaces the collection, Cros states: 'Bibelots d'emplois incertains/ [...] Pastels effacés, durs camées,/ Fioles encore parfumées,/ Bijoux, chiffons, hochets, pantins/ […] Je vends tout. Accepte mon offre,/ Lecteur [...]', *OC*, p. 47.

[56] For more detail on the stereoscope, see John Plunkett, 'Depth, Colour, Movement: Embodied Vision and the Stereoscope', *Multimedia Histories,* ed. James Lyons and John Plunkett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 117-131, pp. 118-119.

particularly the idea that, although the two eyes see different images, the brain unites them into one coherent image. Brewster insists on the *successive* nature of this process, positing that the unification of the two images perceived was not simultaneous but temporally sequential.[57] This temporal dimension points us towards another step in the history of optical instruments in the nineteenth century: the notion of vision as a temporal process informs the developing fascination with the moving image – early attempts at which include Eadweard Muybridge's experiments with capturing movement through photography – a fascination that would eventually lead to the birth of cinema.

*

'Tout passe, ma sœur, devant nos curieux regards comme ces objets de la lanterne magique.'

(La Mettrie, quoted by Gustave Kahn, 1896)[58]

Almost immediately after – indeed, arguably *before* – the advent of photography, a desire to capture and display an image in motion was prevalent among optical theorists and technological innovators alike. A number of devices were invented that moved towards this goal, among them the phenakistiscope, the zoetrope, the praxinoscope, and the kinetoscope.[59] These devices are simply constructed and involve the manipulation of a series of images in a back-and-forth or circular motion. They proliferated during the nineteenth century as a result of Joseph Plateau's (1829) theory of 'the persistence of vision', which draws on Goethe's observations about the retinal afterimage:

> If several objects which differ sequentially in terms of form and position are presented one after the other to the eye in very brief intervals and sufficiently close together, the impressions they produce on the retina will blend together without confusion and one will believe that a single object is gradually changing form and position.[60]

[57] Crary, *Techiniques*, p. 120.

[58] Gustave Kahn, *La Pluie et le beau temps* (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1896), epigraph.

[59] For further detail see Mannoni (*The Great Art*) who traces the precursors to cinema. Some of these instruments were handheld, requiring the individual observer to operate them, while others offered a more passive experience.

[60] Quoted by Crary, *Techniques*, pp. 107-109.

This theory formed the foundation of numerous experiments with representing the moving image in devices that had both scientific and entertainment value (often passing from the former context into the latter). The combination of glass and light technology, and a greater understanding of the perception of movement, eventually allows for the invention of cinema, but it was not until the advent of the cinematograph in 1895 that the photographic realism achieved by the camera, the image in motion achieved by the various aforementioned optical instruments, and the projection of the magic lantern, united to produce the first film as we know it.[61] There can be no doubt that the poets of the late nineteenth century were aware of the developments in cinematic technology, which were widely publicised in the French press.[62]

However, as this crucial development did not occur until late 1895, it is at the tail end of the period we are concerned with, so I will not dwell on it except to mention the obvious impact that cinema had on poets of the early twentieth century, such as Apollinaire, Cendrars, Cocteau, and Prévert (the latter two were directly involved in making films). These poets, who experiment with spatial innovation as a means of manipulating poetic time, exemplify, in literary form, the theory of persistence of vision outlined by Plateau nearly a century earlier: their use of brief images delivered in quick succession might be interpreted as a response to the discovery of the afterimage and the way that the eye perceives motion. Arguably, these poets' cinematic poetry is informed by techniques used by the Symbolists, to whom they owe the liberation of French verse in the form of *vers libre* and prose poetry. In fact, Christophe Wall-Romana makes a convincing argument for reading 'Un coup de Dés' as a cinematic

[61] The cinematograph first appeared in Germany in November 1895, and was debuted in Paris the following month by the Lumière brothers. See Mannoni, *The Great Art*, pp. 454-462. Plunkett outlines the importance of the stereoscope and phenakisticope in the development of the cinematograph, see 'Depth, Colour, Movement', p. 125.

[62] Christophe Wall-Romana explains that Mallarmé probably encountered both Edison's kinetoscope and the Lumières' cinematograph in *Le Figaro*. See 'Mallarmé's Cinepoetics: The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinématographe, 1893-8', *PMLA*, 120.1 (2005): 128-147, pp. 130-131.

poem, drawing on Mallarmé's notion of 'déroulement' – poetic unfolding and the film reel – and gesturing towards this poem's legacy throughout the twentieth century.[63]

Yet the cinematograph was not the first projection of the image in motion; in fact, the magic lantern predates all of these optical instruments by centuries, and it is this instrument that I will focus on here. The magic lantern, which projects images onto a white screen, was invented in the mid-seventeenth century by Christiaan Huygens in the Netherlands. Even at the earliest stages of its history, it is associated with the desire to depict a *moving* image: Mannoni explains that a series of Huygens' sketches made with the lantern in mind 'clearly indicated desire for artificial recreation of motion.'[64] The magic lantern quickly became popular among specialists and non-specialists alike, and, by the eighteenth century, it was common for travelling lanternists to tour Europe, offering private lantern shows in exchange for money.[65] In the late eighteenth century, the magic lantern became integral to a new kind of optical show – the phantasmagoria, in which a 'ghost' was projected using the same technology as the traditional magic lantern, but with the projector remaining hidden, to give the illusion of an apparition.[66] As a result, the device became associated with sorcery and the occult. In France in particular, it was put to use at the turn of the nineteenth century by Étienne-Gaspard Robert (alias Robertson) who used his 'Fantascope' (a version of the original magic lantern) to create the illusion of raising the dead, including notable revolutionary figures like Robespierre.[67] The popularity of the magic lantern did not wane for several centuries, and at the close of the nineteenth century it remained a common form of

[63] Wall-Romana studies twentieth-century cinematic poetry in *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). David Mendelson writes about Mallarmé and numerous technological innovations, including photography, cinema and the internet, in *Stéphane Mallarmé: "Le blanc souci de notre toile": Du livre à l'ordinateur* (Paris: Orizons, 2013).

[64] Mannoni, *The Great Art*, p. 38.

[65] Mannoni outlines the history of the magic lantern, including the travelling lanternist, *The Great Art*, pp. 33-135.

[66] See Mannoni, *The Great Art*, pp. 136-147. 'Phantasmagoria' was how Benjamin (following in Marx's footsteps) characterised the commodity-driven display culture of nineteenth-century arcades.

[67] See Mannoni, *The Great Art*, pp. 147-171.

popular entertainment.[68] This may have been because the invention of photography and other lens-based devices kept the fascination with the image as spectacle alive, or because by this point the magic lantern had become such a common domestic item that it was deeply embedded in the consciousness of the nineteenth-century bourgeois consumer.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Théodore de Banville's prose poetry collection, *La Lanterne magique* (1883).[69] At this point, many of the optical instruments detailed above were long established, but the magic lantern remained dominant, and the cinematograph was still more ambition than reality. Banville's collection illustrates some of the important issues surrounding the intersection of poetic and cinematic culture in the second half of the century. The collection is grouped into several series of twelve prose poems, each series thematically linked: there is, for example, one series of poems about food, another about the elements, another about sin, etc. But it is the preface that merits attention here. Banville begins with a short, decasyllabic verse poem – the last vestiges of formal versification passing the baton onto prose poetry – before proceeding to his explanation of the text to come:

> Trala, deri, traderi, dère; la, la, la, traderi, tradère! Demandez la Curiosité! Faites monter chez vous la belle Lanterne Magique; il ne vous en coûtera pas plus que cinquante-cinq sols [...] j'ai inventé une Lanterne Magique [...] qui vous montrera mille tableaux ingénieux et divers [...].
>
> Attachez un drap blanc sur votre mur, et cependant appelez-moi par la fenêtre, et mettez-vous en rang bien sagement, comme les spectateurs du mardi à la Comédie Française. Moi, je viendrai avec mon appareil, et alors vous aurez du plaisir pour votre argent. Vous verrez le Bon Dieu, et monsieur le Soleil, madame la Lune, mesdemoiselles les Étoiles, [...] et beaucoup de figures d'une alléchante modernité.

---

[68] The Musée Stéphane Mallarmé collection includes the magic lantern owned by Geneviève Mallarmé, and hand-painted slides by Julie Manet. Undoubtedly, the most famous reference to the magic lantern in the literature of this period is in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Howard Moss singles out the lantern as a central symbol in the novel. See *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963). David Mendelson studies the representation of glass in Proust's work in *Le Verre et les objets de verre dans l'univers imaginaire de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Corti, 1968).

[69] Banville himself might disagree with the characterisation of this text as 'prose poetry'. However, the pieces in this collection are so similar in length, style, and theme, to approximately contemporary collections like Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose* and Huysmans' *Croquis parisiens* that to label them prose poetry does not seem inappropriate. Kahn, in quoting La Mettrie as the epigraph to his 1896 free-verse collection *La Pluie et le beau temps* (quoted at the beginning of this section), implies that his short poems also resemble the successive, transient images projected by the magic lantern.

> Mes Tableaux rapides vous apparaîtront, groupés méthodiquement par douzaines, en l'honneur [...] du nombre de syllabes contenu dans le vers alexandrin, auquel je m'étais fort adonné du temps que j'étais poète, avant d'embrasser une profession honorable.
>
> Mais je vous les expliquerai en prose, tout naïvement, sans économiser mes plus flambants adjectifs, non plus qu'un honnête ouvrier peintre n'épargne son outremer lapis [...].[1]

Banville situates the magic lantern projection within the theatrical tradition; comparing his audience to that of the Comédie Française, he acknowledges the place held by this type of display in a narrative of spectacle and representation. While cinema never replaced theatre entirely, its popularity did come to overshadow that of the stage, and the magic lantern is the logical step between these media. Unlike the lenses of the microscope and telescope, and equally unlike the photographic lens, all of which aid, to varying degrees, the observation of reality (although, as we have seen, this can be problematised), the magic lantern lens is more akin in function to that of the theatrical *jumelles*: it is used to observe fiction.

But there is a crucial difference between the *jumelles* and the magic lantern: while one clarifies the sight of a portrayed spectacle, the other is a component in the portrayal – that is to say, the magic lantern lens *projects*. This means that the spectacle experienced by the magic lantern audience is less individualised than that of the theatre-goer peering through his *jumelles*. Where Mallarmé's Gautier presses his eye to a private lens, rendering a public spectacle personal, in line with a Romantic subjectivisation of the image, the spectators whom Banville addresses would all witness the *same* spectacle, portrayed by a common lens. We are moving from a quiet, private enjoyment of art towards a convergence of public taste which accompanies an increasing emphasis on mass media enabled by new technologies and greater freedom of the press.

This move away from Romanticism is echoed in the tone. Traditionally, there is a strong link between the magic lantern and the imagination, which stems from its association with the occult: Fulgence Marion, describing a magician's use of the device to create the illusion of

[1] Théodore de Banville, *La Lanterne magique* (Paris: Charpentier, 1883), pp. 3-4.

demons, remarks on the difficulty of distinguishing between '[ce] que l'œil voyait réellement et [ce] que l'imagination rêvait.'[2] In Banville's text, the magic of the lantern is evoked with references to celestial figures represented in 'tableaux ingénieux'; however, there is an underlying cynicism in the preface which suggests the poet cares less for the lantern's aesthetic capacity than for the money to be gained from its use. The preface reads like an advert, the cry of a lanternist travelling the streets and advertising his wares. Banville commercialises the imagination, dismantling the Romantic ivory tower to sell its bricks to people on the streets.

But there is, of course, an irony behind this frame, a deliberate and knowing hyperbolic tone that overemphasises the writer's new-found honesty and overstates the lantern's charm. Despite his insistence that he has renounced the role of poet and become an 'honnête ouvrier', the very existence of this collection is testimony to the fact that Banville nonetheless remains a poet: he may profess the honesty of prose, but this is merely poetry in disguise. Consequently, the cynical subversion of the imagination comes full circle, and the power of the poetic spectacle is reinstated, in new prosaic trappings. The move into prose coincides with the poet's descent to street level, where he mills among the crowd. This is not Gautier peering through a lens at a crude and popular art: this is the Romantic poet assimilating popular taste into his art.

And the question of form is tied in with that of modernity. The magic lantern images are explicitly linked to both the prose form and 'une alléchante modernité'. We might, by extension, infer that Banville saw prose itself as a form more suited to the modern temperament than verse was. What it meant to be 'modern' was a common preoccupation among writers of the late nineteenth century, among them Mallarmé, who explores 'la modernité' in 'Le Genre ou des modernes', Rimbaud, who famously declared that 'il faut être

[2] Marion, *L'Optique*, p. 204.

absolument moderne',[3] and, most obviously, Baudelaire, the modern poet par excellence. Definitions of 'modernity' are numerous and diverse, but it is important to note that there is often a correlation between this early exploration of modernity and radical poetic form: from Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* to Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* and Mallarmé's 'Un coup de Dés', the poets who are interested in modernity are those who push formal limits.[4] In so doing, they pave the way for the formal experiments associated with early modernism.[5] A big part of these experiments was the increasing convergence of poetry and visual art, challenging the traditional doctrine that the latter represents a static scene and the former expresses movement.[6] Modernity meant the annihilation of these boundaries in a renewed conciliation between painting and writing, a radical new version of 'ut pictura poesis'.

Banville spanned a period in which aesthetic values shifted rapidly and nebulously – from Romanticism to Symbolism via Realism, Naturalism, Decadence, and the Parnassian poets – and proclaiming these values was perhaps more important than demonstrating them. Banville himself could fall into a number of these categories but, equally, he is proof that these categories are often fluid and ill-defined. As witness to the increasing concern with modernity in art, it is not surprising that he should turn his attention that way.[7]

La Lanterne magique does not constitute a complete severance from Banville's former verse poetry. It begins with a verse poem, and the grouping of the prose poems into twelve is,

---

[3] Arthur Rimbaud, 'Adieu', *Poésies. Une saison en enfer. Illuminations*, ed. Louis Forestier, preface by René Char (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 204.

[4] This does not mean that they did not value verse poetry also: indeed, each of these poets produced exemplary poems in traditional verse form before experimenting with the boundary between poetry and prose.

[5] Examples include Apollinaire's calligrammatic method, Imagisme's pithy vignettes, Joyce's experimentation with free indirect speech and prose layout, and the widespread adoption of free verse on both sides of the Channel.

[6] This is G.E. Lessing's theory (1766). Arguing against the 'ut pictura poesis' tradition that links poetry and painting, Lessing states: 'if it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colours in space rather than articulated sounds in time, [...] then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive.' See *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E.A. McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 78.

[7] Jean-Pierre Bertrand writes about Banville's approach to modernity in *Odes funambulesques*, 'La poétique du fil: *Odes funambulesques* de Théodore de Banville', *Études françaises*¸ 43: 2 (2007), 73-83. For a fuller account of modernity in poetry across this period, see also Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Pascal Durand, *Les Poètes de la modernité. De Baudelaire à Apollinaire* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

as he states, a nod to the alexandrine, the ghost of poetic tradition lingering in the new. Banville had been grappling with the alexandrine for over a decade; in his *Petit traité de poésie française*, he already remarks that French verse is not restricted to a twelve-syllable pattern:

> Il y a, en français, des vers de toutes les longueurs, depuis le vers d'une syllabe jusqu'au vers de treize syllabes. On a prétendu à tort que les vers de neuf, de onze et de treize syllabes n'existent pas. Ce n'était qu'une affirmation vaine et qui ne s'appuie sur rien.[8]

However, in the very same text, he also refutes the very possibility of prose poetry:

> Ceci tranche une question bien souvent controversée: Peut-il y avoir des poèmes en prose? Non, il ne peut pas y en avoir, malgré le *Télémaque* de Fénelon, les admirables *Poëmes en prose* de Charles Baudelaire et le *Gaspard de la Nuit* de Louis Bertrand; car il est impossible d'imaginer une prose, si parfaite qu'elle soit, à laquelle on ne puisse, avec un effort surhumain, rien ajouter ou rien retrancher; elle est donc toujours à faire, et par conséquent n'est jamais la chose faite [...].[9]

Why, therefore, does he embrace the form in this later collection? Banville's reason for denying prose poetry is that prose can always be changed, expanded, contracted, whereas verse is absolute and fixed. It is on account of the flexibility of prose, its inability to ever be complete – the very reason Banville initially denounced it – that it now seems an appropriate form through which to explore modernity. One aspect of modernity that is often emphasised is its flux and flow – this is the Baudelairean *flâneur* on the move, the city that is constantly demolished and rebuilt, the speed of modern technology (Futurist motorcars, Vorticist machinery). Consequently, prose could express modernity in a way verse could not, precisely because it is so malleable: its forward drive is uninterrupted by the restraints of versification.

---

[8] Théodore de Banville, *Petit traité de poésie française* (Paris: A. Le Clère, 1872), p. 9.

[9] Banville, *Petit traité*, p. 6. David Evans remarks on the ludic and deliberately provocative tone of this text, which is often read as rigidly prescriptive. He states: 'The *Petit traité*, then, operates a similar operation to the prose poetry of Bertrand, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, [...] disassociating poeticity from metrical forms and locating it elsewhere, while maintaining all the while that there is such a quality as poeticity', *Théodore de Banville: constructing poetic value in nineteenth-century France* (Leeds: Legenda, 2014), p. 79. If we accept that the *Petit traité* itself is ironic, then we might see *La Lanterne magique* as a continuation of Banville's playful provocation.

And this, I suggest, is why Banville deems the magic lantern to be the quintessential metaphor for the modern, prose-poetic form. The lantern projects painted images in succession and, as Banville states, creates a series of 'tableaux rapides' (that word 'tableau' brings to mind Baudelaire's 'Peintre de la vie moderne'). If we recall Plateau's theory on the perception of movement, he states that the eye perceives motion 'if several objects [...] are presented one after the other [...] in very brief intervals and sufficiently close together'. This is the basis for cinematic technology, and it is where the magic lantern is heading. The display of motion is not yet fluid in the lantern, it still involves the brief pause between slides, the movement is limited and jerking. It is, therefore, the technological equivalent of the prose poem collection: neither fluid and continuous like the prose novel, nor fixed and self-contained like verse.

The prose poetry collection has a temporal impetus, propelled by continuous syntax and unimpeded by versification, but it retains the pause between poems. It is approaching modernist form but, like its technological equivalent, it is not quite there yet. In selecting the magic lantern as the model for his collection, Banville brings his poetry closer to modernity than it had previously been. The lantern, a triumph of glass (glass lenses projecting painted glass slides), is the perfect representation of an aesthetic mood that was in constant flux: it puts painting into motion, attempting to lend visual art some of the qualities of writing, just as writing itself was trying to assimilate the properties of visual art. Perhaps one reason why the lantern enjoyed such longevity is that it resonated with a growing sense of modernity. When Banville wrote *La Lanterne magique* the lantern was nearing the end of its dominance over technologies of the spectacle as the age of cinema was imminent: Banville's text is its swansong.

*

[...] mes cils se rapprochant qui me kaléidoscopaient les choses [...]

(Verlaine, *Confessions,* 1895)[10]

From lorgnette to lantern, we have explored a century in which lens technology is intricately connected to questions of reality, imagination, mimesis, and artifice. Even as the ambition to present life mimetically was ostensibly realised in the photographic lens, there was a concurrent obsession with the observation of fiction, on stage and through the various optical toys developed in the mid-nineteenth century. At the same time, we can observe how writers used these new optical instruments, or used old optical instruments in new ways, to interrogate how literature contributes to the debates surrounding reality and artifice in visual art. The question of whether art was eclipsed or liberated by the camera applies to writing in similar ways as to painting, and pushes both arts towards experiments with form that would be seen increasingly as 'modern'. It is useful, finally, to examine one optical device which was particularly linked to the concept of modernity, and which again accentuates the division between reality and aesthetics – the kaleidoscope.

Invented in 1815 by Sir David Brewster, the kaleidoscope is the convergence of glass technology, being composed of a lens, through which we see a pattern, often of glass beads, reflected in numerous mirrors inside the device. Brewster initially envisaged the kaleidoscope as a functional instrument, which artists could use to reproduce exact symmetrical designs, before recognising that it would also be a popular addition to the entertainment industry. He insists on symmetry as the most valuable quality in the kaleidoscopic display:

> I was then ignorant of those positions for the eye and the objects, which are absolutely necessary to produce that magical union of parts, and that mathematical symmetry throughout the whole picture, which, independently of all colouring, give to the visions of the Kaleidoscope the peculiar charm which distinguished them from all artificial creations.[11]

[10] Verlaine, *OC*, ii, p. 1098.

[11] Sir David Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope: its History, Theory, and Construction* (London: John Murray, 1858), pp. 2-3.

Brewster describes how he perfected the kaleidoscope's design, before concluding that 'it was impossible not to perceive that [the kaleidoscope] would prove of the highest service in all the ornamental arts, and would, at the same time, become a popular instrument for the purposes of rational amusement'.[12] The kaleidoscope's function is therefore twofold: it is both an artistic instrument and a source of optical diversion. The general public quickly took to the new invention, and Brewster estimates that 200,000 kaleidoscopes were sold in London and Paris in the space of three months.[13] Consequently, it is fair to say that the kaleidoscope became a commonplace object in the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior. Its potential as metaphor was quickly noticed by intellectuals of the time, among them Schopenhauer, who compared history to the kaleidoscope in its presentation of new configurations which are, in fact, no different than what preceded.[14] Today, the kaleidoscope remains part of our cultural vocabulary and, as Verlaine's use of the verb 'kaléidoscoper' testifies, this was equally true of nineteenth-century France. Then, as now, to describe something as kaleidoscopic was to comment on its vivacity, brightness, and changing shape, its dissolution and reconfiguration.

For this reason, the device naturally appealed to the poets of the time, interested as they were in form, fragmentation, and renewal. We might say that the kaleidoscope is the device which, above all others, is concerned with aesthetics. As we have seen, its original purpose was to facilitate the representation of perfect symmetry, which Brewster believed to be the basis of *beauty*: its entire history is thus an artistic one.[15] Moreover, the kaleidoscope arguably deals with the pure, non-referential image more exclusively than other lens devices. Through the microscope, telescope and camera, we see a version of reality, albeit a manipulated version, while through the *jumelles* we witness a theatrical representation that is never quite wholly separated from its referent. Even in the magic lantern spectacle, where the image has

---

[12] Brewster, *Kaleidoscope*, p. 6.

[13] Brewster, *Kaleidoscope*, pp. 6-7.

[14] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Art of Literature*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), p. 58.

[15] Brewster states: 'If we examine the various objects of art which have exercised the skill and ingenuity of man, we shall find that they derive all their beauty from the symmetry of their form'(*Kaleidoscope*, p. 134).

the potential to be unrecognisable as reality, the spectator is nonetheless aware of the world around him, as he sees a projection before him, rather than placing his eye to a lens, and consequently he never sees the image alone. In the kaleidoscope, on the other hand, the viewer sees only the image, disrupted and multiplied, bearing no resemblance to the world outside the device itself, and denying our view of that world.[16] The kaleidoscope's patterns are the equivalent of 'l'art pour l'art' in the context of optical devices: their images existing in and of themselves, their forms abstract, their purpose to create pure beauty.

The kaleidoscope was the perfect metaphor for modernity. Baudelaire is among the first to remark on this in 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne'.[17] In the Introduction, we saw his description of the *flâneur* who makes his home among the crowd – this is the observer for whom 'c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini'.[18] He goes on:

> Ainsi l'amoureux de la vie universelle entre dans la foule comme dans un immense réservoir d'électricité. On peut aussi le comparer, lui, à un miroir aussi immense que cette foule; à un kaléidoscope doué de conscience, qui, à chacun de ses mouvements, représente la vie multiple et la grâce mouvante de tous les éléments de la vie. C'est un *moi* insatiable du *non-moi*, qui, à chaque instant, le rend et l'exprime en images plus vivantes que la vie elle-même, toujours instable et fugitive.[19]

For Baudelaire, the *flâneur* is akin to the kaleidoscope – both are products and enablers of modern life. Although Brewster insisted on the sense of order within the kaleidoscope – the patterns, reflections, and reproductions – the kaleidoscope's constant shifts and movements, its pulsating rhythm and fragmented edges, mean that it also conveys an impression of disorder, even as it reformulates into order again. The image the kaleidoscope gives is fleeting and ungraspable, dissolving before it can reassemble: consequently, its movement is always

[16] Brewster later added a convex lens which reflected a reverse image of a distant object alongside the kaleidoscope's internal patterns, but this image would still have been indistinct and confounded with the internal images.

[17] Marit Grøtta studies Baudelaire and pre-cinematic devices in *Baudelaire's Media Aesthetics: The Gaze of the Flâneur and Nineteenth-Century Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[18] Baudelaire, *OC*, ii, p. 691.

[19] Baudelaire, *OC*, ii, p. 692.

imbued with loss, even as its reflections are endless perpetuation. The device combines the 'fugitif' and the 'infini' – those qualities that, for Baudelaire, define modern life. In the kaleidoscope nothing ever truly disappears, and nothing ever truly remains. The *flâneur* resembles the kaleidoscope because he identifies these features in life and expresses them in their utmost vividness, lending them more colour and grace – in a word, *aestheticising* them.

However, the kaleidoscope does not, in fact, represent the exterior world, but only reproduces the patterns within itself. It may be that Baudelaire is unconcerned with this technicality and simply could not resist a potent simile. Yet it is also possible that, if the *flâneur* resembles the kaleidoscope, representing the world around him in fleeting patterns, and the kaleidoscope only portrays what is internal to itself, then what the *flâneur* expresses is really an element of himself. In the crowd he may find himself, but in himself he also finds the crowd.

For Laforgue, the kaleidoscope is similarly a way to speak figuratively about life. The poet mentions the kaleidoscope in two letters, penned within three weeks of one another:

> Je m'ennuie, voilà tout. Je sens le vide de tout, de l'amour, de la gloire, de l'art, de la métaphysique.
>
> Il est des jours où l'on s'égaie à se dire que l'universelle vie n'est qu'un kaléidoscope transitoire, – et à d'autres jours que, sans la rétine de nos cerveaux *humains*, ce kaléidoscope ne serait que vibrations.[20]

> Spleen toujours. [...]
>
> Et je m'embête, voilà.
>
> Heureusement j'aime le vers, les livres, les vrais tableaux, les bonnes eaux-fortes, des coins de nature, des toilettes de femmes, des types imprévus... Bref, tout le kaléidoscope de la vie.
>
> Mais on est fini et bien misérable au fond quand la vie n'a pour vous que l'intérêt d'un kaléidoscope... n'est-ce pas? [21]

Like Baudelaire, Laforgue picks out the transitory, assembled nature of life. His references to the kaleidoscope follow lists in which he piles up nouns, one after another, his syntax

---

[20] Laforgue, letter to Charles Henry (22 April 1882), *OC*, i, p. 772.

[21] Laforgue, letter to Charles Henry (12 May 1882), *OC*, i, pp. 778-779.

demonstrating the fleeting quality the kaleidoscope represents. However, for him the device is accompanied by a more melancholy tone than Baudelaire's; the images of life's kaleidoscope are barely a diversion, their ephemerality is their only redeeming quality.

But the most important difference between Laforgue's representation of the kaleidoscope and Baudelaire's is that, in 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', the *flâneur* is, himself, the kaleidoscope, whereas in Laforgue's letters, life is the kaleidoscope and man presses his eye to it. The human mind is a retina, observing and processing life's patterns, making sense of the image, which would otherwise be meaningless. If we envisage Baudelaire's *flâneur* as the poet, making life into art by creating patterns and lending colour, then for Laforgue, the viewer is the component required to decipher those patterns. The text of life is incomprehensible without the human brain. The difference between the ways in which these two poets figure the kaleidoscope is the difference between life as represented by the artist, and art as understood by the reader.

Ian Christie has commented on the individual nature of the kaleidoscope, as opposed to the communal nature of devices like the magic lantern: '[The kaleidoscope] is strictly personal, activated by handling, and belongs to the object-type or instrument family that includes the telescope and the microscope'.[22] We are in the realm of the personal lens, used for a private view of the spectacle and activated by the individual user. Laforgue does not go so far as to formulate a theory regarding the analogy between the reader and the spectator, the text and the lens: however, his acknowledgement that, without the retina of the human brain, the kaleidoscope would be nothing more than vibrations, suggests an intuitive awareness of the role of the individual viewer in the act of perception and, by extension, in the perception of art. We might draw a parallel between this role and that of the reader in interpreting the text.

[22] Ian Christie, 'Toys, Instruments, Machines: Why the Hardware matters', *Multimedia Histories*, ed. James Lyons and John Plunkett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 3-17, p. 10.

While the Baudelairean *flâneur* is kaleidoscopic, creating a text from the fragments of life, the Laforguian spectator interprets the kaleidoscopic text of life.

But how is the nineteenth-century kaleidoscope represented in poetry itself? It is Verlaine who provides the most comprehensive answer with his poem, 'Kaléidoscope':

Dans une rue, au cœur d'une ville de rêve
Ce sera comme quand on a déjà vécu:
Un instant à la fois très vague et très aigu...
Ô ce soleil parmi la brume qui se lève!

Ô ce cri sur la mer, cette voix dans les bois! 5
Ce sera comme quand on ignore des causes;
Un lent réveil après bien des métempsycoses:
Les choses seront plus les mêmes qu'autrefois

Dans cette rue, au cœur de la ville magique
Où des orgues moudront des gigues dans les soirs, 10
Où les cafés auront des chats sur les dressoirs
Et que traverseront des bandes de musique.

Ce sera si fatal qu'on en croira mourir:
Des larmes ruisselant douces le long des joues,
Des rires sanglotés dans le fracas des roues, 15
Des invocations à la mort de venir,

Des mots anciens comme un bouquet de fleurs fanées!
Les bruits aigres des bals publics arriveront,
Et des veuves avec du cuivre après leur front,
Paysannes, fendront la foule des traînées 20

Qui flânent là, causant avec d'affreux moutards
Et des vieux sans sourcils que la dartre enfarine,
Cependant qu'à deux pas, dans des senteurs d'urine,
Quelque fête publique enverra des pétards.

Ce sera comme quand on rêve et qu'on s'éveille, 25
Et que l'on se rendort et que l'on rêve encor
De la même féerie et du même décor,
L'été, dans l'herbe, au bruit moiré d'un vol d'abeille.[23]

[23] Verlaine, *OC*, i, pp. 507-8.

This poem's imagery is ambivalent, at once fairylike and sinister. Despite the dreamlike set-up, there is also an implication of spleen. For example, the 'orgues *moudront* les gigues' (l. 10) and death is invited to the party (l. 16). Both of these images are, in fact, the result of changes Verlaine made when revising the poem. The early draft, written in 1873 when Verlaine was in prison, reads 'des orgues *joueront* des gigues', and 'des invocations à *l'oubli* de venir'. These original images are more playful, less final than those that replace them. The revisions emphasise the melancholy or revolting aspect of the city (the urine, the 'dartre'), and he thus combines the dynamic motion of Baudelaire's kaleidoscope with the *ennui* of Laforgue's.

But regardless of the *spleen/idéal* quality of the images, the overriding impression is one of a dreamlike magic. The pictures Verlaine creates – the 'ville magique', the fireworks, music, carnival atmosphere, and 'féerie' – are in line with the illusory enchantment associated with the magic lantern. Indeed, we might almost imagine that, as with Banville's 'tableaux ingénieux', a sorcerer is at work here, projecting the poem's images. This magical atmosphere that unites the sublime and the grotesque calls to mind Brewster's own description of the kaleidoscopic image, its symmetry a 'magical union of parts'.

At the same time, Verlaine's poem expresses the aspect of the kaleidoscope that is emphasised by Baudelaire and Laforgue alike – its transitory nature. There is very little description in the poem: instead, images are piled up in quick succession, offering themselves briefly to us, swelling before our eyes, before receding and morphing into something new. Verlaine's language is simple, favouring concrete nouns and uncomplicated syntax. The result is that each image – cafes, cats, old women, shepherdesses – lasts a brief moment before it gives way to the next. This is precisely the 'fugitif' and 'transitoire' impression of the kaleidoscope which leads Baudelaire and Laforgue to deem it such an appropriate metaphor for modern life. Moreover, the tenses of the poem contribute to this effect, intermingling the future tense with the present, the perfect, and the present participle. Even in the poem's

grammar, time pushes forward but cannot go too far; the syntax pulls back on itself and, as each image would become new, there is still the trace of the old, the promise that what has once been will be so again. Consider that line 'Un lent réveil après bien des métempsycoses' (l. 7): this is what each new image seems to enact, for metempsychosis is exactly what the poem brings to life, an evolution of an old form into a new, continuation and reconfiguration combined.

Furthermore, this effect is enhanced by the form of the poem. The *rimes embrassées* create a point of heightened similarity in the middle of each stanza, a linguistic reflection like the kaleidoscope's internal mirrors, but one which leads to ever new images. The poem's lines seem to swell and recede again: like the pulsating rhythm of the kaleidoscope, the form twists into images and then twists away again. Nonetheless, while the rhyme is peculiar to each stanza, the repetition of certain phrases ('ce sera', 'au cœur de') means that images leave their traces on future images. The poem expresses both order and symmetry – the rhyme – *and* movement and ephemerality – the progression from one stanza to the next. Throughout 'Kaléidoscope', Verlaine demonstrates the ambiguity of that line 'Les choses seront plus les mêmes qu'autrefois' (l. 8). The implied negative here that is not quite whole (the missing 'ne') leaves us feeling that things will never be the same as before, and yet, at the same time, things will be *more* the same than before.[24]

Verlaine's poem is not about a kaleidoscope, only its title alludes to it, but it demonstrates perfectly the way the nineteenth-century optical device interacted with poetry. Although the kaleidoscope is not the subject matter, it serves as inspiration, both formal and conceptual. Who or what is the kaleidoscope here? For Baudelaire, the poet was a kaleidoscope, while for Laforgue, the reader had to press his eye to the kaleidoscopic lens. In Verlaine's poem, the

[24] Armstrong states: '[The kaleidoscope's] principle is pure atomization abstracted to the furthest degree, endless but unreplicated pattern within endless replication – it creates a glittering, prismatic rearrangement of coloured particles, "never again recurring with the same form and colour"', *Glassworlds*, p. 342.

text itself is shown to be kaleidoscopic, aping the mechanism of the device so as to portray the movements and contortions of modern life.

The Goncourts called for an 'optique nouvelle', a lorgnette through which the purpose and character of literature might be re-evaluated in the light of the numerous scientific and technological developments that occurred throughout the nineteenth century. In diverse ways the poets of the late nineteenth century heard this call. Many types of lenses feature in their writing and, even when certain lenses do not appear, their absence tells us something about how poetry sees itself at this time. Feeling at once threatened and liberated by inventions like the camera and cinematograph, poetry reacts to lenses, assimilating the new ways of seeing afforded by the lens into its own mechanisms. Poetry becomes, in itself, lenticular; its fabric adapts to incorporate the concepts introduced or challenged by new lens technology.

It is difficult to trace a unidirectional train of thought in relation to lenses during this period because old technologies lingered and overlapped with new, and influenced the poetic imagination in a manner that was not chronological. However, throughout poetry's interaction with lenses, the central issue is that of reality and artifice. What do we see when we look through a lens? Nature in all its detail, or pure aesthetic spectacle? Which of these does the text represent? Lenses offer a useful insight into how poetry contends with this question, playing into the debate surrounding mimesis and 'art for art's sake'. A fascination with modernity contributed to this debate and, as painting attempted to reassert itself in the face of photography and cinema, so too did poetry look for its identity. The convergence of visual and written art that began in this period and blossomed in the early days of modernism is the logical result of a literary culture that is obsessed with ways of seeing and being seen.

Chapter Three: Glass Walls

Et une végétation orientale dans une grotte de glace!

(Maeterlinck, 'Hôpital', 1889)[1]

If Paris lost one vitreous architectural phenomenon when Haussmann demolished the arcades, it compensated with an abundance of glass-walled structures that characterised not only the French capital, but the urban landscape across Europe in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As a result of improving production techniques, lowered costs, and an increased focus on spectacle, glass quickly dominated metropolitan architecture.

In the public sphere, it was prominent in the International Exhibitions (variously referred to as 'World's Fairs' or 'Expositions universelles'), with Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace (1851) setting a trend for glass exhibition buildings. Designed to showcase the latest industrial and cultural innovations, the Exhibitions are a product of the same discourse of display and materialism that produced department stores and glazed marketplaces. In this environment, glass moved to the forefront of the public consciousness: its legibility was associated with democracy, and its lustrous allure with a magical exoticism. Transparent but impermeable, glass became the quintessential mark of exhibition culture, the material used to contain both the objects on view and the people viewing them. Moreover, glass was used widely in the construction of train station roofs, where it provided a cost-effective way to illuminate a vast public space during daylight hours. Consequently, glass was indirectly associated with a burgeoning aspiration to travel.

The enthusiasm for glass architecture was equally prevalent in the private domain, where hothouses became staple features of the bourgeois home. Inspired by the numerous winter gardens built in cities across France, as well as the more educationally-orientated Jardin des Plantes, middle-class consumers installed hothouses of varied design in their homes. A similar trend occurred in Belgium: in 1855, *Le Magasin pittoresque* remarks that Belgium and

[1] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ed. Paul Gorceix, 3 vols (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1999), i, p. 74.

Holland are the countries 'où l'on rencontre les serres les plus nombreuses, les plus vastes et les mieux tenues. La seule ville de Gand, avec sa banlieue, en compte au-delà de cinq cents'.[2] The Belgian love for the hothouse culminated in the magnificent hothouses at Laeken, built from 1874 onwards for King Léopold II. As the century progressed, hothouses served less as horticultural tools than as enclosed social environments for showcasing wealth and class. The marine equivalent of the hothouse, the aquarium, was also popular and owes its existence to new technologies for transporting aquatic creatures from distant locations. Like the hothouse, the aquarium responded to a growing fascination with exotic flora and fauna, encouraged by the horticultural displays at the International Exhibitions.

Glass was key to all these structures because it was quick to assemble (and disassemble), it transmitted light and enclosed heat, thereby providing a form of climate control, its glittering appearance represented a modern age in which mysticism and industry converged, and it simultaneously questioned and asserted the boundary between public and private. Glass structures allowed conflicting ideologies and impressions to coexist, prompting dialogues between: legibility and obscurity; democracy and hierarchy; nature and artifice; chaos and order; nurture and disease; and shelter and suffocation. Above all, nineteenth-century architecture prized the material for its inherent contradictions.

It is the ambiguity of glass that is transposed onto late-nineteenth-century poetry. While many of the poets with whom we are concerned produced articles about the Exhibitions, references to these events are scarce in their poetry. What is remarkable, however, is a pronounced shift towards a more vitreous landscape. This poetry addresses the conceptual issues raised by the Exhibitions but does so in the quieter, less commercial milieu of the hothouse and aquarium. The more isolated, individual, domestic atmosphere of the hothouse becomes an emblem of both gratuitous Decadent artifice and *fin-de-siècle* creative anxiety.

*

[2] *Le Magasin pittoresque*, ed. Édouard Charton (23 April 1855), p. 122.

Exposition: Sujet de délire du XIXe siècle.

(Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, 1850-79)[3]

Sous une voûte de cristal, au feu protecteur des calorifères, le jardin d'hiver a fait naître et prospérer les riches fleurs qui parent l'Oregon et le Rio de Janeiro.

(Edmond Texier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1852)[4]

Although national exhibitions had been a trend since the late eighteenth century,[5] it was not until 1851 that relaxed trade regulations allowed for the first *international* exhibition, which took place in Paxton's famous Crystal Palace in London.[6] Paxton's design was inspired by his work on the conservatory at Chatsworth,[7] and incorporated 300,000 glass plates but, despite its enormous dimensions (1851 feet long), construction was completed within seventeen weeks using prefabricated and standardised materials.[8] The building demonstrates the two principal advantages of glass architecture: it can be assembled and disassembled rapidly, and it reduces the need for artificial lighting.

By the time the Crystal Palace was envisioned, glass architecture was already popular among Paxton's contemporaries: John Claudius Loudon designed several high-profile conservatories in England throughout the first half of the century;[9] Charles Rohault de Fleury installed large-scale hothouses in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in the 1830s, which Paxton visited in 1834;[10] and Hector Horeau produced the glass-covered Château des Fleurs in Paris

---

[3] Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, ed. Lea Caminiti (Napoli: Liguori; Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1966), p. 78.

[4] Edmond Texier, *Tableau de Paris*, 2 vols (Paris: Paulin et Le Chevalier, 1852-3), i, p. 9.

[5] When François de Neufchateau became Interior Minister, he organised the first French national industrial exhibition in 1798. There were ten further exhibitions between 1798 and 1849. See Bernard Marrey and Jean-Pierre Monnet, *La Grande Histoire des serres & des jardins d'hiver: France 1780-1900* (Paris: Graphite, 1984), p. 65.

[6] See Erik Mattie, *World's Fairs* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 8.

[7] Paxton built Chatsworth Conservatory between 1836 and 1840, using mostly glass and iron. See Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, p. 157.

[8] Mattie, *World's Fairs*, p. 12.

[9] Armstrong (*Glassworlds*, pp. 167-188) establishes an antithetical relationship between Loudon's glass democracy, which emancipated the working class, and Paxton's glass populism, which exploited a society of the spectacle for profit.

[10] See Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, pp. 35-37 and Armstrong, *Glassworlds*, p. 183.

in 1847, described by Gautier as ‘vraiment féerique’,[11] and the winter garden in Lyon, which was celebrated in the French press.[12] Furthermore, glass roofs were common in other mid-century public spaces in Paris, such as the marketplace Les Halles, and major train stations including the Gare de l’Est and Saint Lazare.

Whereas in the past, glass architecture had facilitated horticultural activity, now it became more socially-orientated: winter gardens, plant-filled glass buildings where people socialised and enjoyed refreshments, were particularly popular.[13] Among other cities, Paris, Lyon, and Bordeaux boasted elaborate *jardins d’hiver*, oases of flora within the urban environment. These buildings were partly designed to meet practical needs: when Horeau planned a network of glass-covered boulevards across Paris it was in an effort to combat the weather and ease commercial circulation:

> Considérant que la poussière, le vent, la pluie, la neige, le verglas [...] paralysent le commerce, [...] on propose de couvrir le boulevard par une vitrine n’entravant pas sensiblement la circulation de l’air [...].[14]

However, the winter gardens were not merely functional: they also embodied a mystical exoticism, a fairylike abundance of foliage. Hugo’s description of the first winter garden on the Champs-Élysées (1846), which welcomed 40,000 visitors a month, reveals this:

> Quand on y entrait, l’œil se fermait dans l’éblouissement d’un flot de lumière; […] on distinguait toutes sortes de fleurs magnifiques et d’arbres étranges [...] comme dans une forêt vierge. Du reste, il n’y avait là de vierge que la forêt. Les plus jolies femmes et les plus belles filles de Paris, en toilettes de bal, tourbillonnaient dans cette illumination [...].
>
> Au-dessus de cette cohue parée, resplendissait un monstrueux lustre de cuivre, [...] qui laissait pendre sur la foule son feuillage de clartés et d’étincelles. [...]
>
> Mais ce qui donnait au Jardin d’Hiver une figure à part, c’est [...] une grotte d’ombre et de mystère [...] où l’on voyait un jet d’eau se dissoudre en brume de diamants. [...] Au milieu des arbres des satyres, des nymphes toutes nues, des hydres, toutes sortes de

[11] Théophile Gautier, *Histoire de l’art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6 vols (Paris: Hetzel, 1859), v, p. 126.

[12] See Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, pp. 47-49.

[13] ‘Jardins des plantes’, which focussed less on socialising and more on cultivation and horticultural education, were also increasingly popular: large examples include the botanical gardens of Paris, Montpellier, Cherbourg, and Nantes. See Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, pp. 82-97.

[14] Quoted by Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, p. 49. This project was never realised because of economic constraints.

groupes et de statues, qui avaient, tous ensemble, comme le lieu même où on les voyait, je ne sais quoi d'impossible et je ne sais quoi de vivant.[15]

The cultural importance of the winter garden resembles that of the department store and the Exhibition building: these vast public leisure spaces were the milieu of the crowd; there, fashions were showcased and a fascination with spectacle was nourished.[16] In the winter garden, the tension between seeing and being seen, first experienced in the arcades, was perpetuated by the glass walls and canopy, which created a space that was neither wholly inside nor out.

Paxton's Crystal Palace, then, was just one among many glass structures that proliferated during this period. Yet, perhaps because it was the most extreme example of a totalising glass architecture, it dominated in the cultural and literary imagination of the second half of the century. Glass continued to be used widely in Exhibition buildings: aiming to match the glittering splendour of the London Exhibition, Paris produced the glass-roofed Palais de l'Industrie (1855), which was later replaced by the equally vitreous Grand Palais (1897).[17] Even those Exhibition buildings which favoured glass less (the concentric oval building of the 1867 Exhibition and the stone Palais du Trocadéro of the 1878 Exhibition) featured extensive glazed areas.[18] Nonetheless, the memory of Paxton's creation haunts all subsequent International Exhibitions, as Verlaine, writing in 1890, states:

> Il n'y a dans toute l'histoire presque demi-centenaire des expositions universelles internationales [...] que deux réussites complètement satisfaisantes. Et ce sont, *namely*, le Crystal Palace de Sydenham, imposant et léger, […] tel un château de Shakespeare, féerique dans une apothéose de fraîche verdure et de collines toutes gracieuses, et ce tubalcaïnesque Palais des Machines de notre quatre-vingt-neuf.[19]

---

[15] Victor Hugo, *Choses vues: souvenirs, journaux, cahiers, 1830-1885*, ed. Hubert Juin (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 682.

[16] Armstrong comments: 'the winter garden offers an ideal artificial world, a protected world of nurture that is the twin of the commodified glass boulevard', *Glassworlds*, p. 158.

[17] The Palais de l'Industrie was described as 'Paxton en dur.' See Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, p. 66.

[18] See Mattie, *World's Fairs*, p. 48 and p. 24.

[19] Paul Verlaine, 'La Décoration et l'art industriel à l'Exposition de 1889', *L'Artiste* (November 1890), 321-327, pp. 323-324 [Verlaine's emphasis].

The Crystal Palace, the most memorable example of public glass architecture, shaped late-nineteenth-century culture. It set the trend for regarding glass buildings as representative of numerous, often conflicting, ideologies, which were absorbed by literature and reproduced in new settings and distorted forms.

On the one hand, glass walls represented a move towards democracy: uniting people from different classes in a single, transparent environment, the Exhibitions and winter gardens seemingly abolished social hierarchy. Yet on the other hand, there was an imperial quality to them: Prince Albert was instrumental in arranging the 1851 Exhibition,[20] and in France the 1855 and 1867 Exhibitions were organised under the auspices of Napoléon III. As Anne Green shows, these Exhibitions were designed to demonstrate a facade of political and economic stability, 'a showcase for the aims of the new Empire and an expression of a new national and imperial identity'.[21] The Exhibitions at once promoted and undermined the democratic impulse. Green also notes that the Exhibitions were simultaneously seen as a marker of the new and a continuation of the old.[22] Indeed, many industrial and technological inventions were debuted at the Exhibitions, and the buildings themselves were symbols of cutting-edge modernity.[23] Likewise, exotic fauna was first showcased to the public in the Jardin des Plantes. Glass buildings were therefore a site of novelty, the public's first encounter with the latest innovations and discoveries. However, the Exhibitions were also presented as a prolongation of the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality, and were even sometimes aligned with ancient civilisation.[24] A tension between novelty and tradition is also

---

[20] Prince Albert outlined four categories of exhibited items: raw materials, manufactured products, machines, and applied arts. See Mattie, *World's Fairs*, p. 17.

[21] Green, *Changing France*, pp. 5-6.

[22] Green, *Changing France*, pp. 6-8.

[23] See Mattie (*World's Fairs*). Novelties exhibited included: artificial limbs, reinforced concrete, and the hydraulic elevator at the 1867 Exhibition (p. 19); electric lighting in 1878 (p. 43); the phonograph in 1889 (p. 75); and escalators, panoramic movies, and the Olympic Games in 1900 (p. 102).

[24] Green, *Changing France*, pp. 6-8. The concentric oval design of the 1867 Exhibition invited comparison with the Roman Coliseum.

a recurring theme in the poetry of this period: as we shall see, it goes to the heart of the Decadent glass poetics of Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, and Laforgue.

The Exhibitions were also an intersection of industry and art. Although they were originally conceived as purely industrial (the 1851 Exhibition was entitled 'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations'), fine arts were introduced at the 1855 Paris Exhibition and thereafter art was included as a category in its own right.[25] Exhibitions became at once utilitarian sites for displaying industry, and places of aesthetic supremacy, showcasing the finest arts. Moreover, the buildings themselves were aesthetically innovative while nonetheless serving a social use. A similar dichotomy exists in the relationship between the educationally-orientated Jardin des Plantes and the leisure-based winter gardens. The relationship between social engagement and art is embodied in the glass environment.

Finally, glass structures were locations in which commerce and mysticality coexisted. As we have seen, glass was already a commercial emblem in the arcades, department stores and glazed marketplaces, and this was amplified in the Exhibitions, where commodities were elevated in the public eye. The Exhibitions, with their transparent shells, were exaggerated versions of the glass display cases they housed and, as such, blurred the lines between subject and object. Tied in with the increased exposure to commodities is a greater emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, both in the Exhibitions, where a vast and eclectic array of objects was arranged in an ordered layout, and in the Jardin des Plantes, where flora was categorised meticulously.[26] Exhibition catalogues were popular texts, and almost became a genre in their own right, feeding the desire to discover and categorise the material world.[27] Glass buildings, which appeared transparent and therefore knowable, complemented this process.

---

[25] For detail on the introduction of fine arts to the 1855 Exhibition, see Green, *Changing France*, p. 6 and p. 13.

[26] Armstrong argues that the 1851 Exhibition contributed to a growing interest in taxonomy, see *Glassworlds*, pp. 192-198.

[27] See Green, *Changing France*, p. 20.

However, despite their transparency, glass walls also connoted mystery. Hugo and Verlaine are not alone in likening these buildings to fairylike crystal grottos: in the winter gardens, in particular, the abundance of exotic foliage contributed to the air of magical enigma. While the Exhibitions promoted industry and technology, the winter gardens accentuated nature and disarray, a realm beyond human control: as mankind asserted itself over nature, nature invaded the city. Consequently, glass architecture was associated with contradictory ideologies: mystery and knowledge, disorder and order, nature and artifice, and material reality and mythical imagination. Glass, perhaps because it is itself so liminal, at once present but invisible, by turns transparent and opaque, moving from liquid to solid, lent itself to conflicting perspectives and encouraged antagonisms.[28]

Certainly, these structures made a literary impact. In his *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle*, Philippe Hamon studies the way exhibition culture shaped the nineteenth-century text. Hamon traces a parallel between an interest in the glass architecture of the Exhibition buildings and exposition as a literary technique, commenting that the nineteenth-century novel, like an exhibition, categorises objects and resembles a storehouse of the material world.[29] He argues that there is a superficial link between mimesis and transparent glass walls, but that in fact literature subverts this by over-exposing, thereby depriving signs of meaning and creating 'déflation sémantique', a lack of legibility where exhibition value replaces true meaning.[30] Hamon's persuasive study is exhaustive where the novel is concerned, but he touches on poetry only lightly. That he privileges the novel is unsurprising given that the expositionary technique and storehouse mentality barely manifest in the poetry of this period. Indeed, in 1855, Ernest Renan commented that the recent

[28] Armstrong states: 'glass culture met with and created contradiction. These antagonistic readings *were* the meaning of the Exhibition' (*Glassworlds*, p. 169), while Green observes that the national identity promoted by Second-Empire Exhibitions 'absorbed paradoxes, instabilities and contradictions' (*Changing France*, p. 8).

[29] Hamon states that Realism 'veut "exposer" exhaustivement les articulations "discrètes" d'un monde conçu comme un "magasin" de documents', p. 52. He identifies several glass architectural features that resonate with the nineteenth-century literary imagination: windows; stained-glass windows; shop windows; and mirrors (see *Expositions*, pp. 40-41).

[30] Hamon, *Expositions*, p. 124.

Exhibition had happened 'sans rien dire à l'imagination et sans produire une strophe digne de mémoire.'[31]

However, poets in the second half of the century were not oblivious to the Exhibitions: a number of them wrote accounts of the Exhibitions for contemporary periodicals, in which they discuss many of the concerns I have outlined. Some, like Verhaeren, embrace the wonder of the Exhibitions whole-heartedly. Verhaeren's account for *Mercure de France* of the 1900 Exhibition testifies to the event's awesome and bold modernity: 'C'est le grandiose, le puissant, l'immense qui nous doit séduire. C'est la jeunesse dans la force, l'audace, et même la folie qui nous doit tenter.'[32] Here, we might discern an early trace of Futurist rhetoric, with its celebration of power and innovation:[33] the 1900 Exhibition, heralding a new century, was one where modernity and progress were particularly feted.

However, other poets reacted more ambivalently. Baudelaire, for example, writing about the 1855 Exhibition, comments on 'l'idée d'ordre et de hiérarchie' embodied in 'cette belle Exposition, si variée dans ses éléments, si inquiétante par sa variété'.[34] Baudelaire's reaction to this, the first Parisian International Exhibition, reveals a concern with order and classification, and a simultaneous celebration and fear of diversity, which recurred throughout reactions to later Exhibitions. Baudelaire emphasises too the mystical exoticism of this Exhibition, focussing particularly on the Oriental products he sees: he imagines that, faced with 'un produit chinois, produit étrange, bizarre, contourné dans sa forme' the spectator 'opère en lui-même une transformation qui tient du mystère, et que, par un phénomène de la volonté agissant sur l'imagination, il apprenne de lui-même à participer au milieu qui a donné naissance à cette floraison insolite'.[35] Baudelaire's fascination with the strangeness of the

[31] Ernest Renan, *Essais de morale et de critique* (Paris: Michel Levy, 1859), p. 354.
[32] Émile Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Paul Aron, 2 vols (Brussels: Archives et Musée de la littérature; Labor, 1997), ii, p. 767.
[33] Castiglione makes this argument in 'A Futurist before Futurism', pp. 109-110.
[34] Baudelaire, *OC*, ii, p. 575 and p. 579.
[35] Baudelaire, *OC*, ii, p. 576.

exotic, and his acknowledgement of its influence on the imagination, is an early symptom of a Decadent mentality which other writers will develop later in the century.

Mallarmé, whose review of the 1871 London Exhibition in the Royal Albert Hall, like Baudelaire's piece, emphasises the event's scope and eclecticism, comments on the building's structural features, drawing his reader's attention towards the glazed roof:

> Levez les yeux maintenant, s'il vous plaît.
> Ne trouvez-vous pas une analogie certaine entre l'architecture de féerie qui retient votre regard, dans ce moment, et ce parterre oriental et multicolore?
> […] Nous nous croirions aux temps où le potier ninivite ou babylonien construisait, seul, les palais, si la brume transparente […] ne laissait étinceler une toiture toute moderne et industrielle, réminiscence des palais de cristal et de fer inaugurés presque à cette même place, en 1851, à l'occasion de la première Exposition.[36]

Mallarmé, like Verlaine, attributes a fairylike quality to this building which, nonetheless is the product and symbol of industrial modernity. Yet, despite his positive appraisal of the building, Mallarmé's remarks about the collection housed therein are tempered by an underlying disquiet about artistic progress:

> toute invention ayant cessé, dans les arts décoratifs, à la fin du siècle dernier, le rôle critique de notre siècle est de collectionner les formes usuelles et curieuses nées de la Fantaisie de chaque peuple et de chaque époque.[37]

While he is referring to decorative art, Mallarmé's assertion also holds true for poetry (we will examine the relationship between poetry and décor in Chapter Four). His words are symptomatic of an anxiety about the future of creativity that informed the Decadent movement a decade later. The notion that aesthetic potential has been exhausted and the contemporary artist can merely collect the works of the past is one that Mallarmé had touched upon in 'Brise marine' (1866), which begins: 'La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres.'[38] In this poem he longs to set sail toward 'une exotique nature', and, in an early draft,

---

[36] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 383.
[37] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 385.
[38] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 15.

refers to ‘la blancheur stérile sous la lampe’.[39] Here, the dialogue between the exhausted sterility of the poet’s situation and an imagined exoticism, which might prove more creatively fertile, plays out in a microcosm of what was to become a dominant theme in late-nineteenth-century poetry. Mallarmé’s return to this theme in the Exhibition environment, enclosed by the glass roof he has admired, is an early example of how glass architecture provokes meditation on this opposition.

Mallarmé is not alone in finding the volume of items collected at the Exhibition troubling. For all the wonder expressed by poets like Verhaeren, others remain uneasy. Verlaine and Coppée, for example, mock the new Exhibition culture of ‘marvels’ in their satirical *Qui veut des merveilles?*. Meanwhile, Henri de Régnier is less circumspect when he assesses the 1889 Exhibition for *La Vogue*. Régnier acknowledges the wonder of the Exhibitions but ultimately criticises them on these grounds:

> Les artistes peuvent s’amuser de ces Exhibitions fragmentaires, et garder intacte la source de rêverie dont elles sont quelques perles perdues, mais l’âme des gens va en tirer un complément de sécheresse.
>
> En agissant ainsi, on délivre l’âme bourgeoise du préservateur mystère qui l’inquiétait encore, savoir qu’en dehors de lui il existait de l’inconnu sous une forme quelconque, mais maintenant comment lui persuader qu’il n’a pas tout vu et qu’il n’est vraiment le centre du monde?[40]

Régnier illustrates why poets of his generation, while engaged with the Exhibitions socially, hardly broached the subject in their poetry. He dislikes the Exhibitions because they provided the bourgeois consumer with too much knowledge, removing the mystery of the unknown and hindering the appetite for discovery. This is why Exhibition poetry is scarce: the quality Hamon identifies in the exhibition mentality, the ‘storehouse’ method of writing apparent in the novel, encyclopaedic in its descriptions and enumerations – its ‘exposition’ – is far from the poetry of suggestion favoured by Régnier and his circle. The Exhibitions, by virtue of the

[39] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 122.
[40] Henri de Régnier, ‘Spectacles en plein air’, *La Vogue* (August 1889), 157-160, p. 160.

very universality and vastness which rendered them appealing to contemporary novelists, held little creative interest for poets.

Paul Valéry reaffirms Régnier's position in his essays, 'Présentation du "Musée de la littérature"' and 'Un problème d'exposition' (1937). Valéry acknowledges the comprehensiveness of Exhibitions, which aim to make visible the material world:

> Le problème général d'une Exposition est de faire voir: il consiste à assembler, à mettre en évidence et en valeur ce qui est ordinairement dispersé, retiré, réservé à quelques-uns, peu accessible, et pour beaucoup, véritablement inconnu. […] Une machine, une statue, un meuble, une espèce sélectionnée, tout ceci est visible et le problème de les exposer n'est qu'une affaire de choix et de mise en ordre et en place.[41]

Although he is writing well into the twentieth century, Valéry, heir to the Symbolist tradition, articulates a reaction to the Exhibitions that had been developing for some sixty years. Like Régnier, he is discouraged by the Exhibition's *raison d'être*, believing that in exhibiting the unknown, making it knowable, humanity ceases its intellectual interaction with the world. Valéry states that 'l'esprit, puissance originale de transformation, ne se révèle que par l'ordre ou le désordre qu'il introduit dans le monde des choses sensibles':[42] in imposing order, the Exhibitions revoke intellectual agency.

Moreover, Valéry claims, there is little place for literature in an Exhibition context, for literature is *invisible*. 'Quoi de plus abstrait que l'activité littéraire? Que faire voir?' he asks, and indeed, the question of abstraction and invisibility is key to the Symbolist dilemma. Valéry compares literature to other, more obviously useful, disciplines, stating that in science, for example, 'le travail intellectuel aboutit toujours à des actes […] qui s'effectuent au moyen de techniques instrumentales […]. Tout ceci peut se faire devant le public.'[43] Consequently, science is valued because public opinion is 'dominée par la considération de l'utilité immédiate.'[44] Literature, on the other hand, faces 'le paradoxe de faire voir ce qui n'existe

---

[41] Paul Valéry, *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 287.
[42] Valéry, *Regards*, p. 287.
[43] Valéry, *Regards*, p. 288.
[44] Valéry, *Regards*, p. 292.

que par l'esprit et dans l'esprit.'[45] Valéry summarises the aversion late-nineteenth-century poets felt towards the Exhibitions: first, the over-signification of the Exhibitions, the plethora of objects on display, does not suit Symbolism, which rejects classification and the direct view; second, that the Exhibitions privilege functional phenomena (science, technology, industry) is contrary to the Decadent poetics Valéry inherits, which celebrate uselessness, excess, and aesthetics. Exhibitions are not natural material for late-nineteenth-century poetry. Therefore, when these poets *do* address this subject they do so in their journalism because the expositionary nature of the press is more appropriate: socially, these poets engage with Exhibition culture, but poetically, they keep their distance.

Nevertheless, while the Exhibitions are not direct source material, the glass architecture which they epitomise resonates throughout the poetic landscape of the period. An early example is Baudelaire's 'Rêve parisien', which appeared in *La Revue contemporaine* in 1860, five years after the first Paris Exhibition in the glass-walled Palais de l'Industrie. In this poem, Baudelaire describes an urban dream scene:

Le sommeil est plein de miracles! 5
[…]

Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades,
C'était un palais infini
Plein de bassins et de cascades 15
Tombant dans l'or mat ou bruni;

Et des cataractes pesantes,
Comme des rideaux de cristal
Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
À des murailles de métal. 20

Non d'arbres, mais de colonnades
Les étangs dormants s'entouraient
Où de gigantesques naïades,
Comme des femmes, se miraient.

[…]

C'étaient des pierres inouïes
Et des flots magiques, c'étaient 30
D'immenses glaces éblouies

[45] Valéry, *Regards*, p. 294.

Par tout ce qu'elles reflétaient!

Insouciants et taciturnes,
Des Ganges, dans le firmament,
Versaient le trésor de leurs urnes 35
Dans des gouffres de diamant.

Architecte de mes féeries,
Je faisais, à ma volonté,
Sous un tunnel de pierreries
Passer un océan dompté; 40

Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
Dans le rayon cristallisé.

[…]

En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis
Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme, 55
La pointe des soucis maudits;

La pendule aux accents funèbres
Sonnait brutalement midi,
Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
Sur le triste monde engourdi.[46] 60

Baudelaire's vocabulary brings to mind the Crystal Palace and its Parisian counterpart; not only does he refer to the imaginary structure as a 'palais' (l. 14) but the poem is peppered with vitreous images – the crystal curtain, reflective pools, diamonds, and mirrors. Furthermore, Baudelaire associates these images with a similar fairylike magic to that evoked in Hugo's description of the winter garden, Verlaine's assessment of the Crystal Palace, and Mallarmé's article on the Albert Hall. Despite its prevalence in modern industry, glass retains a mythical quality, which may explain why, although the Exhibitions themselves rarely feature in this poetry, the structures housing them were an inspiration.

What they inspire, however, is not the transparent, legible mimesis associated with the glass walls of Realist fiction; in Baudelaire's poem, glass is associated with a dream

[46] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, pp. 101-103.

landscape which resists modern reality and takes refuge in the imagination. When the speaker awakens he is confronted with a world far from that which he pictured, but the glass he evokes is central not to his reality, but rather to his dream world. In fact, 'residues of a dreamworld' is precisely how Benjamin characterises nineteenth-century arcades, Exhibition halls, and panoramas when he identifies this period as transitory:

> In the nineteenth century [the development of the forces of production] worked to emancipate the forms of construction from art […]. A start is made with architecture as engineered construction. Then comes the reproduction of nature as photography. The creation of fantasy prepares to become practical as commercial art. Literature submits to montage in the feuilleton. All these products are on the point of entering the market as commodities. But they linger on the threshold. From this epoch derive the arcades and *intérieurs*, the exhibition halls and panoramas. They are residues of a dreamworld.[47]

It is striking how many of the threshold items Benjamin names depend on glass technology: Exhibition halls, the arcades, photography. The liminal nature of glass, which encourages dualities and ambiguities, makes it an apt component of threshold objects. Baudelaire demonstrates that the dominant assumption that glass symbolises industrial progress can be resisted or subverted, and that the material is equally associated with myth, dream, and uncertainty. Glass may be a marker of change, but it is also refuge from change.

As we have seen, during the period when Baudelaire was writing, Haussmann renovated Paris radically, a fact which Baudelaire lamented.[48] In this poem, the glass-filled dream offers protection from these changes. 'Real' Paris is seen only at the end (ll. 53-60), and instead the artist's oneiric vision is overlaid on the city to depict a Paris that exists within his mind. Baudelaire links a glass world, such as he would have witnessed first in the arcades and then in the Exhibitions, to the imagination, and the glass structure he portrays acts as a shelter, foreshadowing the way Decadent poets would later find shelter in hothouses and aquariums.

---

[47] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 13.

[48] Sima Godfrey illustrates this in 'From Memory Lane to Memory Boulevard: Paris change!', *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), 158-171.

In his defence of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Barbey d'Aurevilly identifies Baudelaire as a precursor to Decadence, who celebrates the materiality of poetry:

> l'auteur des *Fleurs du mal* [...] est lui-même une fleur du mal venue dans les serres chaudes d'une décadence. [...] C'est un de ces matérialistes raffinés et ambitieux qui ne conçoivent guère qu'une perfection matérielle; […] le plus profond des sensualistes, et enragé de n'être que cela, l'auteur des *Fleurs du mal* [...] se replie sur la langue et passe ses fureurs sur elle. Figurez-vous cette langue, plus plastique encore que poétique, maniée et taillée comme le bronze et la pierre, et où la phrase a des enroulements et des cannelures [...] qui prend les formes les plus variées comme les prendrait un cristal [...].[49]

For Barbey, Baudelaire's language has the physicality of metal or stone but can mutate into diverse shapes, crystalline in texture and in its refractive ability. Furthermore, Barbey aligns Baudelaire's poetic development with the hothouse which, he asserts, is the forcing house of Decadence. Perhaps accidentally, Barbey touches upon an image that later became a poetic trope as Decadence became increasingly associated with glass structures.

Whether or not Baudelaire had the glass Exhibition halls in mind when he wrote 'Rêve parisien', the increasingly vitreous architecture of the city had a marked effect on his poetry: he at once drew inspiration from the Exhibition halls and resisted them, transforming them into his own dream world. Benjamin, extending his comment about the 'residues of a dream world', states that 'Every epoch […] not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening.'[50] Baudelaire's poem of a dream landscape precipitates the poetry that will follow him; it is one in which the Decadence outlined by Barbey matures, and the dialectic of the glass wall – at once shelter and trap, nursery and forcing-house – is ruminated over in the stiller, private atmosphere of the domestic hothouse and aquarium.

*

Domestic hothouses were both precursors to and products of the public glass architecture we have examined. Hothouses existed in more or less rudimentary forms for centuries before the

---

[49] Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, '*Les Fleurs du mal* par M. Charles Baudelaire' (24 July 1857), in Baudelaire *OC*, i, pp. 1194-1195.

[50] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 13.

International Exhibitions, in answer to the botanical need to counter the changeable European seasons. While the first orangeries simply sheltered plants from frost, hothouses gradually became more sophisticated, incorporating glass walls and roofs. Throughout its history, the hothouse has had a dual function: first, scientific, nurturing plants for medical purposes; second, ornamental, constituting a decorative addendum to the house.

Like other facets of glass culture, hothouses tread an uneasy line between aristocracy and democracy. Among the most prominent and ostentatious early hothouses were those built at Versailles for Louis XIV, and for the next century, hothouses continued to be the privilege of the wealthy, who could afford the glass to construct the buildings and the plants housed therein. However, this changed with the Revolution, when hothouses became part of a conscious effort to produce more on French soil, rather than importing goods. In May 1794, Deputy Grégoire asked the National Convention for large hothouses in which to grow over eight hundred new species of plant imported into France. Grégoire ambitiously claims that 'La France est située de manière à devenir […] l'abrégé de tous les climats et l'entrepôt de l'Europe.'[51] Hothouses, then, were a matter of economic policy and national identity, and at the turn of the nineteenth century they were slowly becoming a more bourgeois trend. This trend was boosted by the growing urban population: Paris saw its population double in the first half of the century to just over a million and, with the growing suburbs, by the 1880s this figure had doubled again.[52] Consequently, gardens became scarce as land was built on for housing. Hothouses, an intermediate space between inside and outside, offered a compromise and a source of greenery. However, the popularisation of hothouses can also, to an extent, be attributed to public glass structures: first, the winter gardens, where the public first experienced exotic flora, encouraged domestic hothouses; then the Exhibitions, where hothouses were display items, brought small hothouses to public attention.

[51] Henri Grégoire, *Rapport fait au nom des comités des finances, des domaines et d'instruction publique, par Grégoire. Séance du 11 prairial, l'an deuxième de la République* (L'Imprimerie nationale, 1794), p. 2.

[52] Marrey, *La Grande Histoire*, pp. 52-53.

Similarly, the Exhibitions showcased early public aquariums, and at both the 1867 and 1878 Exhibitions visitors walked beneath glass ceilings above which swam fish.[53] The incorporation of aquariums in Exhibitions was part of a wider vogue: after early marine biologists such as Anna Thynne and Philip Henry Gosse experimented with glass to transport and contain ocean life, the household aquarium developed into an object of entertainment for the middle-class consumer, and by the mid 1850s it was a commonplace in the domestic interior.[54] Equally, the vast public aquariums that became popular attractions across Europe were the marine equivalents of the winter gardens, places of spectacle and intrigue. As with hothouses, the obsession with aquariums operated in both public and private contexts, and testifies to the prominence of glass walls in an increasing culture of display.

Both the nineteenth-century hothouse and the aquarium owe their development to Nathaniel Ward, who first used sealed glass containers to transport ferns in the 1830s.[55] Ward's discovery that glass could maintain delicate microclimates transformed the study of fauna and flora, allowing exotic plants and marine animals to be transported internationally. His method inspired the development of the hothouse and aquarium alike, as the full potential of glass as a means of climate control was recognised. Ward's studies, as well as the expansion of biological study into environments like the Jardin des Plantes, meant that glass structures were initially associated with science, and even those private individuals who owned such structures – mostly the aristocracy initially – were interested in botany and marine biology.[56]

As the century progressed, the purpose of these glass structures shifted from the educational towards the social. Aquariums became associated with leisure and escapism, providing interaction with an exotic world removed from reality. Hothouses, meanwhile, were

---

[53] Bernd Brunner, *The Ocean at Home: An Illustrated History of the Aquarium*, trans. Ashley Marc (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 109.

[54] See Brunner, *Ocean at Home*, pp. 35-57.

[55] Brunner, *Ocean at Home*, p. 30.

[56] Marrey details the early private owners of hothouses, *La Grande Histoire*, pp. 54-63.

used almost solely for social gatherings, as an extension of the house, and by the late nineteenth century most middle-class houses boasted a hothouse. Writing in 1883 for *La Revue horticole*, Édouard André states: 'La mode charmante d'annexer des jardins d'hiver aux habitations prend une extension croissante. […] Ce qui était autrefois une luxueuse exception, réservée aux demeures opulentes, est devenu le complément obligé de toute résidence un peu confortable.'[57]

This was true not only in Paris but throughout northern Europe and, as we have noted, Belgium had a particularly astonishing number of hothouses. The most extravagant example was the plethora of hothouses built for King Léopold II at his palace in Laeken. While there had been an orangery and hothouse at this site since 1859, in the 1870s Léopold expanded the network of hothouses until it covered nearly five acres and included specialist houses for specific plants such as palms, orchids, and azaleas. There was also a Congo house, reflecting Belgium's colonial interests, and even a hothouse chapel in which religious services were held![58] The hothouses at Laeken are the culmination of glass culture, drawing on a tradition of glass and iron construction that can be traced through the arcades to the department stores, train stations, and Exhibition halls and finally to the individual glass house.

This period of intense vitrification coincides with one of busy literary activity in France and Belgium alike. As we noted in the Introduction, Naturalism was developing in prose fiction and, meanwhile in poetry, partly as a reaction against Naturalism, Decadence was beginning to emerge.[59] In the 1880s, the decadent quality Barbey identified in Baudelaire's

---

[57] Édouard André, 'Serre-Galerie', *La Revue horticole* (1883), pp. 159-160.

[58] See May Woods and Arete Swartz Warren, *Glass houses: a history of greenhouses, orangeries and conservatories* (London: Aurum, 1990), pp. 154-155.

[59] Anatole Baju, founder of *Le Décadent* magazine, states that Decadence was a reaction against '"cette littérature vénale, stérile et terre à terre où s'illustre Zola, et qui fait les délices du bourgeois sans âme"'. Quoted by Richard, *Le mouvement décadent*, p. 34. However, the distinction between Decadence and Naturalism is not this straightfoward, for the two movements shared many concerns – the decline of civilisation, the body and disease, the adoption of specialised scientific terminology – and might be considered differently formulated reactions to universal social and literary circumstances. Moreover, some of Naturalism's most lauded texts betray the symptoms of Decadence – *La Curée*, for example – and the quintessentially Decadent novel, *A rebours,* was written by a Naturalist protégé, Huysmans. Baju's claim, therefore, should be treated with caution, and without forgetting that Baju himself was a divisive figure who did not speak for Decadence as a whole, in so far as it ever existed *as* a whole. For a detailed history of Baju's career, see Richard, *Le Mouvement décadent*.

Fleurs du mal was taken up by writers who saw Barbey and Baudelaire as forerunners to their movement.[60] The poets who are most interested in glass architecture span the grey area between Decadence and Symbolism, and it is proof of the versatility of glass that it encapsulates the concerns of both movements. The texts in which glass walls are most prominent are Laforgue's 'L'Aquarium', Verhaeren's 'L'Aquarium', Rodenbach's 'Aquarium mental', and Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*. We begin with the most Decadent of these – Laforgue's 'L'Aquarium' (1886). As we move through the later 1880s and early 1890s, the mood becomes less Decadent but the legacies of 'Decadence' can still be traced in the more 'Symbolist' poetry of Rodenbach, whose 'Aquarium mental' was published in 1896.

This topic has been studied before and it has been acknowledged that the hothouse and aquarium are recurring Decadent images.[61] Here, I see these structures as a response to discourses set in motion by the wider glass culture of the period. I focus particularly on how glass as a *material* contributed to the importance of these structures in the Decadent mentality: not merely because it enabled the functions of the hothouse and aquarium – as nursery, forcing-house, viewing arena, etc. – but also because the liminality of glass shapes Decadent concerns. The parallels between hothouses, aquariums, and Exhibitions, both structurally and conceptually, ultimately affect late-nineteenth-century writers' explorations of poetic form and linguistic decline and regeneration.

We have seen that Decadence and Symbolism, besides contradicting and complementing one another, are full of contradictions within themselves, and it is striking how many of those contradictions map conceptually onto those of the International Exhibitions. Questions of national identity and exoticism, nature and artifice, consumerism, taxonomy (the Exhibitions' ordered displays, the Decadents' glossary), enclosure – both protective and claustrophobic –

[60] Pierrot identifies Baudelaire as a Decadent forerunner. See *L'Imaginaire décadent*, pp. 36-38. Barbey, who contributed to *Le Décadent,* was greatly admired by Baju, as Richard outlines, *Le Mouvement décadent*, pp. 81-83.

[61] See, for example: Michael Riffaterre, 'Traits décadents dans la poésie de Maeterlinck', *La Production du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979); and Jourde, *L'Alcool du silence*.

the role of the arts, mass production, elitism, ancient fallen civilisations, and creative renewal were common to both contemporary poetry and Exhibition culture. Yet, as we have noted, Exhibitions rarely provide direct poetic material: instead, the themes they generate are transferred to a milieu which structurally resembles the Exhibition halls – the hothouse and aquarium. In these buildings, stasis, humidity and lethargy encounter the grotesque and exotic; thirst for the new is tempered by anxiety about the old; and this poetry finds its architectural counterpart.

First to explore this analogy was Laforgue, whose text 'L'Aquarium' appeared in *La Vogue* in 1886, and was later revised and incorporated into 'Salomé', published in *Moralités légendaires* two years later. The description of the aquarium in 'Salomé' is almost identical to the earlier version but is embedded in the third-person fictional narrative, whereas the early first-person version is presented as personal anecdote. I will discuss the early version as its description of the aquarium is more detailed.

Laforgue's fascination with the aquarium probably stemmed from the five years he spent in Berlin, where he visited the popular Berliner Aquarium, which, like the International Exhibitions and the Jardin des Plantes, combined public entertainment with education, serving as a research hub for marine biologists.[62] Its architecture was striking: there were no windows (the only light came from overhead or gas lighting) and the structure resembled a natural grotto, hewn from rock brought in from German mountains.[63] Something of this darkness and mystery flavours Laforgue's description:

> Connais-tu le pays où fleurit le Silence? C'est un franc d'entrée […].
> Labyrinthe style de grottes, à patibulaires becs de gaz aux voûtes, corridors partis à droite, à gauche du vitré lumineux des compartiments sous-marins, – c'est l'Aquarium tournoyant dans son tous-les-jours de cave que scande de temps en temps, seul, le piston de la machine hydraulique, – c'est l'Aquarium où l'on assiste aux dessous les plus vierges, aux scènes d'intérieur les plus perdues du monde en question, – silence! comme dans une

[62] Harro Strehlow gives a brief history of the Berlin Aquarium in 'Zoos and Aquariums of Berlin' in *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. R.J. Hoage and William A. Deiss (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 63-72, p. 69.

[63] Brunner, *Ocean at Home*, p. 110.

> chambre de malade, l'honorable compagnie, c'est l'Aquarium que nous verrons un jour élevé à la hauteur d'une institution d'utilité publique.
>
> Des landes à dolmens incrustés de joailleries visqueuses, – des cirques de gradins basaltiques […].
>
> Et des champs d'éponges, d'éponges en débris de poumons, des cultures de truffes en velours orange, et tout un cimetière de mollusques nacrés, et ces précieuses plantations d'asperges tuméfiées et confites dans l'alcool du Silence… […].
>
> Et des migrations à la bonne aventure des nuclœus hirsutes, cils en houppe autour d'une matrice qu'ils éventent dans l'ennui des longs voyages…
>
> Et ces puits bien à part, gynécées plus perdus, laboratoires d'expériences plus mystérieuses, où flottent en ascensions, oh! elles vont se déchirer! des bulles peut-être enceintes, des bulles de gélatine bleuâtre contractées d'un même et perpétuel spasme diaphane…
>
> J'en passe et des meilleurs.
>
> Mais enfin, et à perte de vue, des prairies, des prairies émaillées d'actinies blanches, d'oignons gras à point, de bulbes à muqueuses violettes, de bouts de tripes égarés là, et ma foi s'y refaisant une existence, de moignons dont les antennes clignent au corail d'en face, de mille verrues sans but apparent; – toute une flore fœtale et claustrale, agitant vibratile […].[1]

Laforgue exults in the bizarre, listing vivid images in clause upon clause, his sentence structure as fluid as the water he evokes. His description resembles Hugo's account of the winter garden – a grotto where light and shadow interplay, vegetation thrives, and an air of mystery prevails. There is an exoticism to the aquarium: described as a 'pays' and a 'monde', it figures as a foreign land. The passion for the exotic is a symptom of the Decadent insistence on renewal, which Laforgue himself expressed (in the context of visual art): 'notre idéal appliqué […] est fondé à ne préconiser d'autre objectif en général que: du nouveau, du nouveau, indéfiniment du nouveau'.[2] Laforgue's desire for novelty is met in the contorted and unfamiliar shapes and colours of the aquarium's inhabitants. The glass walls are a vessel for the strange, the route to the unknowable.[3] By contrast, Laforgue describes departing the

[1] All quotations from 'L'Aquarium' are in Laforgue, *OC*, ii, pp. 501-503.

[2] Laforgue, *OC*, iii, p. 342.

[3] A common reading of the aquarium trope sees it as analogous to the Unconscious, the glass walls enclosing the subject and prompting an examination of the aspects of himself of which he is unaware. Jourde (*L'Alcool du silence*, pp. 165-169) sees the Decadent aquarium as a space of limits, which represents 'le monde de la psyché'. Paul Gorceix similarly claims that the aquarium in Rodenbach's poetry 'devient l'image archétypale de la subconscience', *Georges Rodenbach (1855-1898)* (Paris: Champion, 2006), p. 175. Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophie de l'inconscient*, which was translated into French in 1877, popularised the notion of the Unconscious, a pre-Freudian understanding of human existence as governed by processes of which we are unaware. For detailed analysis of Laforgue's response to Hartmann, see: Daniel Grojnowski, *Jules Laforgue et l'originalité* (Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1988), pp. 27-39; Madeleine Guy, 'Jules Laforgue, Hartmann and

structure as 's'en aller au grand jour boueux, frileux, fiacreux, muflueux, cagneux, catarrheux, véreux et belliqueux de 1886!'. The present outside the aquarium is unpleasant and without beauty: only within the aquarium is the imagination stimulated.

Laforgue's text exploits the ambiguity of the glass wall as both barrier and access point between exterior and interior. Ostensibly, the speaker appears to be outside the aquarium: he describes the arrival and departure process; he addresses the underwater world in the second person ('ô villégiatures sous-marines'); and he states: 'vous êtes dans le sous-marin, et nous, nous déssechons de fringales supra-terrestres; voilà la différence'. Laforgue emphasises the distinction between the landscape of the aquarium and the external world. Moreover, while those external to the aquarium are alert to this distinction, the marine creatures are blissfully unaware of what lies beyond the glass walls, for those walls dull their senses. The speaker, looking in, asks: 'Et pourquoi les antennes de nos sens, à nous, ne sont-elles pas bornées par le Silence et l'Opaque et l'Aveugle?' The aquarium protects what is internal to it, allowing it to flourish: its inhabitants become 'un *monde de satisfaits*'.

However, Laforgue's text is so invested in the aquarium's world that he almost seems to identify with it. The vivid imagery and first-person perspective lend the speaker's description an immediacy which aligns him with the aquatic creatures, rather than simply observing them. Furthermore, there are parallels between the aquarium world and our own. Laforgue evokes architectural construction ('un cimetière de mollusques', 'plantations d'asperges', 'de chaotiques arcs de Triomphes'), so that the aquarium's strangeness is rendered human. Finally, he alludes to the possibility of switching places with the aquarium's inhabitants: 'je sais qu'allez me dire, amis aplatissant vos nez sensuels à ces vitres. Oui, comme on se met à leur place'.[4] Consequently, the line between interior and exterior blurs, the two becoming

Schopenhauer: From Influence to Rewriting', *Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature*, ed. Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 58-70; and Roger Pearson, 'The Voice of the Unconscious: Laforgue and the Poet as Lawgiver', *Dix-Neuf*, 20:1 (February 2016), 125-144.

[4] The image of a nose flat against the glass is reminiscent of the poetic figure at his window – a figure which occurs, as we have seen, in the work of Gautier, Baudelaire, Rodenbach, and most memorably, in Mallarmé's

interchangeable: the ‘ennui’ experienced by the marine life might equally be applied to 1886; the ‘monde de satisfaits’ might just as well designate middle-class society at the time.

The ambiguity of the aquarium wall sits well with the climate of contradictions characteristic of Exhibition culture and Decadence alike. The poetry of this period is essentially ambivalent. Laforgue’s ‘L’Aquarium’, a hybrid text, is formally ambivalent: as prose poetry, it hovers between two poetic forms.[5] Furthermore, Laforgue’s description of the aquarium occasionally includes poetic terminology (‘enjambé’, ‘impair’),[6] revealing that he is, in fact, talking about poetry itself. That Laforgue expresses a desire to change places with the aquarium’s inhabitants and be inside the structure, therefore points towards a poetry based on interiority, which takes itself as its subject matter. Inside the aquarium, poetry roves its fertile landscape, finding novelty and imaginative inspiration, and revolting against the old. As for the reader, the fact that we are addressed directly (‘connais-tu […]?’) draws us too into the aquarium’s interior world, further exploiting the simultaneity of perspective afforded by the glass wall.

Life in the aquarium moves at a different speed from outside the water: time ceases to be quantifiable, the seasons are erased (‘Ni jour, ni nuit, ni hiver, ni printemps, ni été, ni automne et autres girouettes’), and silence dominates. While certain senses are stimulated, others are dulled by the environment, the glass deadening sound, and the shadows clouding vision. The juxtaposition of silence and sound (the hydraulic piston’s rhythmical chant), and of vision and blindness, is reflective of the Decadent interest in the *clair-obscur*, which we have encountered in Rodenbach’s window poetry. The growing concern with clarity, fed by the

---

‘Les Fenêtres’ (an association strengthened by Laforgue’s comparison of the aquarium to ‘une chambre de malade’).

[5] Clive Scott examines innovative poetic form in Decadence in ‘The Poetry of Symbolism and Decadence’, *Symbolism, Decadence and the* Fin de Siècle: *French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 57-71. He states: ‘The *impair* is a verse form which hangs equivocally between Decadent and Symbolist functions. […] culturally, the *impair* represented scumbled outlines, evaporating shapes, elusive proportions’, p. 65.

[6] Verlaine’s ‘Art poétique’, in which he declares: ‘De la musique avant toute chose,/ Et pour cela préfère l’Impair’, was published in *Jadis et naguère* (1884).

classification of objects and the surfeit of signs at the International Exhibitions, encouraged writers to reflect on the delicate balance between clarity and obscurity that poetry must strike. This contradiction appears in miniature in Laforgue's text. There is a messiness to the aquarium scene: it is labyrinthine with corridors branching in every direction, images blossoming at all angles, and even a sense of decadent destruction in the 'chaotiques arcs de Triomphe désertés'. Nonetheless, a sense of control undermines this fervour, suggested by a laboratory, a 'phalanstère' (Fourier's organised utopian community), and the aquarium's potential as a public utility. The aquarium is not purely a Decadent space of imagination: it has a potential function, whether to provide a public service or as material for scientific research.

Moreover, there is a precision to Laforgue's language that belies the apparent chaos of the scene and complements the strangeness of the imagery. His vocabulary is specialised, his labelling of marine life accurate ('actinies', 'mollusques', 'limules'), his architectural descriptions specific ('dolmens', 'gradins'). This is typical of the Decadent tendency to use rare terminology in an effort to regenerate language, as we saw in the Introduction.[7] Laforgue's poetic method, as evident in 'L'Aquarium', demonstrates this effort, as well as the reason why this effort may have, paradoxically, led to accusations of obscurity. Laforgue relishes the aquarium because it combines the taxonomic impulse with creative freedom, constituting an environment in which the imagination and knowledge coexist. As in the Exhibitions, glass is connected to classification and precision – mirrored here in language – but also with chaos and incomprehensibility. The glass walls represent poetic and linguistic boundaries, which are at once asserted and interrogated, as light infiltrates the world of shadows.

[7] In his introduction to the *Petit glossaire,* McGuinness comments that, in Laforgue's work, 'un lexique s'impose, bien que,[…] dans la plupart des cas le sens du mot se laisse deviner à partir de mots trouvables dans les dictionnaires. […] le mot larforguien est ouvertement difficile à reconnaître.', p. xxii. Plowert's glossary quotes Laforgue fifty-seven times.

The interplay between light and shadow is also a predominant feature of Verhaeren's 'L'Aquarium', published in *La Wallonie* in 1890. Verhaeren's imagery resembles Laforgue's:

> Parmi les jardins émeraudés, sur de fragiles pavois de perles, au fond de subites maisons de nacre, aussitôt que construites — disparues, c'est de l'illusion d'or, d'argent, de pourpre, de lunes et de soleils, certes! avec le rien au bout. Mais qu'importe! Le mensonge su, le rêve percé à jour, que charmants à cause de leur fausseté même! Et voici en cette fantasmagorie claire et trompeuse, voici de graciles spectres de naïades balancées en des arcs-en-ciel et des nymphes nées et mortes en l'éclair d'un rai de prisme et des ondines en des niches de saphirs, sur des bouches de fleurs ouvertes, comme des poupées de verre, endormies.[8]

Verhaeren too describes the aquatic world in architectural terms, his descriptions of shape and colour are vivid and exultant, and he even refers to 'les nez aplatis contre les vitres'. Moreover, his language, like Laforgue's, recalls the Hugolian winter garden, with its flowers and nymphs, and Verhaeren alludes to 'les carreaux [du] palais' later in the text.

However, Verhaeren's tone is more measured than Laforgue's, and his poem has a stillness in which the water's fluidity is offset by its monotony. He emphasises somnolence, referring to dreams and sleep, 'siestes longtemps immobiles', and a life which is 'passive et voluptueusement froide'. Whereas Laforgue's cumulative syntax and excitable tone enacted the bizarre, unexpected scene he described, Verhaeren is more deliberate. He states: 'claires et fuyantes ainsi que des soies et des moires, c'est lentes et lentes qu'elles vont, mes pensées.' The assonance, repetition, and delayed subject lend Verhaeren's syntax a drowsy languor, its rhythm sure and unhurried. Perhaps because his text is less narrative than Laforgue's (and it is segmented into four paragraphs, rather than one continuous text), this poem does not possess that same restless movement.

But what is particularly interesting about Verhaeren's poem is that he draws attention to the play of light within the aquarium:

> ce glauque aquarium de mes pensées […]. Bloc d'eau massive, qui s'illustre d'une vie soudaine de lueurs et de pierres. […] quelle agitation de miroirs en cette armoire, où […]

[8] Quotations from Verhaeren's 'L'Aquarium' are from *La Wallonie* (May 1890), pp. 161-162.

les feux réverbérés des lustres et des lampes semblent, depuis des siècles, en des écrins dormir! Sommeils de joyaux les yeux ouverts; fleurs qui brûlez, boréales; longues lumières vaguement vêtues.

The aquarium, which consists of the poet's thoughts, is dark, the lamps dormant, but it is lit by glimmering rocks and flowers which burn like northern lights, the sources of light unfamiliar and ethereal. The *clair-obscur* in Laforgue's poem appears here, but the Decadent obsession with extraordinary vocabulary is absent, making Verhaeren's a more accessible text. He creates unexpected connections between words, requiring the reader to follow his syntax carefully, bouncing between phrases like the light reflected in the 'agitation de miroirs'. The poem is full of parallel constructions and delayed nouns, clauses echoing one another and aligning things unexpectedly. For example, in the passage 'leurs écailles étrangement d'or, leurs nageoires frêles comme des ailes, leurs voyages monotones […], leurs siestes longtemps immobiles […] et toute leur vie passive', 'écaille' is paralleled with 'nageoire', 'voyage', 'siestes' and finally 'vie', in a series of nouns that gradually become bigger and more abstract. Moreover, the abundant vitreous surfaces – 'carreaux', 'vitres', 'cristal', 'prisme' and 'miroirs' – are receptors for light and cast it off into new directions (the prism and mirror do not merely transmit light, but change its course). We might see a parallel between Verhaeren's treatment of language and his depiction of light in the way it highlights different nuances and casts certain things in shadow. 'Glauque' is the buzzword of the period,[9] and the aquarium's depths are murky and obscure, but the glass, transparent, is at odds with this quality. Darkness and light encounter one another, mirroring what language does in this poetry.

Finally, Verhaeren dares to contemplate what the other aquarium poets will not – breaking the glass:

Ainsi vivent-elles mes pensées […], en ce cristal de fluidités nageantes, et telle serait leur existence à tout jamais pavoisée, si l'une d'elles, certes, un jour, fatalement, par

[9] Ezra Pound comments that the nineteenth century 'was "glauque" and "nacre", it had its pet and too-petted adjectives', *Instigations of Ezra Pound* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), p. 92.

> simple désir d'absurdité, ne devait casser la glace d'illusion et de splendeur et, choyante hors du mirage, entraîner toutes les autres sur le trottoir, où de brutales servantes, modèle de propreté et d'ordre, les pousseront à coups de balais vers les égouts infinis.

This is the movement Mallarmé's invalid longs for in 'Les Fenêtres'; it is the rash move of Baudelaire's narrator in 'Le Mauvais vitrier', as we shall see in Chapter Five. Until this moment, Verhaeren's thoughts have been safely enclosed within glass walls, cloistered within the 'mirage'. In breaking the glass, the continuity of the imagination – all the splendour Verhaeren has emphasised – would be ruptured, and the boundary between interior and exterior shattered. Why, then, does the poet contemplate this? It may be because Verhaeren, writing in 1890, was already aware that the Decadent movement was fading and a new poetic era was approaching. Until the final stanza the poem ticks all the Decadent boxes: it is exotic, gratuitous, and artificial (the aquarium's features are charming 'à cause de leur fausseté même!'). The aquarium lives up to its reputation as a Decadent motif. However, the Decadent imagination could not continue indefinitely and was close to rupture, its boundaries broken and spilling over into Symbolism. Verhaeren pre-empts the *fin-de-siècle* crisis by destroying his own creative inheritance. After all, his thoughts, he imagines, would be swept to the infinite sewers and would, presumably, drain back to the sea: imagination coming full circle, the aquarium returning to its origins in nature for replenishment.

But Verhaeren's text does not quite mark the end of aquarium poetry, for Rodenbach produced a late contribution to the trend: the series 'Aquarium mental' (1896). Rodenbach revives the ideas explored by Laforgue and Verhaeren, but does so more reservedly: his poetic figure is hermetic and content to be so. In Rodenbach's aquarium, traces of Decadence linger: he shares with Laforgue the references to exotic flora and fauna, including the anemone ('Végétation fine, herbes, perles, lueurs;/ Et cauteleux poissons doucement remueurs;/ Et gravier supportant quelque rose actinie');[10] the 'rêves craintifs' he describes

[10] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 9.

unfold in a ‘jardin embryonnaire’, suggestive of the Laforguian foetus;[11] the image of the grotto appears again;[12] and, most tellingly, the declaration:

> L'Aquarium les plaint, toutes ces eaux vassales
> Que la vie intéresse, et s’y associant;
> Tandis que lui, de son seul songe, est conscient;
> Il n’a pas d'autre but que ses fêtes mentales
> Et l’anoblissement de l’univers qu’il est;
> Eau de l’Aquarium dont la pâleur miroite,
> – C’est comme si du clair de lune se gelait! –
> Car dans le verre elle s’est close et se tient coite,
> Moins en souci des vains reflets et du réel
> Que d’être ainsi quelque mystère qui scintille
> Et de réaliser ce qu’elle a d’éternel,
> Avec l’orgueil un peu triste d'être inutile![13]

This echoes Oscar Wilde’s famous claim that ‘all art is quite useless’, in the preface to that other Decadent bible, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).[14] The aquarium is glorified because it has no function, it is a space of pure beauty, self-contained and uninterested in the real world. Rodenbach has not abandoned the Decadent motifs, but he finds them less invigorating than Laforgue does, preferring a stiller existence, cloistered within the aquarium.

Indeed, the sense of enclosure is probably the quality Rodenbach’s poetry shares most with the Decadence that surfaced a decade previously. Des Esseintes’ hermeticism is echoed in this series as Rodenbach cherishes the glass walls, which keep his soul ‘si bien à l’abri’.[15] This poetry dramatises the ‘spectacle intérieur’, the mind taking precedence, as the title suggests, over the external world.[16] Life beyond the aquarium walls might as well not exist, for the series is self-contained, the glass itself ‘transi’.[17]

---

[11] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 17.
[12] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 13.
[13] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, pp. 22-23.
[14] Oscar Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 3.
[15] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 13.
[16] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 10.
[17] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 18.

Rodenbach also inherits Verhaeren's fascination with light and shadow in the aquarium and he evokes the *clair-obscur* with particular attention to its relationship with glass:

Eau de l'aquarium, nuit glauque, clair-obscur,
Où passe la pensée en apparences brèves [.][18]

And again:

Quel aquarium glauque apparaît la Mémoire,
En qui les souvenirs, les rêves, le passé
Émergent par moments d'un clair-obscur glacé;
Clairière d'une grotte en deuil![19]

Quietude and shelter are emphasised, and the protective aquarium, which dulls noise (the crystal is 'muet'),[20] allows thoughts and memories to germinate and clarify. Within the 'cristal contigu', the speaker's soul 's'en épure et de plus en plus se clarifie',[21] refined by an environment in which 'tout est solitude et silence'.[22] This purifying process involves rejecting reality and becoming increasingly self-reflexive, as the aquarium water is 'fermée au monde et se possède toute':[23] the glass walls filter out external content, and poetry becomes its own subject matter.

This focus on interiority is an attempt to relocate poetic depth at a time when surface value has overtaken meaning. Rodenbach repeatedly refers to the distinction between surface and depth, praising the aquarium for its profundity:

Ici l'eau n'est pas toute à la vie en surface,
À n'être qu'un écran docile s'imageant...
La voici, recueillie, en sa maison de verre
N'aimant plus que ce qui, dans elle, verdoie, erre
Et lui fait au dedans un Univers meilleur![24]

---

[18] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 7.
[19] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 19.
[20] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 15.
[21] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 13.
[22] Patrick Laude sees Rodenbach's aquarium as a space of purification, its isolation protecting it from contamination. See 'Souls under Glass', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, 113-128.
[23] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 8.
[24] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 10.

Compared to a screen, a flat surface onto which images are only projected, the aquarium's three-dimensionality creates depth, the water looking inwards for meaning. We have seen that some poets lamented that the Exhibitions privileged surface over depth, and that certain technologies popularised flat, two-dimensional images (for instance, photography and the panorama): this move inwards is Rodenbach's answer to an external world which he perceives as lacking depth. Throughout the series, water and glass are contiguous, merging into one another. Referring to water, he states that 'son sort à celui du verre s'est uni',[25] and reiterates:

> Eau de l'aquarium qui, glauque, se limite
> Par des cloisons qui sont un palais exigu;
> Mais le verre est assez glauque pour qu'il l'imite;
> Ainsi l'eau, confondue avec lui, se recule
> Dans un leurre équivoque où chacun s'est accru […].[26]

While the glass container separates water from the world, allowing it to be self-sufficient, it also extends the water, the properties of the material literally mirroring those of the liquid, and vice versa. Each time the water meets the glass, it is reflected back at itself: every limitation is an imitation. As Rodenbach states: 'Rien d'autre ne se mire en ces miroirs sans tain/ Où, seule, elle se fait l'effet d'être plus vaste/ Et de se prolonger soi-même à l'infini!'[27] That idea of a two-way mirror is telling, for it allows external spectators – the reader, perhaps – to see in, but the internal spectator sees only himself, mirrored infinitely. Rodenbach plumbs the depths of the aquarium because he is dissatisfied with the surface of the water. In creating a space of infinite reflection, in which surfaces upon surfaces emerge, and yet, no real surface is ever discernible, he moves towards a new kind of profundity, one that finds meaning not in the external world but in the interiority of poetry itself.

---

[25] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 7.
[26] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, pp. 15-16.
[27] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 7.

*

The most prolonged examination of glass structures is undoubtedly in the work of Rodenbach and Verhaeren's compatriot, Maeterlinck, who ruminates on glass not only in his poetry, but also in his theatrical writing, his essays, and his fiction. In particular, hothouses and aquariums are the principal motifs in his first poetry collection, *Serres chaudes* (1889). Like Rodenbach and Verhaeren, Maeterlinck attended the Collège Sainte-Barbe in Ghent, a town in which, as we have noted, hothouses were especially prolific.[28] But to read a biographical explanation into the recurrence of hothouses in his work would be to ignore the fact that these structures were an existing trait of the literature to which Maeterlinck was heir.

Most notably, hothouses were already associated with Decadence on account of Huysmans' *A rebours* (1884), published two years before the first of *Serres chaudes* appeared in *La Pléiade*.[29] In this seminal novel, hothouses are associated with all the hallmarks of Decadence: literally sealed, they epitomise des Esseintes' desire for a hermetic retreat from the anxieties of Parisian society; they are also the environment in which he experiments with the relationship between nature and artifice; and within which he dwells on the metaphors and vocabulary of disease that would come to be associated with Decadence. In the hothouse, des Esseintes links his beloved exotic plants to sickness:

> la plupart, comme rongées par des syphilis et des lèpres, tendaient des chairs livides, marbrées de roséoles, damassées de dartres; d'autres avaient le ton rose vif des cicatrices qui se ferment.[30]

The plants are emblematic of the pox des Esseintes fears, and he imagines them to be arranged 'ainsi que dans un hôpital, parmi les salles vitrées des serres'.[31] The glass walls of

---

[28] On Maeterlinck's childhood, see W.D. Halls, *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of his Life and Thought* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 1-11.

[29] Maeterlinck published six poems in regular verse in *La Pléiade* in June 1886: 'Reflets', 'Fauves las', Feuillage du cœur', 'Serre d'ennui', 'Le Souvenir', and 'Visions'. To these, he eventually added a further twenty-seven poems, in both regular and free verse, to form *Serres chaudes*.

[30] Huysmans, *A rebours*, p. 125. Hannah Scott has examined glass in another of Huysmans' novels, *En rade*. See 'Vert versus verre: vegetal violence in Huysmans's *En rade*', *French Studies*, 69:3 (July 2015), 305-317.

[31] Huysmans, *A rebours*, p. 120.

the hothouse are aligned with a hospital, their impermeability keeping the disease sealed within an enclosed atmosphere, where it flourishes and starves the patient of oxygen. Maeterlinck's own hothouse texts draw on this image.

The link between glass and Decadence, then, was established by the time *Serres chaudes* was published, and Maeterlinck's collection duly pays homage to this. His poems abound with typical Decadent imagery. On the one hand, vivid, voluptuous botany and heady exoticism recall Zola's incestuous *La Curée* and Huysmans' sensual protagonist:

> Ô les glauques tentations
> Au milieu des ombres mentales,
> Avec leurs flammes végétales
> Et leurs éjaculations
>
> Obscures de tiges obscures,
> Dans le clair de lune du mal,
> Éployant l'ombrage automnal
> De leurs luxurieux augures![32]

And on the other, there are images of sickliness and lethargy:

> Ô serre au milieu des forêts!
> Et vos portes à jamais closes!
> Et tout ce qu'il y a sous votre coupole!
> Et sous mon âme en vos analogies!
>
> Les pensées d'une princesse qui a faim,
> L'ennui d'un matelot dans le désert,
> Une musique de cuivre aux fenêtres des incurables.[33]

In many ways, Maeterlinck's collection epitomises the Decadent sensibility. This becomes even clearer if we consider that, while the young poet was writing his first collection, he was also drafting a novella, *Sous verre* (originally entitled *Dans la serre*), in which the daughter of a gardener conceives a child in a hothouse and later, abandoned by her lover, also takes refuge in a hothouse.[34] Clearly, Maeterlinck is indebted to both Zola and Huysmans in this text

[32] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 65.
[33] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 63.
[34] See Maurice Maeterlinck, *Carnets de travail (1881-1890)*, ed. Fabrice van de Kerckhove, 2 vols (Brussels: Archives & Musée de la Littérature; Labor, 2002), pp. 609-672.

which posits the hothouse as both the scene of an illicit love affair and a refuge from societal pressures. That he wrote this text concurrently with the early poems of *Serres chaudes* suggests a decidedly Decadent influence on the poetry, and the explanation of the hothouse image is more literary than biographical. Indeed, in his influential reading of *Serres chaudes*, Michael Riffaterre argues that the hothouse is a Decadent trope in Maeterlinck's collection, identifying the principal qualities of Decadence as 'désespoir, fatigue morale, ennui, désirs vagues, aspirations sans but précis, mélancolie sans cause déterminée, un dégoût de vivre'.[35]

However, the lethargy of *Serres chaudes* is more than merely a symptom of the Decadent climate: it expresses an attitude towards that climate. The hothouse walls are associated with ennui and melancholy:

Cet ennui bleu comme la serre,
Où l'on voit closes à travers
Les vitrages profonds et verts,
Couvertes de lune et de verre,

Les grandes végétations […].[36]

Je vois des songes dans mes yeux;
Et mon âme enclose sous verre,
Éclairant sa mobile serre,
Affleure les vitrages bleus.

Ô les serres de l'âme tiède,
Les lys contre les verres clos,
Les roseaux éclos sous leurs eaux,
Et tous mes désirs sans remède![37]

Maeterlinck goes through the motions of Decadence, but there is an uneasiness to this collection which suggests his discomfort with the tradition in which he finds himself. Claustrophobia pervades the poetry, particularly in the regular-verse poems, where it is reinforced by the rhyme, end-stopped lines, and assonance. This is not the exultant enclosure

[35] Riffaterre, p. 199.
[36] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, pp. 64-65.
[37] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, pp. 84-85.

of Rodenbach's aquarium, but a profound anxiety with the tropes of Decadence, expressed through the mechanism of those tropes themselves. *Serres chaudes* is full of unsubtle allusions to language and poetry, explicit references to 'analogies' and 'symboles', as well as the heavy-handed stereotypes lifted from the Decadent repertoire. Indeed, as Patrick McGuinness remarks, these poems are 'replete with literary-critical terminology',[38] they are 'a space in which critical metalanguage recasts itself as […] the primary object of study.'[39] These poems are metatextual, engaged in a reading of themselves, and the enclosure depicted is not des Esseintes' comfortable hermeticism, nor Laforgue's creative fertility, but a feeling of entrapment *within* the Decadent tradition. This explains why Maeterlinck stated in a letter to Octave Mirbeau: 'Dans *Serres chaudes*, il n'y a que du Verlaine, du Rimbaud, du Laforgue […] et presque rien de moi-même, sauf peut-être cette sensation de choses qui ne sont pas à leur place.'[40] *Serres chaudes* is less an expression of Decadence than a performance of it, which ultimately comments on the stagnation of the movement itself – the very anxiety Decadence tries to escape. That the first of these poems appeared in 1886, followed by the full collection in 1889, situates *Serres chaudes* right on the borderline between Decadence and Symbolism, when the former was waning and the latter emerging.

Glass is central to the expression of both the claustrophobia Maeterlinck feels within the Decadent tradition, and his liminal position between that movement and Symbolism. We might look to his nature writing, produced much later than *Serres chaudes*, for an illustration of the role glass plays in Maeterlinck's depiction of suffocation and stasis. *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), for example, in which Maeterlinck extols the virtues of the industrious bee, nonetheless comments on the constraints of the glass box in which the creatures are kept:

[38] Patrick McGuinness, 'Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*: Modernism and the Decadent Micro-climate', *La Belgique entre deux siècles: Laboratoire de la modernité 1880-1914*, ed. Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, Patrick McGuinness (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 235-259, p. 235.

[39] McGuinness, 'Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*, p. 239.

[40] Quoted by W.D. Halls, 'Some Aspects of the Relationship between Maeterlinck and Anglo-American Literature', *Annales de la Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck*, 31 vols (Ghent: Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck, 1955-1999), i (1955), 9-25, p. 13.

> [Les abeilles] n’ont jamais eu connaissance de ce mystère surnaturel qu’est pour elles le verre, cette atmosphère subitement impénétrable, qui n’existe pas dans la nature, et l’obstacle et le mystère doivent leur être d’autant plus inadmissibles, d’autant plus incompréhensibles qu’elles sont plus intelligentes.[41]

Bees, which are intelligent and productive creatures, are constrained by their artificial and impermeable glass enclosure. This is precisely the idea illustrated in *Serres chaudes*, where glass walls prevent contact with the exterior world, trapping the poetic soul within. ‘Cloche à plongeur’ (the diving bell a miniature glass enclosure), in which Maeterlinck advises ‘Appuyez votre front aux parois les moins chaudes’, begins with a desperate expression of imprisonment:

> Ô plongeur à jamais sous sa cloche!
> Toute une mer de verre éternellement chaude!
> Toute une vie immobile aux lents pendules verts!
> Et tant d’êtres étranges à travers les parois!
> Et tout attouchement à jamais interdit!
> Lorsqu’il y a tant de vie en l’eau claire au dehors![42]

The lack of enjambement reinforces the sense of enclosure, each line trapped within the parameters of punctuation, enclosed by exclamation marks that have none of Laforgue’s irony. Moreover, the close proximity of ‘verre’ and ‘verts’ gestures towards that absent homophone, ‘vers’, suggesting that the poetry itself is as much an enclosure as the glass structures evoked.

Indeed, it is more useful to read *Serres chaudes* as an enactment of the claustrophobia it depicts than as merely the expression of it. The trapped feeling that characterises the collection – so *unlike* the security of the hothouse portrayed by contemporary writers – indicates Maeterlinck’s attitude towards the tradition he inherits. Furthermore, we might conjecture that this trapped feeling is due to the very language in which Maeterlinck writes, and the prosodic conventions to which he adheres, particularly in the early regular-verse

[41] Maurice Maeterlinck, *La Vie des abeilles* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1901), p. 104.
[42] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 78.

poems. As we have noted, glass offered late-nineteenth-century writers a metaphor for the borders between interior and exterior, nature and artifice, decay and regeneration, etc. But for Maeterlinck, another liminality is in play, for he is poised on a linguistic and cultural national frontier, his native Belgium divided between Latin and Germanic influences.[43] Glass aptly figures this predicament and we might recall that the aquarium poetry was written by two other Belgians – Verhaeren and Rodenbach – and that even Laforgue wrote about the aquarium during his time in Berlin, where the influence of both French and German culture must have been felt. As Paul Gorceix has noted, Maeterlinck was acutely aware of the distinction between the two cultures, and it informs his understanding of the nature of Symbolism.[44] In his response to Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891), Maeterlinck conceives of two types of 'symbole':

> Oui, je crois qu'il y a deux sortes de symboles: l'un qu'on pourrait appeler le symbole *a priori*; le symbole de *propos délibéré* […] qui touche bien près à l'allégorie […]. L'autre espèce de symbole serait plutôt inconscient, aurait lieu à l'insu du poète, souvent malgré lui, et irait, presque toujours, bien au-delà de sa pensée […].
>
> Je ne crois pas que l'œuvre puisse naître véritablement du symbole; mais le symbole naît toujours de l'œuvre si celle-ci est viable. L'œuvre née du symbole ne peut être qu'une allégorie, et c'est pourquoi l'esprit latin, ami de l'ordre et de certitude me semble plus enclin à l'allégorie qu'au symbole.[45]

Maeterlinck inherits the literary tradition of French Symbolism/Decadence and, as he stated, his first collection is a nod to the likes of Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Laforgue. But presumably the French school embodied the Latin spirit he identifies as being closer to allegory than to the true 'symbole'. Torn as he was between French and Germanic cultures, it is possible that,

---

[43] Patrick Laude points out that numerous Belgian writers at this time were Flamands writing in French and suggests that the liminality of Belgian Symbolism was integral to the creation of a national aesthetic identity as distinct from French Symbolism. See 'Belgian Symbolism and Belgian Literary Identity' in *Symbolism, Decadence and the* Fin de Siècle, 194-208.

[44] Gorceix aligns the first type of Symbol identified by Maeterlinck with Latin culture, and the second type with the intuitive unconscious embodied in the works of Goethe, Schelling, Schiller, and Novalis. See *Le Symbolisme en Belgique* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1982), pp. 153-156. Patrick McGuinness situates *Serres chaudes* at a turning point in *fin-de-siècle* poetry, recognising the collection's Symbolist roots, but also its status as a precursor to Surrealism. See *Maurice Maeterlinck and The Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 27-33.

[45] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 586 [Maeterlinck's italics].

writing in French, Maeterlinck felt all the limitations of that language and tradition. *Serres chaudes* is a typical, indeed stereotypical, Decadent French collection, and might well have allowed Maeterlinck to explore the first kind of symbol, that is, allegory. Yet, because it is so Latinate, it does not allow the unconscious communication with the universe which would give the poet access to the second *symbole*. We might, as Gorceix has done, see the extreme juxtapositions of the collection as an early attempt to break free of the French tradition and move into a more surreal and mystical literature.[46]

However, this attempt is unsuccessful, and the overarching impression of the collection is one of trapped impotence. Above all, the poetic voice is trapped linguistically, the very language in which Maeterlinck writes proving an obstacle to the effect he seeks. The hothouse embodies this, its glass walls representing a barrier to the world, which is visible but untouchable. We recall the desperate exclamation in 'Cloche à plongeur': 'Et tant d'êtres étranges à travers les parois!/ Et tout attouchement à jamais interdit!'. Later in the poem, Maeterlinck warns: 'Attention! voici les langues en flamme du Gulf-Stream!'[47] – it is surely impossible not to read this as an allusion to the Flemish language ('flamand', a 'langue en flamme') which competes against the French in which Maeterlinck writes.

Nonetheless, it is this claustrophobia – literary, cultural, and linguistic – that ultimately redeems *Serres chaudes*, for the very feeling of enclosure is a source of creativity for Maeterlinck at this early stage in his career. Unable to reach that second *symbole* (when *Serres chaudes* was published Maeterlinck had yet to articulate his theory to Huret), he is limited to the first kind, which he has witnessed in the work of his fellow Decadents. Trapped inside, the poetic voice turns inwards for inspiration, becoming its own subject matter. In exploring its own status as enclosed, his poetry becomes self-reflexive: the glass traps the

[46] Gorceix characterises these juxtapositions as 'les vertiges de l'analogie', claiming that Maeterlinck rejects Baudelaire's notion of 'correspondances', and creates an effect of shock, which surpasses referential language. Gorceix states that Maeterlinck aims to 'suggérer, par l'image dégagée de sa détermination rationnelle et de ses références logiques, ce qui n'est précisément pas accessible à l'entendement.' *Maurice Maeterlinck: Le Symbolisme de la différence* (Saint-Pierre-du-Mont: Eurédit, 2000), p. 74.

[47] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 78.

verse and reflects it back, forcing it to use itself as poetic material. Maeterlinck reveals the stagnant state poetry is in, but this stagnation becomes the source of rejuvenation, the *fin-de-siècle* crisis turned on its head. In a way, *Serres chaudes* is a failure because it epitomises Decadence and this is what denies its access to the true symbol, which remains beyond the glass barrier, untouchable: however, the failure is harnessed and channelled towards new growth. This ambivalence recurs in Maeterlinck's work. In 'Tentations', growth is 'sacrilège' and 'morne comme les regrets/ Des malades sur de la neige',[48] and much later, he dwells on the 'héroïque et tragique beauté' which characterises the fertilisation of Vallisneria (eelgrass), where the male plant must die for reproduction to occur.[49] Growth is painful, accompanied by regret; survival and suffocation are two sides of the same coin. This bifurcation explains Maeterlinck's particular attachment to the hothouse because duality is embedded in its nature, at once forcing house and nursery, stifling and nurturing.

Some forty years later in his essay 'L'Araignée de verre' (1932), Maeterlinck describes his first interactions with nature, as a child in his family garden. The poet recalls seeing the Argyronète or 'Diving bell spider' contained in a glass jar. This spider needs oxygen to survive and cannot breathe underwater but is forced to go underwater in search of food, so it spins an air bubble, a diving bell, around itself, allowing it to breathe below the surface. Maeterlinck explains:

> Ainsi prise entre deux morts, la mort par l'asphyxie ou par la faim, [l'araignée] aurait inventé un appareil dont l'homme ne s'avisa qu'au temps d'Aristote, c'est-à-dire à l'apogée de son intelligence, à savoir la cloche à plongeur […].[50]

For the spider, glass is a means of surviving suffocation. For Maeterlinck too, despite the emphasis on suffocation and inertia in *Serres chaudes*, the glass structure encourages poetic fertility, trapping the poet within a sealed enclosure in which the air is recycled and poetry

---

[48] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 65.
[49] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 404.
[50] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 414.

looks to itself for material. The Decadent movement began amongst and in reaction to accusations of decay which, paradoxically, led to a kind of literary regeneration. Maeterlinck goes a step further, taking the decline of the Decadent movement itself as his subject matter to create a poetry that privileges self-reflexivity.

Chapter Four: Glass Décor

Mon vers est un verre
De Venise, aussi;
[…]
Je l'enfle et le gonfle
En forme de fleur…

(Montesquiou, 'Siffleur', 1895)[1]

The passion for glass which dominated late-nineteenth-century French architecture was equally evident in the bourgeois *interior* during this period. Mirrors, vases, glass cases, perfume bottles, glass jewellery, and the burgeoning Art Nouveau movement all contributed to a décor in which reflections and refractions abounded, and clarity and obscurity were in constant dialogue.

On the one hand, this attention to decoration was the product of the materialist, commercial attitude evident in other aspects of glass culture like the department stores and Exhibition halls. Glassware was integral to the French economy, and glass factories proliferated throughout the century, employing hundreds of workers.[2] From the consumer's perspective, glass artefacts, seen as ornamental and therefore superfluous,[3] signified wealth and an awareness of the latest fashions, as the material enjoyed a renewed popularity during this period. Glass objects, a mark of prosperity, represent a moment when industrial and technological progress entered the domestic environment.

On the other hand, late-nineteenth-century glass objects resist this narrative. Although glass had come to define modern urban spaces of technology and commerce like train stations and marketplaces, interior glass objects instead signal a prioritisation of aesthetics. In a

[1] Robert de Montesquiou, *Œuvres poétiques*, 7 vols (Paris: G. Richard, 1906-1912), iv, p. 283.

[2] For a detailed history of leading nineteenth-century glassworkers and their factories, see Janine Bloch-Dermant, *The Art of French Glass, 1860-1914*, trans. Marian Burleigh-Motley (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), pp. 12-46.

[3] Gordon comments that ornament has traditionally been considered superficial, inessential, and meaningless. See *Ornament*, p. 3.

decorative context, glass – the product of industrial progress – conversely allows art to assert itself against industry, declaring the value of beauty above utility.

For this reason, glass art was frequently represented in late-nineteenth-century poetry, and vice versa, for the glass artists of the period were often inspired by poetry. Glass art encapsulated the very same concerns as poetry: the two arts were mutually informative, developing in tandem towards a new aesthetics. While artists like Gallé sought to imitate the purity of Symbolist poetry, poetry itself became increasingly vitreous – that is to say, occupied with degrees of transparency and opacity, with the passage of light, and with form. Glass offered poets a means to resist time: in a society ever more transitive and rapid, bent on progress, glass connoted preservation after death, a stasis that belied temporality. It was also a focal point for discussion about the role of art in a climate of industrialisation. Poetry and glass gradually converged in a reassertion of aesthetics.

In the 1890s, Art Nouveau prospered, beginning first as an aesthetic movement but later reconciling industry and art.[4] Before this, however, poets had already reached the point where *le vers* and *le verre* became not only homophonous but almost homogenous. Confronted with a 'crise de vers', glass was a way to address that crisis. Glass containers, particularly vases, emerged as the central metaphor for how writing was being re-evaluated at this time. The semi-visible shape around the flower echoes the role of language in shaping the idea: art strives to articulate its aspiration to contain and construct the ideal, ephemeral, and increasingly absent flower.

*

> [C]'était la chose même de la morte, qui avait échappé à la tombe pour dormir d'un meilleur sommeil dans ce cercueil de verre.
>
> (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, 1892)[5]

[4] Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, pp. 113-114.
[5] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 141-142.

Throughout the architectural history of the second half of the nineteenth century, glass roofs and walls were associated with showcasing and materialism: from arcades and department stores to the array of items at the International Exhibitions, to put something behind glass was to objectify it and elevate it to the status of a collectible. The microcosmic equivalent of this mentality was glass museum cases: just as the hothouse encloses and protects the exotic plant, so does the glass box preserve the object within, its sealed atmosphere averting decay. The glass environment resists temporality, the museum existing in a pocket of time where the modern spectator confronts the visible evidence of the past, removed from its historical context. Glass, an emblem of industrial and technological progress, shaped the late-nineteenth-century understanding of modernity, but it also constituted the threshold to the past, impeding direct contact with historic artefacts, yet displaying and preserving them. Moreover, the association of glass with the Exhibitions meant that the material also defied spatial expectations, uniting many nations under a single glazed canopy: the glass roof becomes a universalising factor. Essentially, while this vitreous architecture is a product and symbol of its time, for the nineteenth-century observer glass implied a defiance of temporal and spatial norms.

The temporal aspect of glass is an important reason why vitreous objects are prominent in literature at this time. Perhaps the most explicit instance of this association occurs in *Bruges-la-Morte*, where Hugues enshrines a tress of his dead wife's hair in a glass case:[6]

> le trésor conservé de cette chevelure intégrale qu'il n'avait point voulu enfermer dans quelque tiroir de commode ou quelque coffret obscur – ç'aurait été comme mettre la chevelure dans un tombeau! – aimant mieux, puisqu'elle était toujours vivante, elle, et d'un or sans âge, la laisser étalée et visible comme la portion d'immortalité de son amour!
>
> Pour la voir sans cesse, dans le grand salon toujours le même, cette chevelure qui était encore Elle, il l'avait posée là sur le piano désormais muet, simplement gisante – tresse interrompue, chaîne brisée, câble sauvé du naufrage! Et, pour l'abriter des contaminations, de l'air humide […], il avait eu cette idée, naïve si elle n'eût pas été attendrissante, de la mettre sous verre, écrin transparent, boîte de cristal où reposait la tresse nue qu'il allait chaque jour honorer.

[6] Rodenbach may have been inspired by the box in which his mother kept the hair of dead relatives, which he memorialises in 'Le Coffret' (1879). See Mosley, 'The Soul's Interior Spectacle', pp. 35-36.

Pour lui, […] il apparaissait que cette chevelure […] était l'âme de la maison.[7]

The glass case, protection from contamination, keeps the hair out of reach, contributing to its role as both a quasi-religious and an erotic object, a synecdoche of the female body. On the one hand, the glass fetishises the hair: Hugues becomes fixated on it, worshipping it daily, yet he cannot touch it and, by virtue of its inaccessibility, the hair remains pure in contrast to Jane's overt sexuality. On the other hand, the hair is reminiscent of a saintly relic, the bodily remains which become a site of ritual and are elevated to the status of deity (note the capitalisation of 'Elle'). Therefore, when Jane removes the lid and touches the hair, this is seen as 'la profanation' and 'un sacrilège'.[8] The glass case illustrates the crossover between idol and fetish.

But glass is also protection from time, which takes Hugues ever further from his dead wife. The hair, which is 'sans âge', is a continuation of the past into the present, the reassurance that, after death, his wife 'était toujours présente'.[9] In preventing decay, glass counters the dead woman's absence (already offset by the existence of her living counterpart, Jane) with the continued presence of the hair. The description of the case as a 'cercueil de verre' even suggests a fairy-tale mysticality, where life after death is possible.[10]

Moreover, the glass case represents a microcosm of Bruges: a cloistered anti-Paris, full of reflections and temporally frozen, the city resists urban progress and modernity. Hugues' inhabitation of this timeless city is repetitive and habitual:

> Le jour déclinait, assombrissant les corridors de la grande demeure silencieuse, mettant des écrans de crêpe aux vitres.
>
> Hugues Viane se disposa à sortir, comme il en avait l'habitude quotidienne à la fin des après-midi. Inoccupé, solitaire, il passait toute la journée dans sa chambre, […] dont les fenêtres donnaient sur le quai du Rosaire, au long duquel s'alignait sa maison, mirée dans l'eau.

---

[7] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 61-62.

[8] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 267-268.

[9] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 141-142.

[10] Geneviève Sicotte explores the fairy-tale tradition behind Rodenbach's glass box in 'D'un coffret de verre. Sur quelques sources intertextuelles de *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Le Monde de Rodenbach: études et documents*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand (Brussels: Labor, 1999), 119-134.

Il lisait un peu: des revues, de vieux livres; fumait beaucoup; rêvassait à la croisée ouverte par les temps gris, perdu dans ses souvenirs.[11]

The imperfect tense and present participles establish the city as a place where time is in suspension, unchanging and quotidian, and the past bleeds into the present. At first, Jane appears to represent the continuity of the past, providing a mirror image of the deceased. Eventually, however, her presence disrupts this and, tellingly, she prompts the novel's denouement by opening the glass box:

Tout à coup elle s'arrêta avec un rire sonore.
Elle avait aperçu sur le piano le précieux coffret de verre et, […] soulevant le couvercle, en retira, toute stupéfaite et amusée, la longue chevelure, la déroula, la secoua dans l'air.[12]

The past historic – unusual in this text – underlines the impulsive nature of Jane's action, which is so far from the comforting and timeless routine Hugues normally enjoys. Jane, in penetrating the glass wall, precipitates her own death by means of the very object she has touched – the sacred hair. In Bruges and, on a smaller scale, in the glass box, death confronts life, presence confronts absence: two temporalities collide.

This action also ruptures the fiction within the fiction: at this point, the illusion is broken and the disparity between Jane and the deceased is emphasised. Until this moment, the vitreous surfaces in the novel – the windows and canals – had created layers of reflection, seeming to confirm Jane as the double of Hugues' wife, and corroborating the fiction Hugues creates through her. Their life together is pure artifice, a recreation of something lost that is sustained by Hugues' delusion. Jane, as Hugues conceives of her, is only a product of his imagination and, as her murder demonstrates, she cannot be allowed to exist independently of the identity he creates for her. When the glass cover is removed, this fiction is interrupted and the illusion disintegrates.

[11] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp. 51-52.
[12] Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, p. 267.

Rodenbach's glass box epitomises the fascination glass objects held for *fin-de-siècle* poets: it encloses the feminine, it is temporally resistant, and it aids in the construction of fiction above reality. The dead woman is transfixed and permanent, yet paradoxically absent, her perpetuation a fragile product of the protagonist's psychological routine. The living woman, concrete and present, is paradoxically ephemeral, from her first passing encounter with Hugues, whom she brushes past in a manner recalling Baudelaire's 'A une passante', to her death at his hands. The intersection between permanence and ephemerality, presence and absence, which here provokes the novel's climax, lies at the heart of the nineteenth-century interest in glass objects.

*

Où sont les parfums enivrants des fleurs disparues?
(Baudelaire, 'Du vin et du hachish', 1851)[13]

Rodenbach's 'cercueil de verre' echoes Baudelaire's 1857 poem 'Une martyre', part of the 'Fleurs du mal' section of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Alluding to a 'dessin d'un maître inconnu', Baudelaire describes a room filled with *bibelots*, in which a woman's decapitated body is strewn across a bed, her head on the nightstand. Baudelaire compares this room to a hothouse:

> Dans une chambre tiède où, comme en une serre,
> L'air est dangereux et fatal,
> Où des bouquets mourants dans leurs cercueils de verre
> Exhalent leur soupir final[.][14]

The atmosphere is suffocating, deathly, a clear forerunner to Maeterlinck's hothouse imagery where, similarly, the glass stifles and constricts. Indeed, the vase in Baudelaire's poem resembles a miniature hothouse, but one in which flowers do not blossom but wither and die.

[13] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 386.
[14] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 112. In *La Fanfarlo*, Baudelaire describes the bedroom as a hothouse: 'l'air, chargé de miasmes bizarres, donnait envie d'y mourir lentement comme dans une serre chaude', *OC*, i, p. 576.

‘Une martyre’ offers insight into how poetry was to be reconsidered during the second half of the century. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire anticipates a new understanding of poetry to which glass would prove essential: this understanding sees the conventional analogy between poetry and flowers shift to one between poetry and the vessels that once contained these flowers and now hold their lingering scent – their poetic essence captured in perfume. ‘Une martyre’, a poem which features literal ‘fleurs du mal’, is doubly labelled as such, by both the collection title and that of its respective section. Baudelaire draws on a long tradition of associating flowers with poetry. As Philip Knight explains, this tradition is almost as old as literature itself, for the analogy between poems and flowers was established in the Classical period, and even the etymology of the word ‘anthology’ (from the ancient Greek ‘anthos’ (flower) and ‘logia’ (collection)) reflects this association.[15] Baudelaire’s immediate precursors, the Romantics, drew on this long tradition in their own work, and were attracted, in particular, to the flower’s emotive potential, and to the links between flowers and mysticism.[16] Baudelaire inherits an image of the flower as ideal beauty, possessed of a perfection that poetry strives to emulate.

However, Baudelaire ironised this notion, establishing, as Knight explains, a reverse flower poetics, in which the flower is sick and dying, the source of evil and ennui.[17] ‘Une martyre’ is an example of this subversive floral imagery;[18] here, all the vitality of the flower previously associated with poetry becomes a mere hangover of beauty, on the cusp of fading. This irony is doubly emphasised by the reference to the impotent hothouse.

[15] Philip Knight’s *Flower Poetics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) studies the history of the flower-poem analogy, focussing on how Baudelaire reimagined this analogy.

[16] See Knight, *Flower Poetics*, pp. 26-61. Knight observes that, during the Romantic period, ‘a floral tropology of pathos and sentimental idealization [… and] a new literary ideology of the *langage des fleurs*, propos[ed] a privileged participation in nature’s meanings and synaesthetic mysteries’ p. 60.’

[17] Knight states: ‘The flower figures are an image of pieties to be rejected, a sign of contradiction, or an acknowledged or implied absence: they are all flowers of negativity, expressions of Baudelaire’s unprecedentedly subversive irony’ (*Flower Poetics*, p. 81).

[18] A similar impulse to subvert the traditional floral analogy informs des Esseintes’ interest in artificial flowers in *A rebours*, where the unnatural achieves a state of aesthetic perfection which nature must imitate.

This poem represents the moment when the glass vase begins to come into its own. The vase is a unique decorative object because its contents, cut off from their roots, are necessarily dying, already remote from life, yet they also retain the appearance of life. For Baudelaire, who embodies traits of Romanticism but who is hailed as the harbinger of modernity, this ambiguity was appropriate: if flowers had long been a traditional metaphor for poetry, *Les Fleurs du mal* seems to prolong that metaphor, only to reveal its inversion. A collection that appears to uphold the vitality of flower-emulating poetry in fact proclaims the end of poetry as it is known, heralding the death of existing metaphorical lines of thought.

However, it is through this inversion that poetry is renewed – by stating its own exhaustion. Maeterlinck will do this more explicitly in *Serres chaudes* some thirty years later, but Baudelaire takes the first step down this path. The knowing subversion of a traditional metaphor becomes poetry's new life force, and the dying, evil, and artificial are prized above the natural. The reference to a 'cercueil de verre' is important: thanks to the Grimm brothers' *Household Tales*, this is a moment when glass coffins are present in the public consciousness and are associated with preservation and resurrection.[19] The coffin, as we have seen in *Bruges-la-Morte*, does not keep its contents alive, but lends them the appearance of life, suspending them in time, awaiting magical resurrection. At the time Baudelaire is writing, poetry, like the 'bouquets mourants' (note the present participle – this death is an ongoing process), is waiting to be renewed. How, though, can such renewal be achieved?

To begin to answer that question, we might look to another of Baudelaire's recurring glass containers – the *flacon*. This object appears several times in Baudelaire's œuvre, including in

[19] Grimms' tales, frequently republished from 1812 onwards, included 'Little Snow White' and 'The Glass Coffin'. In both tales, beautiful maidens repose in a state of simulated death within glass coffins, until being resurrected by a hero. Alfred de Vigny also includes a coffin-like glass case in his unfinished manuscript *Daphné*. In this text, an Egyptian mummy lies beneath a crystal cover, which preserves its markings. Although written in 1837, *Daphné* was not published until 1912, but the glass case suggests the prominence of glass coffins in the cultural Zeitgeist of the period when it was composed.

'Une martyre', but two instances particularly stand out. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, the verse poem 'Le Flacon' evokes the perfume bottle's reminiscent power:

> II est de forts parfums pour qui toute matière
> Est poreuse. On dirait qu'ils pénètrent le verre.
> […]
>
> Parfois on trouve un vieux flacon qui se souvient,
> D'où jaillit toute vive une âme qui revient.
>
> Mille pensers dormaient, chrysalides funèbres,
> Frémissant doucement dans les lourdes ténèbres, 10
> Qui dégagent leur aile et prennent leur essor,
> Teintés d'azur, glacés de rose, lamés d'or.
>
> Voilà le souvenir enivrant qui voltige
> Dans l'air troublé; les yeux se ferment; le Vertige
> Saisit l'âme vaincue et la pousse à deux mains 15
> Vers un gouffre obscurci de miasmes humains;
>
> Il la terrasse au bord d'un gouffre séculaire,
> Où, Lazare odorant déchirant son suaire,
> Se meut dans son réveil le cadavre spectral
> D'un vieil amour ranci, charmant et sépulcral. 20
>
> Ainsi, quand je serai perdu dans la mémoire
> Des hommes, dans le coin d'une sinistre armoire
> Quand on m'aura jeté, vieux flacon désolé,
> Décrépit, poudreux, sale, abject, visqueux, fêlé,
>
> Je serai ton cercueil, aimable pestilence![20] 25

Baudelaire takes a material that is assumed to be impervious and highlights its porosity. The *flacon* does not merely contain the perfume, but imbibes it, absorbing its essence. The glass becomes redolent, both literally and metaphorically, the scent lingering on the surface, the material evoking the memory of a formerly present substance. Perfume is representative of thought and memory ('Mille pensers dormaient' (l. 9), 'Voilà le souvenir enivrant' (l. 13)): the *flacon* is the key to unlocking the traces of an intellectual and emotional past. But the *flacon* is not a passive object: there is an agency to its action, it is the subject of 'se souvenir'. Moreover, lines 21-23, 'Ainsi, quand je serai perdu dans la mémoire/ […] Quand on m'aura

---

[20] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, pp. 47-48.

jeté, vieux flacon désolé' align the *flacon* and the first-person voice. The poet himself becomes the *flacon*, the empty vessel carrying the trace of what came before.

In fact, this image occurs frequently in Baudelaire's work. Even in his earliest writing, the poet already portrays the artist as a permeable surface, absorbing the aroma of his literary environment. Thus, 'Tous imberbes alors' (c. 1843) claims that, in the context of his literary studies, the poet has 'tout absorbé, les miasmes, les parfums'.[21] And these ideas are again articulated in the more sophisticated offerings of *Les Fleurs du mal*, where the 'Spleen' poem, 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans', states:

> Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,
> Où tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
> Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,
> Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.[22]

While the poet is not the *flacon* here (he is aligned with the room), this perfumed object is a constituent part of the room, which is, itself, invested with myriad memories. Dying flowers appear again, surrounded by the traces of an aesthetic past – outdated fashions and Rococo paintings. Throughout *Les Fleurs du mal*, the glass *flacon* connotes a lingering history, and – given the accompanying references to dying flowers and works of art – we can infer that this is a poetic history. Leaving their mark on the vitreous container are the remnants of a former poetic tradition, the dying, near-evaporated flowers.

Nonetheless, an important counter-movement in 'Le Flacon' is the suggestion that, as the past decays, the *flacon* facilitates resurrection, both of the soul and of poetry itself. The soul 'revient', its return realised by the *flacon*'s act of remembrance, the two verbs ('souvient' and 'revient') connected by the *rimes plates*, for rhyme itself is an act of remembrance. Seized by memory, the soul is thrown into the abyss (l. 16)[23] – the *flacon* precipitating ruin – only to

---

[21] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 207.
[22] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 73.
[23] This image recalls Mallarmé's invalid in 'Les Fenêtres', who similarly contemplates the abyss from his window, his soul an angel with featherless wings. This poem too is concerned with death, renewal, and salvation, as we saw in Chapter One.

become Lazarus (l. 18), a famously resurrected figure. The *flacon*, having absorbed the past, effects poetic renewal. Where once the living flower was poetry in full bloom, now only the remnants of that tradition remain, the lingering scent of the perfume on the glass becoming the source of a new poetry. Baudelaire does not merely subvert the old idea of the poem-cum-flower by filling his collection with *fleurs du mal*: he moves towards the removal of the flower altogether, until only the memory of it remains.

This is why, for Baudelaire, vases and phials are frequently linked to death, memory, and frustrated desire, to an absence that nonetheless contains the suggestion of a once-present thing. Five years after 'Le Flacon', Baudelaire returned to the metaphor in his prose poem, 'Le Chien et le flacon', published in *La Presse* in 1862. In this poem, the speaker invites his canine companion to smell an opened bottle of excellent perfume. The dog, however, recoils, prompting the speaker's exasperation:

> – Ah! misérable chien, si je vous avais offert un paquet d'excréments, vous l'auriez flairé avec délices et peut-être dévoré. Ainsi, vous-même, indigne compagnon de ma triste vie, vous ressemblez au public, à qui il ne faut jamais présenter des parfums délicats qui l'exaspèrent, mais des ordures soigneusement choisies.[24]

Baudelaire outlines an allegory between the exquisite perfume rejected by the public and art, suggesting that the poet is unappreciated by an audience blind to beauty and preoccupied with lower-quality entertainment. However, this allegory is, if anything, too straightforward: by stating explicitly that the dog 'resembles' the public, Baudelaire joins the dots for the reader too easily. The hyperbolic tone suggests an underlying irony, such that, rather than simply demonstrating allegory, the poem mocks the allegorical mechanism by overstating it. Baudelaire claims that the public enjoys inferior art but his heavy-handed allegory simplifies his own poem, essentially turning it into an *example* of inferior art, such as the public might appreciate.

---

[24] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 283.

But what is the role of the *flacon*? The title of the poem suggests that this vessel for perfume is important and yet, the *flacon* does not receive the studied attention granted it in 'Le Flacon'. To fully understand the prose poem, we must read it as a reponse to the earlier verse poem. We have seen in 'Le Flacon' that glass is porous, absorbing the perfume it contains. This perfume is, itself, analogous to Baudelaire's new poetry of the decaying flower: the poetry of perfume is a version of the poem-as-flower trope, where the flower has been replaced by perfume, the product of a conversion from blossom to liquid, which retains a floral essence – the scent – but is physically transformed. Perfume itself is a kind of *fleur du mal*, all the flower's olfactory beauty coming at the price of its visual perfection, beauty wrested from decay. The true significance of the prose poem, then, is that it is, itself, a *flacon* which imbibes and retains something of the verse poem. The 'excellent parfum' contained in this bottle is none other than Baudelaire's own poem in verse, 'Le Flacon' – the true superior art which goes unappreciated by the public – and we might read 'Le Chien et le flacon' as a response to the indictment of *Les Fleurs du mal*. The poetry of the disappearing flower, which we observed in the verse collection, is preserved in the later poem, which illustrates the public's inability to appreciate the new poetics.

Glass containers indicate the direction poetry will take. The vase in 'Une martyre' still holds flowers, but they are dying, awaiting renewal. Rather than injecting life into these flowers, poetry seeks an alternative renewal by eradicating them, leaving behind the empty container, on which the perfume of a former poetry lingers. Baudelaire does not make this move definitively, for the flowers in his poetry – and therefore his poetry itself – are only beginning to fade, and their energy derives, paradoxically, from this process. Later poets go further in lauding the emptiness of the glass container, the disappearance of content which leaves behind a trace of itself – the idea of a flower. In turn, this emptying out draws attention to the shape and texture of the glass itself. These poets take their cue from Mallarmé, whose

evocation of glass objects informs and illustrates the dialogue between words and silence, shaping a new poetics which privileges language above content, signifier above signified.

Like Baudelaire, Mallarmé often has recourse to floral imagery, which inevitably provokes a meditation on reality and the ideal, the flowers representing an ambiguous image halfway between presence and absence, life and death. This dichotomy spans Mallarmé's career: we see an early iteration of it in 'Renouveau', where the pain of the blossoming lilacs is associated with the at-once comforting and disquieting sterility of early Mallarmé.[25] And later, it is rendered more explicit in 'Prose (pour des Esseintes)', a poem which simultaneously questions and affirms the existence of a flower-filled world, and marks the shift towards a Mallarmé interested in verbal polysemy and ludic self-awareness.[26] For Mallarmé, flowers are the quintessential metaphor for poetic creation, and for confirmation of this we need only look to his famous statement in 'Crise de vers':

> Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets.[27]

The absent flower represents a new poetry of suggestion, the gesture towards the idea of something, rather than the thing itself. The referentiality of language is questioned and the object evoked arises from the absence of a rigid link between word and object, signifier and signified, and existing purely in ideal form. Moreover, if we follow the flower-poem logic dictated by tradition, this ideal flower is also poetry itself, the 'absente de tous bouquets' being formed by the dissolution of a former poetics of representation. The poem itself 'se lève musicalement' from the very pronouncement of that initial word, 'fleur' – poem. In

[25]'Renouveau' begins: 'Le printemps maladif a chassé tristement/ L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide'. See Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 11.

[26] 'Oui, dans une île que l'air charge/ De vue et non de visions/ Toute fleur s'étalait plus large/ Sans que nous en devisions.', writes Mallarmé in 'Prose (pour des Esseintes)', the flower blossoming independently of the speaker, yet evoked through the speaker's words. See *OC*, i, pp. 28-30.

[27] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 213.

Mallarmé’s declaration of the new poetics, the flower is removed, only the trace of it remaining, the shape of it unlike any previously known form (‘calices sus’).

However, hidden in this statement is the implication of another important Mallarméan metaphor, which again encourages a more self-referential poetry that is interested in the creative act itself, the poem as a wrought object which is valuable in its own right. For, those ‘calices’ suggest not only the flower’s calyxes, but also a chalice: a religious vessel and/or a drinking glass. The shape of the flower is relegated to the ‘oubli’, the idea rising from something other than the ‘calices sus’, but rising, also, from the chalice, which is not the flower itself but nonetheless gives it shape, by sketching the area around the elusive flower. For the poet fascinated by the relationship between patterns and the void – a constellation in the sky, debris amidst the sea foam, intricate lacework – the idea of the flower can only be possible when its absence is thrown into relief by the presence of something other, the (empty) vessel. Furthermore, we can be sure that, for Mallarmé, this vessel would certainly be made of glass, for glass containers recur frequently in his corpus, and it is tempting to hear the latent homophone in the title of the text in which this statement is made as ‘Crise de *verre*’. Mallarmé’s statement shifts the emphasis away from any represented poetic object and onto language itself – the act of enunciation, ‘je dis une fleur’. Poetry becomes pure language, speaking about and through itself at the same time. The form of the chalice is necessary to define the shape of the absent flower, and, being made of glass (‘le verre’), the chalice also suggests verse (‘le vers’); thus the implied chalice of glass evokes poetic form itself, which in turn evokes the flower. A new form of self-reflexive poetry, interested only in the components of its own creative process, is born.

Indeed, it is remarkable how often Mallarmé’s flowers are accompanied by the vessel containing them. ‘Les Fleurs’ (written in 1864), for instance, describes the creation of a number of flowers, before concluding:

Ô Mère, qui créas en ton sein juste et fort,
Calices balançant la future fiole,
De grandes fleurs avec la balsamique Mort
Pour le poëte las que la vie étiole.[28]

As Pearson has commented, this poem 'turns principally on the theme of death and renewal',[29] evoking flowers not as an initial act of creation but as one of *re*-creation, a theme reinforced by the poem's Christian imagery. Furthermore, Mallarmé is interested not only in the flowers' visual appearance but also in their scent, which is implicit in the incense alluded to, and in the 'balsamique Mort' – the healing aroma of plants counteracting death and resurrecting the withered poet. The ghost of Baudelaire's 'Le Flacon' haunts these images: the dying poet, resurrected by the perfume of the disappearing flower.

But we should also note the reference to the 'future fiole', a glass container yet to exist but brought into existence by this very enunciation, and which will ultimately house the dead flowers. Indeed, the death of the flowers – themselves risen from death – is foreshadowed in the opening stanza by the lines: 'Jadis tu détachas les grands calices […]'. Even as the poem begins, with an act of renewal, the flowers are cut off, the calyxes picked. Yet, as the poem closes, these same calyxes are evoked again, this time with a view to their future environment – the *fiole*. The phial, by virtue of the fact that it is 'future' does not yet exist, and yet its existence was latent throughout the poem and, as with Baudelaire's poem, this glass receptacle plays a role in the resurrection of poetry and the poet himself. 'Les Fleurs' anticipates the more explicit acknowledgement of the glass vase which will come with 'Surgi de la croupe et du bond': indeed, similar motifs appear in both poems, such as the 'col' and the 'mère'. But, where this poem celebrates those motifs – the neck is 'fin', the 'Mère', Mother (Nature), is a fertile sign of strength – by the time we reach the later sonnet, the neck,

[28] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 11.
[29] Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé*, p. 54.

this time of the vase, will stop short in its upwards motion, and the kiss between the mother and her lover will not happen.

Already in his early career, then, we see Mallarmé begin to associate flowers with glass containers, these appearing together as he ruminates on creation and demise, sterility and fertility. In fact, we might note a similar metaphor in 'Hérodiade', for the Nourrice offers to dress Hérodiade's hair, asking: 'Sinon la myrrhe gaie en ses bouteilles closes,/ De l'essence ravie aux vieillesses de roses/ Voulez-vous, mon enfant, essayer la vertu/ Funèbre?'[30] As with Baudelaire, the flowers are no longer living things of beauty, but are distilled into their essence, contained in closed bottles, which Hérodiade refuses. Moreover, Mallarmé's princess is herself a 'triste fleur' who refuses to bloom for any purpose other than self-fulfilment ('c'est pour moi […] que je fleuris, déserte!' she exclaims),[31] echoing 'Les Fleurs', which alludes to 'la rose/ Cruelle, Hérodiade en fleur du jardin clair'.[32] She is surrounded and defined by her own glass walls, the mirror which 'reflète en son calme dormant/ Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant…'.[33] Hérodiade is floral, encapsulating the early Mallarméan anxiety of fertility explored in 'Renouveau', but pointing towards the later poetics of the absent flower, defined by the space around it: she is, herself, a flower in a chalice (indeed, she refers to the 'calices' of her robes).

This interest in the symbiosis of flowers and glass containers recurs throughout Mallarmé's career. A light-hearted example is the quatrain in 'Autres dons du nouvel an':

Ta lèvre contre le cristal
Gorgée à gorgée y compose
Le souvenir pourpre et vital
De la moins éphémère rose.[34]

---

[30] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 18.
[31] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 21.
[32] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 10.
[33] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 21.
[34] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 297.

Destined for Méry Laurent and accompanied by the note ‘avec un verre d’eau/ Noël 1895’, this whimsical poem echoes both ‘Crise de vers’ and ‘Surgi de la croupe’. Not only does it unite the flower and the crystal container, but it also explicitly connects these objects and memory, described as ‘vital’. Méry’s mouth is the memory (of a flower) which is essential to life, perhaps even *lifelike*. And yet memory, by definition, is a thing of the past, no longer living but the reminder of what once was. Presence and absence are united in a kiss of Méry’s lips against the glass – itself, we might imagine, a ‘naïf baiser’ not dissimilar to that evoked in ‘Surgi de la croupe’. The tangibility of this rose, in stark contrast to the absent flower of ‘Crise de vers’, is at once a self-conscious and ludic nod towards Mallarmé’s earlier claims about flowers, and an expression of irony: for, while Méry’s mouth appears to be present and *un*ephemeral, the very act of sending a written communication implies a distance between speaker and addressee – the rose may be more ephemeral than we first imagined.

Yet, the most ephemeral flower in Mallarmé’s work is surely that of the sonnet ‘Surgi de la croupe’, the poet’s most prolonged celebration of the glass container:

Surgi de la croupe et du bond
D’une verrerie éphémère
Sans fleurir la veillée amère
Le col ignoré s'interrompt.

Je crois bien que deux bouches n’ont
Bu, ni son amant ni ma mère,
Jamais à la même Chimère,
Moi, sylphe de ce froid plafond!

Le pur vase d’aucun breuvage
Que l’inexhaustible veuvage
Agonise mais ne consent,

Naïf baiser des plus funèbres!
A rien expirer annonçant
Une rose dans les ténèbres.[35]

[35] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 42.

This poem, part of the 'Triptyque' of interior decoration along with 'Tout Orgueil fume-t-il du soir' and 'Une dentelle s'abolit', subtly illustrates the intersection of several of Mallarmé's concerns. Through the glass vase, presence and absence work in symbiosis, and the tension between the ideal and the material is explored, if left unresolved.[36]

The vase is empty, pure of any potion and of any rose. It is merely a vacant form, incapable of effecting any true result. Thus, the kiss between mother and lover is denied, the rose cannot be articulated, and meaning cannot be evinced (Pearson reads 'annonçant' as 'ah non! sens').[37] Similarly, the shape of the vase itself is 'ignoré' and the upwards motion towards the ceiling stops short. A trace of sterility lingers in this later poem, particularly given that, not only is the flower absent, but 'fleurir' as a transitive verb is denied – flowering in both senses is impossible. Furthermore, the 'col', the vase neck, also suggests a cervix, a channel to the womb that is interrupted and unknown.

However, the very impossibility of these things *is* their realisation: for while the kiss between mother and lover may not be consented to, and while the glass is widowed and therefore in some way sterile, creation is implicit, for the kiss is 'naïf' ('natif'), and the vase rises up to share its own 'naïf baiser' with the ceiling. The upwards motion, even as it is interrupted, is visually perceptible in the shape of the poem, and we might even hear the echo of 'debout' in 'deux bouches'. Moreover, as Pearson says, the ceiling itself would feature a rose, and therefore there *is* a rose in the darkness.[38] The rose does, in fact, exist, evoked by the very declaration of its absence. If, as Mallarméan tradition invites, we read the rose as symbolic of poetic meaning we might see this half-present flower as the contradiction to any

[36] Laurent Jenny examines 'la fin de l'intériorité', which he sees as occurring with the transition from Symbolism to modernism. He states: 'le grand mythe de l'intériorité revendiqué par le symbolisme a évolué avec le modernisme dans un sens qui semblait a priori très éloigné de lui: celui d'une extériorisation de la "pensée" en une forme de "lieu pensant".' *La Fin de l'intériorité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), pp. 1-2. We might see 'Surgi de la croupe' as an example of this transition, although the sonnet retains a certain interiority through its self-reflexivity.

[37] Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé*, p. 205.

[38] Pearson explains: 'an empty vase offers up its lips, as though doomed never to join in union with the ceiling above; and yet the implicit comparison of a ceiling rose with the rose that is absent from the vase provides the kiss of analogy and the imaginary prospect of a flowering: "Une rose dans les ténèbres".' 'Mallarmé's Interior Designs', *Romance Studies*, 22: i (March 2004), 3-15, p. 9.

‘non-sens’, a contradiction which is also suggested by ‘consent’ (con-sens, ‘con’ meaning ‘with’ in Latin, a synonym of ‘col’, also found in this poem). The flower, in investing the poem with some kind of meaning, opposes the lack of meaning, but the act of *announcing* (with the lack of meaning inherent in that word) brings about meaning.

This is precisely the paradox that the glass vase illustrates, for it is empty and full at once. Glass itself is permanent and transient: ‘éphémère’, it is fragile, and yet its emptiness is full of inexhaustible potential. Mallarmé uses the term ‘verrerie’, suggesting not only glassware, but the glassmaking factory. We should remember that this kind of glass is traditionally formed by blowing – human breath creates the ephemeral object. This is important because breath occurs twice more in the poem: first, it is implied in the ‘sylph’, a spirit of the *air* who surveys the room and, as the poetic voice (Moi), articulates the poem itself; second, in the verb ‘expirer’, meaning both to breathe out (and by extension to express, in speech) and to die, the removal of breath. By calling our attention to ‘verrerie’, Mallarmé suggests the very process of creating glass, which is the product of human breath, much like poetry. This glassware will, in turn, create, through the act of non-creation, a rose. Similarly, the poem itself, in negating any direct evocation of the rose, will paradoxically evoke precisely that. Glass and poem are aligned: both stand for the act of aesthetic creation that operates via absence – no accident from the poet who stated that ‘non jamais l’*absent* ne sera moins que le présent’.[39]

This convergence of presence and absence is, as Rae Beth Gordon has shown, typical of the decorative object. Gordon argues that, in Mallarmé’s work, presence and absence are mutually determinative:

> This virginity, the whiteness of the page that re-emerges from between the words, is no longer felt to be something arbitrary and formless that intrudes on the reader, but rather a necessary absence or void that structures the poem as much as the sculpted line of painstakingly chosen words does […]. The architecture, mobile but precise, can be seen only in relation to the white spaces, but their form can be perceived only in relation to the

[39] Mallarmé, ‘Notes pour un tombeau d’Anatole’, *OC*, i, p. 520.

> contours of the architecture: one cannot be seen without the other […]. But Mallarmé's artful ruse is to make the one interchangeable with the other.[40]

Commenting on the lovers' separation in 'Surgi de la croupe', Gordon states: 'in freezing their proximity in the timeless immobility Symbolism prizes, the resurgence of the vase obliterates their presence […] it is out of this absence, whose contours are always represented by a decorative object, that the Ideal vision springs.'[41] She identifies this absence as a theme that is served well by decorative objects, such as the vase, because 'decorative form is most apt, curiously, to represent the Ideal because it is perceived as nonsignifying and purely formal.'[42] In Gordon's eyes, the material and concrete concede to the ideal, but the ideal would never be possible without the material object. The vase, however ephemeral, is an expression of form which encloses pure space, an absence of form. Into that space the 'Idée' flows, filling the void outlined by the contours of the glass walls.

And what are these glass walls really made of? Poetry itself – *le vers*. The poem becomes a vase, the shape of language creating, at the same time as negating, the obscure rose. The tools of poetry – words, versification – are the signifiers designating the space around the signified and therefore the signified itself. But, we might further ask, what is being signified? In other words, what is this absent rose? Well, that too is poetry for, as is so often the case with Mallarmé, poetry is talking about itself. As the subject matter of poetry is stripped away, poetry must focus on its own form, on the material that gives it shape – language itself. Thus, *le verre* quite simply represents *le vers*: the ephemeral casing giving shape to the absent thing contained. And where the thing contained was once a flower (a poem), now it is one step further from a *fleur du mal*: a *fleur absente*, a poetry of negation, where absence is suggestive of presence and vice versa. With the traditional conception of poetry dissolving, the focus becomes self-reflexive, the poetic form scrutinised and glorified.

---

[40] Gordon, *Ornament*, p. 150.

[41] Gordon, *Ornament*, p. 155.

[42] Gordon, *Ornament*, p. 157. Gordon also reads the poem psychoanalytically, the vase representing interrupted desire.

The ultimate example of this self-reflexivity is the sonnet which introduces *Poésies*, 'Salut', originally given as an oral toast at a banquet held by *La Plume* in 1893. We imagine Mallarmé raising his glass as he speaks the opening lines:

> Rien, cette écume, vierge vers
> À ne désigner que la coupe;[43]

Mallarmé succinctly illustrates his understanding of the relationship between language and the glass container. He establishes a syntactic parallel between the 'vierge vers' (as this is the first poem of the collection, it breaks the whiteness of the page) and 'cette écume', both of which define the 'coupe'. But, given that this toast was originally oral, we might well hear 'vers' as 'verre', the very object the speaker holds in his hand. In this case, the glass itself becomes aligned with foam, a typical image of half-presence in Mallarmé's work, and with the poetic line itself. Moreover, while we typically understand 'la coupe' to be the glass of champagne, it is also the cut that breaks the poetic line. In these lines, therefore, it is impossible to tell whether the poetic line (*le vers*) designates the glass (*la coupe*, i.e. *le verre*), or whether the glass (*la coupe*, i.e. *le verre*) designates the line ending (*le vers*). Either way, the subject matter and poetic form are mutually influential: the glass, being empty, filled with 'Rien', becomes an end in its own right. Similarly, the poem talks as much about itself as about anything extra-poetic.

In short, Mallarmé's work shows poetry transitioning from its former status as an enclosed thing of beauty (a flower), to the vessel that encloses. The old understanding of poetry is dying, and poetry responds by celebrating its meta-dimensionality and interrogating its own making. This move set the scene for many of the younger generation of Symbolists,[44] who

---

[43] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 4.

[44] I will go on to look more closely at Montesquiou and Quillard, but the poet who perhaps best absorbed the Baudelairean/Mallarméan method is Henri de Régnier, whose poem 'Le Repos après l'amour' opens: 'Nul parfum n'est plus doux que celui d'une rose/ Lorsque l'on se souvient de l'avoir respiré/ Ou quand l'ardent flacon, où son âme est enclose,/ En conserve au cristal l'arôme capturé.' *Le Miroir des heures* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910), p. 126.

drew heavily on the new flower poetics, but who also eventually moved away from this towards more direct contact with the material world in the form of the tangible glass poetics of Art Nouveau.

*

> Gallé, prince du verre et prêtre du vitrail,
> Régent du cristal clair où l'arc-en-ciel s'éploie,
> Qui vas pilant du spath et filant du corail
> Pour mêler à des mots au creuset qui tournoie.
>
> (Montesquiou, 'Galerie', c. 1893)[45]

Although Mallarmé may be the poet who most radically and extensively considers glass in the context of interior décor, this was reflective of a general trend during the second half of the nineteenth century which saw poetry meditate on its social and aesthetic position through glass objects. While Baudelaire was taking the *flacon* as a metaphor for art, Gautier was exploring the relationship between poetry and glass in another way. His 'L'Art' declares the importance of rigid form in the production of artwork:

> Oui, l'œuvre sort plus belle
> D'une forme au travail
> Rebelle,
> Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.
>
> Point de contraintes fausses!
> […]
>
> Peintre, fuis l'aquarelle,
> Et fixe la couleur
> Trop frêle
> Au four de l'émailleur.
>
> […]
>
> Sculpte, lime, cisèle;
> Que ton rêve flottant
> Se scelle
> Dans le bloc résistant![46]

[45] Montesquiou, *Œuvres*, iii, p. 110.
[46] Gautier, *Émaux et Camées*, pp. 130-132.

Gautier's poem performs what it prescribes: at first glance, its form appears unfamiliar, the third line markedly shorter than the others. Yet, in fact, the versification is perfectly regular throughout the poem: the first two and final lines of each stanza are six syllables, reminiscent of the *hémistiches* of an alexandrine, and the rhyme is *croisée*. Gautier dispenses with the traditional alexandrine, a 'contrainte fausse', but places new formal constraints on the verse which make the words resonate, declaring and demonstrating the association between form and feeling which we saw Baudelaire articulate in relation to the window frame: 'parce que la forme est contraignante, l'idée jaillit plus intense.'

'L'Art' is a poem about tangibility. It urges the artist to abandon painting for sculpture, carving the work from a 'bloc résistant'. The implication, of course, is that poetry should do likewise. 'Vers' is syntactically paralleled with marble, onyx, and enamel so that we might easily hear it as a similarly hard and uncompromising material, 'verre'. Furthermore, enamel itself is a kind of glass work, which consists of fusing powdered glass onto a hard surface such as metal or porcelain at high temperatures.[47] Indeed, Gautier evokes the conditions under which enamel is created, the heat and pressure of the oven, as a way to fix form. The poem, often viewed as the ultimate expression of Parnassian ideals, stresses the rigidity of verse in vitreous terms. The poet is a glassworker, forging and fixing poetry in the glassworks of versification.

Gautier's poem compares the glassmaking process to producing poetry. In so doing, he aligns poetry with decorative art (enamels typically being used in ornament or jewellery), rather than the fine arts more typical of the ekphrastic tradition. This choice is unsurprising, for Gautier's fascination with decorative art frequently manifests in his work.[48] Decorative art was re-evaluated during this period because it encapsulated many of the debates applicable to

[47] Enamelling had been popular in ancient civilisations and was resurrected in the nineteenth century after the publication of Philippe Burty's *Les Émaux cloisonnés anciens et modernes* (1868). See Claire O'Mahony, 'René Lalique and the Subjectification of the Jewel' in *Symbolist Objects: Materiality and Subjectivity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Claire O'Mahony (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009), 293-328, p. 299.

[48] Gordon analyses decorative art in Gautier's œuvre. See *Ornament*, pp. 95-144.

the role of the arts more widely. As Gordon explains, ornament (and by association decorative art) is, by definition, superfluous.[49] Consequently, it naturally appealed to the poet who proclaimed the importance of 'l'art pour l'art' – art as its own end, regardless of its functional value. Gautier precipitated the debate between utility and aesthetics in his Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*:

> un roman n'est pas une paire de bottes sans couture; un sonnet, une seringue à jet continu; un drame n'est pas un chemin de fer, toutes choses essentiellement civilisantes, et faisant marcher l'humanité dans la voie du progrès. […] Qu'on dise après cela que les romans ne contribuent pas à la civilisation. […]
>
> Rien de ce qui est beau n'est indispensable à la vie. […]
>
> Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid[.][50]

He reiterates this position in the Preface to *Albertus*, where he specifically takes jewels as an example of superfluousness: 'dès qu'une chose devient utile, elle cesse d'être belle [...]. Les bijoux curieusement ciselés […] sont de pures superfluités.'[51] Gautier's evocation of decorative art (enamel) in 'L'Art,' then, is telling, for the use of decorative enamel on objects that might otherwise be purely functional – vases, bowls, etc. – underpins the tension between utility and aesthetics, function and beauty. Gautier introduces a metaphor that recurred throughout the late nineteenth century, when the debate about aesthetics and use was continuously understood through glass in various forms.

One such form is jewellery as, during this period, glass began to be used widely instead of precious gems.[52] One reason was simply economical – glass costs less – but for some artists like Lalique and Tiffany, glass was a deliberate choice because it was flexible and could be manipulated using diverse techniques.[53] Claire O'Mahony has explored the connection

---

[49] Gordon, *Ornament*, p. 3.

[50] Théophile Gautier, *Œuvres: choix de romans et de contes*, ed. Paolo Tortonese (Paris: Laffont, 1995), pp. 191-193.

[51] Gautier, *Albertus*, pp. 8-9.

[52] Among the first glassmakers to substitute glass for gemstones was François-Eugène Rousseau, who exhibited imitation gems at the 1878 International Exhibition and went so far as to deliberately flaw his products: 'To conceal the glass' true character, even the natural imperfections of real stone were simulated.' Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 33.

[53] Rosemary C. LoDato examines the history of gemstones in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in *Beyond the Glitter: The Language of Gems in Modernista Writers Rubén Darío, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and*

between Lalique's work and *fin-de-siècle* literature, identifying in his jewellery the embodiment of 'a subjectivity where idealist Symbolist aesthetics, Decadent excess and commodity fetishism intersect'.[54] She examines the patronage Decadent writers offered Lalique, and traces the role Lalique's jewellery played in the development of decorative art into fine art, a role first outlined by Roger Marx in 1899, and re-articulated by Kahn in 1905:

> Lalique n'est simplement ni joaillier, ni orfèvre; il est peintre, il est émailleur, il est ciseleur, il est verrier […]. C'est à propos de lui […] qu'on peut redire, qu'en art les dimensions, le volume sont rien, qu'il n'y a point de gradation d'importance entre le menu chef-d'œuvre et les plus imposantes architectures […]. L'ancien bijou est fondé sur l'idée de la richesse; le nouveau, sur un principe d'art.[55]

Kahn also states that, by using materials other than precious gems, Lalique has 'pour le style de la joaillerie, agrandi et libéré le vocabulaire, effectuant une révolution semblable à celle que firent aboutir les romantiques pour la langue poétique, en effaçant la différence entre des mots nobles et des mots vulgaires'.[56] Kahn's statements are important for two reasons: first, he marks the new status of decorative art as fine art; and second, he describes this art as akin to poetry. Jewellery helps poetry to interrogate its own status, and it is worth remembering that Mallarmé opened his first issue of *La Dernière Mode* with a meditation on jewellery.[57] Referring to jewels as 'objets utiles à achever [la toilette]', Mallarmé speculates that contemporary jewellers took inspiration from the Musée Campana and the Hôtel de Cluny.[58] Damian Catani has read this passage as illustrative of Mallarmé's desire to 'transcend hierarchical distinctions made between fine art and commercial or decorative art', as the

---

José Asunción Silva (London: Associated University Press, 1999). She explains that Tiffany treated glass as a precious gem, exploiting its flexibility of colour, while Lalique used the material to revive jewellery, pp. 53-54.

[54] O'Mahony, 'René Lalique', p. 293. She sees Lalique's work as an example of Gustave Kahn's definition of Symbolism as the attempt to 'objectiver le subjectif (l'extériorisation de l'Idée)', which he frames in opposition to the Naturalist aim to 'subjectiver l'objectif (la nature vue à travers un tempérament)'. Kahn first articulated this in *L'Événement* on 28 September 1886, reprinted in *La Vogue* on 4 October.

[55] Quoted by O'Mahony, 'René Lalique', p. 319.

[56] Quoted by O'Mahony, 'René Lalique', p. 321.

[57] Damian Catani analyses the opening article of *La Dernière Mode*, 'Bijoux', concluding that Mallarmé's thoughts on jewellery express his belief that 'authentic beauty is achieved […] by perceiving [objects] as part of a symbolic order' and that great jewel-makers do not copy old designs, but 'apply the same laws of creativity which made these designs beautiful in the first place,' *The Poet in Society: art, consumerism, and politics in Mallarmé* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 85-86.

[58] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, pp. 490-491.

Musée Campana represents high-brow art, and the Hôtel de Cluny, low-brow (this hierarchical transcendence is similar to Kahn's observation about merging noble and vulgar vocabulary).[59] Catani concludes that 'Bijoux' alludes to the erasure of 'the barriers between the aesthetic and consumerist camps, between art for art's sake and art as a commodity.'[60] By insisting on the collaboration between aesthetics and utility, Mallarmé distances himself from Gautier's position: yet he does so with a metaphor similar to Gautier's own – that of jewelled ornamentation.[61]

Beyond jewellery, glass art continued to represent the shifting relationship between art and utility, and the emergence of a new school of glass artistry – Art Nouveau – is born of this question. Decorative glass objects, like all glass production in France, proliferated in the mid-nineteenth century. A number of important glass-producing firms were established, and glass objects were a significant aspect of French industry.[62] The techniques used to produce decorative glass also increased to include new or resurrected ways of manipulating the material, such as enamelling, crackling, overlaying, and intarsia (inlaying coloured glass).

---

[59] Catani, *The Poet in Society*, p. 86.

[60] Catani, *The Poet in Society*, p. 86. Catani shows that Mallarmé was a forerunner to the decorative arts movement led by Camille Mauclair in the 1890s. See p. 33.

[61] Mallarmé considered founding a journal called *L'Art décoratif* two years before *La Dernière Mode*. He states: 'La *Décoration*! tout est dans ce mot' (*OC*, ii, p. 491). His interest in decoration speaks to a wider debate about art and industry, which often took glass as its central metaphor. However, Mallarmé's fondness for glass is more complicated: as we have seen, he portrays the material as analogous to aesthetics and to language. There are few personal links between Mallarmé and the glass art movement of the 1890s, possibly because Gallé declared his antipathy towards Mallarmé: 'Cette royauté de Mallarmé me fait songer au vêtement imaginaire dont un tailleur fumiste vêtit un certain roi; nul ne pouvait voir le tissu à moins d'être homme d'esprit.' Quoted by Antoine Bertrand, *Les Curiosités esthétiques de Robert de Montesquiou*, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1996), i, p. 173.

[62] In the mid to late century, several glassmakers developed production techniques that eventually led to Art Nouveau. Among the most important are: Kessler, who perfected acid engraving; Maes and Clémandot, who produced coloured crystal; Landier, who owned a crystal factory at Sèvres; Houdaille, who researched cut crystal, imitation gems, enamelled, crackled, and aventurine glass; the Appert brothers, specialists in laboratory and reinforced glass; the Boutigny brothers, who collected Bohemian glass; Monot, famous for his opaline vases; Auguste Legras, who employed almost 1400 workers and 150 decorators; Philippe-Joseph Brocard, who led the trend for imitating mosque lamps; Auguste Jean, who favoured free, untraditional patterns; the aforementioned François-Eugène Rousseau, who produced overlaid glass in different colours; Amédée de Caranza, who developed the metallic lustre; Eugène Michel, specialist in crackled glass; Alphonse-Georges Reyen, who worked for Gallé and specialised in engraving and intercalary decoration; and the Pannier brothers, who combined crystal with bronze. See Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, pp. 12-46.

Gallé adopted and perfected this last technique in the late 1890s, calling it 'marqueterie de verre'.[63]

However, there was an anxiety about mid-century glass production because, although techniques expanded, the glass industry suffered from a lack of originality. Many glassworkers merely copied antiques, taking inspiration from rococo designs which failed to express a modern sentiment.[64] Art Nouveau is, in part, a response to this: while it did not reject glasswork of the past as inspiration, the movement strived for a fresh, innovative approach to glass art. The balance between old and new is expressed by Siegfried Bing, who outlines Art Nouveau's aim to:

> Thoroughly impregnate oneself with the old French tradition; try to pick up the threads of that tradition, with all its grace, elegance, logic, and purity, and give it new developments […]; enrich the old patrimony with a spirit of modernness […].[65]

Bing was one of the chief sponsors of Art Nouveau, and the movement is named after his gallery-cum-shop in Paris, which opened in 1895.[66] Art Nouveau was not the first movement to place decorative art front-and-centre: it was preceded by the Union Centrale des Beaux-Arts in 1864, which later merged with the École des Arts Décoratifs to become the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs (the name change exemplifying the switch in focus towards the decorative).[67] The essential distinguishing feature between these programmes and Art

---

[63] See Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 15.

[64] Debora L. Silverman studies the renaissance of the rococo trend in relation to Art Nouveau. See *Art Nouveau in fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 142-171. She explores the changing understanding of modernity in this period, seeing Art Nouveau as a break from the industrial sense of modernity embodied in steel architecture (which peaked at the 1889 Exhibition with the Eiffel Tower). According to Silverman, Art Nouveau represents a different, more feminine, modernity which, weary of the insistence on progress and industry that characterised the century, retreats to the interior (pp. 1-10).

[65] Siegfried Bing, 'The New Art', in *Quotations and Sources on Design in the Decorative Arts*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 188. This article was originally published in *The Architectural Record* in 1902.

[66] For a detailed account of Bing's role in the movement, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, pp. 270-283.

[67] Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 7.

Nouveau is that the earlier Unions were supported by the state, whereas Art Nouveau has a more purely aesthetic concern.[68]

Glass artists associated with Art Nouveau congregated around Émile Gallé, the most famed nineteenth-century glass artist, to form the 'École de Nancy' – a facet of the broader Art Nouveau movement which was the result of the same impulse, but was distinctly removed from the Parisian mainstream. The École de Nancy, which was formed officially in 1901, was the birthplace of a radical new vision of art. For several decades before this, however, there had been a growing desire for a revitalised French art, which was particularly heartfelt in Lorraine, which had lost territory to Germany during the Franco-Prussian War. The deepening patriotic feeling encouraged a new art which took inspiration from the French countryside as well as industry, and which combatted the monopoly held over the decorative arts by cosmopolitan Paris and by foreign countries. This vision was led by Gallé, whose father owned a glass factory in Nancy that later became Gallé's own. In Nancy, then, the glass master's schooling began and there he met like-minded artists such as the Daum brothers, Louis Majorelle, and Eugène Vallin.[69]

Gallé transformed the glass art scene, going further than anyone in experimenting with new techniques, materials, and colours, and openly welcoming scientific advances in the development of his aesthetics.[70] In his early career, Gallé studied at the Lycée Impérial in Nancy, taking an interest in natural sciences, philosophy, and botany. He travelled to Germany and England, where he saw the glass and ceramics collection at the South

---

[68] Examining the relationship between these bodies, Silverman states: 'The term art nouveau and the goals associated with it are usually assigned to a purely artistic group in France, which coalesced in 1895 under the direction of the art dealer and connoisseur Siegfried Bing. In the decade preceding the 1900 Exhibition, however, a much broader institutional craft initiative existed, directed by an organization called the Central Union of the Decorative Arts. After the Exhibition of 1889, a coalition of prominent politicians and cultural administrators became affiliated with the Central Union's efforts to promote the reform of design in France. [...] Before 1895 both Siegfried Bing and the French artists associated with him participated directly in this broader official movement to rehabilitate the applied arts. […] The 1895 Art Nouveau Bing thus marks not the inception of French art nouveau but one of the final stages of a craft initiative articulated within the institutions of official culture' (*Art Nouveau*, p. 8).

[69] See Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 50.

[70] Gallé valued science for uncovering previously unknown phenomena, and he celebrates geological and oceanographical advances in his work (see Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 70).

Kensington Museum. Like many artists of his time, he appreciated East Asian culture, and was particularly influenced by Japanese art, which favoured a simplicity of style, a preference for suggestion over literal representation, asymmetry, and bold lines.[71] He therefore brought to his art a knowledge of foreign visual art, tempered by the desire for a specifically French revitalisation of the decorative arts, and a passion for nature, which is reflected in his factory's motto: 'Nos racines sont au fond des bois, au bord des sources, sur les mousses.'[72] Indeed, the natural world was Gallé's greatest inspiration: the majority of his pieces represent flora and fauna, and he insisted his artists use living flowers as models. After receiving wide recognition for his display at the 1878 International Exhibition, Gallé became an influential figure in French decorative arts, and by 1889, he employed 300 workers and trained many of the best glass artists of the period. His pieces demonstrate an originality that went unmatched but which led the way for many of his contemporaries, who experimented with new techniques and retained Gallé's fondness for a simplicity of contour and a focus on nature. Around Gallé, the École de Nancy grew, its members united in their aesthetic desires. At the heart of this school, and of the broader Art Nouveau movement, are the principles of simplicity of form, nature and the female form as inspiration, the union of industry and aesthetics, and the primacy of individual vision over mass production.[73]

---

[71] For detail about Gallé's interests and background, see Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, pp. 52-65.

[72] Quoted by Stephan Tschudi Madsen, *The Art Nouveau Style: A Comprehensive Guide with 264 Illustrations*, trans. Ragnar Christopherson (Mineola: Dover, 2002), p. 177.

[73] In blurring the line between industry and art, these artists owe a debt to Bing and Roger Marx, who championed the union of arts and crafts, and also to Ruskin and William Morris, who spearheaded the roughly contemporary socialist Arts and Crafts movement in England (see LoDato, *Beyond the Glitter*, p. 35). The politics of Art Nouveau are less straightforward: on the one hand, the movement democratised art, producing affordable artwork (according to Bloch-Dermant, Gallé strived for 'the reconciliation of cheap production and art', *French Glass*, p. 114). This was especially true later in Gallé's career, when he made concessions to mass production (Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 113.). The École de Nancy was also socially minded, making it a point to establish local studios to teach their methods and principles (see Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 51). However, the impulse against mass production and towards an individual vision might equally be read as elitist. French Art Nouveau was far from egalitarian: unlike Belgian Art Nouveau, which aimed to erase class divisions, the corresponding French movement did the opposite. Silverman states: 'the goal was not to eliminate the hierarchy of the arts and with it the conception of art for an elite but to reform the hierarchy from within and thereby consolidate an elite art on a new basis. The French […wanted] to extend the hierarchy of the arts to include the artisanate. In France, the Salon was able to aristocratize the decorative arts […]' (*Art Nouveau*, p. 211).

This renewal of glass art had much in common with poetry, and is often aligned with it, not least because Gallé himself identified with Symbolism and remarked on its influence on his creative theory. He applies the concept of the 'symbole' to glass art, stating : 'le terme de symbole est bien près de se confondre avec celui d'art. Conscient ou inconscient, le symbole qualifie, vivifie l'œuvre; il en est l'âme.'[74] Furthermore, Gallé openly acknowledges his debt to numerous nineteenth-century poets, especially Baudelaire, Hugo, Rollinat, Maeterlinck, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and others, as well as his particular friend and patron Montesquiou (Mallarmé is conspicuous by his absence, appropriately enough).[75] Indeed, from 1884 until around 1900, Gallé even goes so far as to inscribe quotations from these poets on his glasswork and names some of his pieces after particularly favourite poems.

But even beyond the conscious acknowledgement Gallé gave the Symbolists, there were points of intersection between the poetic scene in France and Art Nouveau, for poetry was grappling with the same issues as the visual art movement. Like decorative art, poetry was treading an ambiguous line between elitism and egalitarianism. On the one hand, the Decadents, as we have seen, promoted their image as inaccessible recluses, a members-only club of poetry. But, on the other hand, certain influential writers associated with Decadence were interested in democracy: for some, like Mallarmé, this was a democratic art; while for others, like Rimbaud, it was a democratic politics. Also similar to Art Nouveau was poetry's position as a superfluous art: just as ornament had to fight to prove its worth as 'fine art', poetry was struggling to re-establish its importance, having been eclipsed by the novel. Finally, poetry too hovered between a respectful adherence to tradition and a desire to break with the past and instigate something new – this was, as we have noted, at the heart of the Decadent dilemma. Consequently, similar trends in late-nineteenth-century poetry and Art Nouveau emerge: among them, a return to nature as inspiration, an Oriental influence, and a

---

[74] Émile Gallé, *Émile Gallé* (New York: Parkstone International, 2014), p. 37.
[75] See Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, pp. 66-85.

need to incorporate the aesthetic traditions of the past balanced with a fresh creative impulse. Just as Art Nouveau assimilated the ideas and methods of Symbolist poetry, so did Symbolist poetry respond with a focus on the material world of interior décor, as a way to evaluate its own status as art.

One of the principal concerns of both movements is the question of obscurity. As we have seen, an interest in the *clair-obscur* recurs often in the poetry of this period, and a similar preoccupation is evident in Art Nouveau glasswork. For poetry, legibility was something to be manipulated, and so Decadent verse is highly specialised and elite, and Symbolism is concerned with silence and enunciation. Meanwhile, in glass art, legibility is also at the forefront of the artists' minds. Alphonse-Georges Reyen, who worked for Gallé, describes one white vase in the following terms: 'different colours are gradually produced with tonalities of differing intensities and with powerful contrasts of light and shade, all standing out against the solid white glass that provides the transparency.'[76] Henri de Régnier appropriately described Gallé's vases as 'lucides et taciturnes'.[77] Indeed, Art Nouveau glasswork constantly throws into question the division between transparency and opacity, the light passing through glass in places, bouncing back elsewhere (this partly explains the abundance of lamps produced by the movement, which exploited the new technology of electric light to enhance the disparities between light and shade). The question of whether a piece could be read was always under discussion. Moreover, Gallé explicitly aimed to make glass talk, as it were, to be *lucid* in both senses, by inscribing his pieces with lines of poetry,[78] which he termed 'verrerie parlante'. However, in quoting lines of poetry on his work, Gallé, if anything, goes too far, bypassing the fine line Symbolism treads between understanding and ambiguity, which we have already seen in the preoccupation with clarity and obscurity in the

---

[76] Quoted by Bloch-Dermant, *French Glass*, p. 45.

[77] Régnier was friends with Gallé and based a *roman-à-clef* on him (*Le Mariage de minuit*). The poet wrote in his notebook: 'J'aimerais aussi être un verrier à la manière de Gallé et ouvrer ces vases lucides et taciturnes, qui sont comme le songe de la matière.' Quoted by Patrick Besnier in *Henri de Régnier: de Mallarmé à l'Art Déco* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), p. 125.

[78] Gallé engraved his work with poetry by Baudelaire, Hugo, Maeterlinck, Montesquiou, and others.

Petit glossaire, the Aquarium poems, and which we will see again in the context of stained glass. Gallé's talking glass, ironically, says too much, and the citations from Symbolist poems contradict the Symbolist method of suggestion. Gallé continued this practice until just after 1900, at which point he ceased inscribing and preferred to allow the glass to speak for itself.

The need to communicate, but also to withhold, was central to both the literary and visual art movements. In poetry, language mediates between reader and meaning; in Art Nouveau, glass does likewise. Consequently, Art Nouveau is often associated with Symbolism: on the surface, glass art appears to strive for the same thing as the poetry, a simplified version of Symbolism akin to that expressed by Moréas when he describes the movement's aim to 'vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible.' Gallé, according to Montesquiou, dresses dreams in flowers ('Tu charges une fleur de revêtir ton rêve', the poet states)[79] – and these flowers are made of glass. Symbolism, meanwhile, dresses the 'Idée' up in language. Just as the flower has represented *le vers*, so it also represents and is represented by *le verre*.

However, this correlation between poetry and glass art was to have an ironic consequence. In the early 1890s, a change occurs in some of the poetry still ostensibly associated with Symbolism: it becomes more open, tangible, and directly engaged with the material. This is where we begin to see Symbolism decline and make way for modernism: its method was becoming obsolete, and this is revealed in the way the movement's relationship with glass evolves. Younger poets respond to Art Nouveau, writing homages to Gallé who, for some, is as much an inspiration as Mallarmé was. Two examples are Pierre Quillard and Robert de Montesquiou, the latter of whom was Gallé's great friend and patron.[80] These poets produced

[79] Montesquiou, *Œuvres*, iii, p. 111.

[80] The friendship between Montesquiou and Gallé was mutually beneficial. They dedicated work to each other, even collaborating on occasion, and corresponded extensively from 1887 onwards. The friendship ended around a decade later, possibly because Montesquiou disliked Gallé's shift towards a more industrial, democratic art, but also because Gallé sided with Régnier in a duel between the two poets. For a full account of the relationship between them, see Bertrand, *Curiosités esthétiques*, i, pp. 165-217. More generally, Montesquiou's contribution to *fin-de-siècle* interior design has been the subject of detailed critical attention. Famous for having inspired the characters of des Esseintes in *A rebours* (a fact he resented) and the Baron de Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Montesquiou devoted much time to interior design, attempting to instil a version of 'correspondances' in his apartments, which included a plethora of glass objects. Moreover, Montesquiou correlated interior design with writing, structuring his collection *Les Hortensias bleus* in terms of architectural

numerous pieces inspired by Gallé's work. Several poems in Quillard's 1897 collection *La Lyre héroïque et dolente* are dedicated to Gallé, and evoke the floral designs of Art Nouveau, while also paying lip service to the dominant motifs of Symbolism. 'Cristal', for example, refers to 'calices d'or', 'glauques fleurs', and 'cristal pâle et gris comme un ciel'.[81] Similarly, 'Les Fleurs noires' states:

> Vos abîmes de nuit dévorent le soleil;
> Le jour est offensé par vos voiles de veuves
> Et vous avez puisé sans peur aux mornes fleuves
> L'onde farouche du sommeil.
>
> O fleurs noires, le vent de l'aube vous balance:
> Mais nul parfum d'amour ne s'exhale de vous,
> Chères, et vous versez dans les cœurs las et fous
> L'incantation du silence.[82]

Quillard's glass-inspired poems contain all the images we would expect of a Symbolist text: the intersection of sunlight and shadow; widowhood and veils; the barely present flower; the grey sky; silence. And yet, there is something un-Symbolist about this poetry for, while it includes the markers of Symbolism, the language itself is almost too simple. There is no syntactical contortion, no esoteric vocabulary, and the verbs operate in a simple and declarative present tense. In other words, the poem seems to be trying so hard to *appear* Symbolist that it forgets the most important aspect of this movement: the attention to language itself. Like Gallé's 'verrerie parlante', Quillard's poems are anxious to communicate but, in this, they neglect the fact that the 'clair' should be balanced by the 'obscur.'

Montesquiou goes further still in his homages to Gallé. The poet declares his wish to 'vous faire une place en ce Livre,/ Mon cher Gallé', suggesting that he wanted to write Gallé into

---

divisions. For more detailed analysis of this topic, see Bertrand, *Curiosités esthétiques*, as well as: Elizabeth Emery, 'Misunderstood Symbolism: Rereading the Subjective Objects of Montesquiou's first *Maison d'un artiste*', in *Symbolist Objects: Materiality and Subjectivity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Claire O'Mahony (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009), 19-37; Willa Z. Silverman, 'Unpacking his library: Robert de Montesquiou and the Esthetics of the Book in *Fin-de-siècle* France', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 2004), 316-331; and Didier Coste, 'Robert de Montesquiou, poète critique: la cristallisation du décoratif', *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 11. 3-4 (1983), 334-349.

[81] Pierre Quillard, *La Lyre héroïque et dolente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1897), p. 196.

[82] Quillard, *Lyre héroïque*, p. 13.

history.[83] And Montesquiou hopes to achieve this by describing Gallé's creations in verse. 'Murrhins', which appears in *Le Chef des odeurs suaves* (1893), describes the vases of antiquity, but seems inspired by those of the *fin de siècle*:

Les vases sont émail, gemme, ivoire, métal,
Albâtre, marbre, bois, laque, bambou, cristal,
Kaolin, pétunsé, porcelaine, faïence,
En leurs rangs infinis que l'étagère agence.

[…]

Des vases aux contours d'insectes, de poissons,
D'oiseaux, de fleurs; un vase ovoïde ou bursaire;
Des vases, de l'été, figurant les moissons;
Et d'autres, de l'hiver, acclimatant la serre.[84]

And Montesquiou returns to the theme of decorative glass two years later in 'Vetri':

Le verre est rouge,
Le fer est froid,
La flamme bouge,
L'homme est adroit.

[…]

Des miroirs et des coupes
Décorés des cent houppes
De vitreuses étoupes.

Des dauphins et des cygnes
Aux torsions insignes;
Et les plus folles lignes

Et les plus molles poses;
Les plus nulles des choses:
Des bulles, et des roses.[85]

Montesquiou's poems read even more simply than Quillard's: he lists concrete nouns and his syntax is straightforward, leaving nothing to the imagination. In 'Vetri' in particular, he favours monosyllabic vocabulary and his rhyme is simplistic and monotonous. In its

---

[83] Montesquiou, *Œuvres*, v, p. 75.
[84] Montesquiou, *Œuvres*, iii, pp. 106-108.
[85] Montesquiou, *Œuvres*, iv, pp. 309-311.

concision and its explicit materiality, Montesquiou's work is closer to modernism than to Symbolism.

Both Quillard and Montesquiou were inspired by Gallé and alluded to his glass in their poetry. However, in doing so, they ironically return to a more representational poetry which describes rather than suggests, and states silence rather than evoking it. Their verse becomes transparent, legible, without the counteracting obscurity or opacity that would make it taciturn. While their poetry may lack Mallarmé's ludic syntax or Rodenbach's haunted imagery, it is useful because it marks the end of the movement that gave birth to these writers. Glass, so important throughout the life of the Decadent and Symbolist movements, is also a fitting way to signal their endgame. Gallé created 'verrerie parlante', and these poets create 'vers parlants', using all the motifs of Symbolism but none of the methods: they simply say too much.

The link between Art Nouveau and Symbolism is a tempting one to draw, and is justified because Gallé was inspired by Symbolist poetry, and because the poets who were inspired by Gallé were associated with Symbolism. Mallarmé's legacy is the excision of the flower from the glass container. Gallé reinserts the floral, but embeds it within the glass itself, so that flower and vase become inseparable, and nature and industry marry. For poets like Quillard and Montesquiou, however, the fascination with Gallé's art led to a renewed focus on the physical properties of the material, to the detriment of the language they used. The absent flower, for them, had merely become a commonplace of Symbolist rhetoric. The irony of the relationship between Art Nouveau and Symbolism is that the poets' admiration for the *maître verrier* came full circle so that, by the 1890s, the poetry inspired by Symbolist glass was moving away from Symbolism. Is it possible, therefore, that Art Nouveau heralds, perhaps even prompts, the death of the very literary movement it celebrates?

Chapter Five: Coloured Glass

> We caused to be painted […] a splendid variety of new windows […], urging us onward from the material to the immaterial […].
>
> (Suger, Abbot of Saint-Denis, c. 1147)[1]

The construction of the Basilica of Saint-Denis marked a turning point in the history of French stained glass. Commissioned by the Abbot Suger in the early twelfth century, it heralded the age of the architectural Gothic, when stained glass came into its own. While the technology to create coloured glass had existed since antiquity,[2] and stained-glass windows had been featured in European churches since at least the seventh century,[3] the tall lancet windows and exterior buttresses of Gothic designs allowed more wall space to be given over to stained glass.[4]

During this period, stained-glass windows assumed an important role in church architecture, and were as prized by the medieval congregation as ornamental metalwork and precious gems.[5] Alongside saintly relics, the windows were a tool to reinforce Christian doctrine: designed to honour saints and biblical figures, stained glass enhanced the sacred environment with narrative.[6] Dominating a communal space, stained glass became an expression of shared values and incorporated a system of recognisable motifs, taking biblical lore as a quasi-universal frame of reference and uniting communities.[7] Nonetheless, artists

---

[1] Abbot Suger, 'On What Was Done under His Administration' (*Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis*), trans. Edwin Panofsky, *The Christianity Reader*, ed. Mary Gerhart and Fabian Udoh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 444-447, p. 447.

[2] Glass can either be coloured during production by adding metal oxides to the melting pot, or it can be painted afterwards. Early stained glass was painted with wine or vinegar and oxide powder, and fused in a kiln. Later, more elaborate paints were developed. See Roger Rosewell, *Stained Glass* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2012), p. 12 and p. 25. In the fourteenth century, a silver stain was invented, which produced a range of hues (Rosewell, p. 27): this was the only truly 'stained' glass. Enamel paints became popular in the seventeenth century. See Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *The History of Stained Glass: The art of light medieval to contemporary*, with a contribution from Mary Clerkin Higgins (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), p. 50.

[3] The Romans possessed the technology to make coloured glass, and examples of coloured glass found in England date to the seventh century (see Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, p. 6). Michael Archer traces the practice of holding glass together with lead to Byzantium. See *An Introduction to English Stained Glass* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1985), p. 5.

[4] See Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, p. 7.

[5] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 10.

[6] Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, p. 10.

[7] In the thirteenth century, stained glass was the principal form of pictorial narrative and was designed to be easily identifiable. Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 86.

within different communities were free to interpret their source material diversely, and consequently each church's windows were a statement of a *particular* community.[8] The Gothic elevated stained glass to a greater status, as communities expanded and more cathedrals were erected as a result of urbanisation.[9] Thenceforth, the popularity of the material continued to grow, and the medium developed in line with contemporary trends in painting; for example, fourteenth-century stained glass became increasingly realist in its portrayal of human figures, while in the sixteenth century the use of perspective, much valued in painting, was applied to glass.[10] The French Renaissance was a period of good health for stained glass, with Paris, Rouen, and Écouen becoming fervent centres of glazing activity.[11]

However, in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, stained glass fell from grace as the move towards more classical architecture was deemed incompatible with the imposing and dramatic designs of Gothic coloured windows.[12] In addition, political unrest caused stained glass to be destroyed, and Napoleon's campaigns in Belgium and the Rhineland displaced much of the glass from that area.[13] It was not until towards the mid nineteenth century that stained glass regained popularity in France, prompted by the revival of the Gothic and a political agenda that profited from the association with medieval art. Virginia Chieffo Raguin comments:

> Nation states began to consolidate along modern boundaries, and increasing industrialisation and the growth of cities brought into question traditional ways. In the face of change, leaders in government and culture began to look to the medieval past as a

---

[8] Medieval stained-glass windows often depicted patrons of a particular church. Therefore, window designs varied between parishes. However, in medieval times the individual was represented generically and it was only later that stained-glass windows resembled more modern portraiture. See Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, pp. 20-30.

[9] The Benedictine monk Theophilus wrote the first surviving detailed account of stained glass production, *De diversis artibus* or *Schedula diversarum artium* (c. 1120). Production techniques remain essentially similar to those he describes.

[10] See Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 33 and p. 40.

[11] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 148.

[12] See Eustache Hyacinthe Langlois, *Essai historique et descriptif sur la Peinture sur Verre ancienne et moderne et sur les vitraux les plus remarquables de quelques monuments français et étrangers* (Rouen: Édouard Frère & Bibliothèque de la ville, 1832), p. 206.

[13] Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, p. 63.

time when national character was formed and when a common Christian culture united Europe.[14]

The July Monarchy, which was responsible for the restoration of many twelfth and thirteenth-century windows, aimed to prove their legitimate claim to the throne by associating themselves with the Capetians, who first unified France.[15] For stylistic and political reasons, then, stained glass returned to public favour in the mid-nineteenth century but, by then, the philosophies regarding the material had changed considerably since the twelfth century.[16]

For the medieval glazier, stained-glass windows had been an incentive to worship. They functioned as mnemonic aids to a congregation who heard biblical stories orally. The windows were not, in themselves, iconography but were an attempt to organise the space of the church, casting light onto important areas like the altar or saintly relics. These windows distinguished the church from other buildings and instilled a 'sense of divine mystery' therein.[17] Each window was designed with its particular spectator in mind, taking into account the education and social position of the congregation, but also their literal position in the church space: lower windows were complex, while higher windows featured less detailed designs;[18] certain areas were only accessible to the choir or wealthy patrons at whom designs might be targeted; and there was a hierarchy of subject, the Madonna and Christ typically occupying the highest and centre-most position. Furthermore, the window's ability to manipulate light was connected to a theological value system: light was associated with the immaculate conception, with goodness and knowledge, and with God's protection. It could signify the act of creation and the division between good and evil. Moreover, the fact that the

---

[14] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 196.

[15] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 210.

[16] Nineteenth-century accounts of the revival of stained glass emphasise that there had formerly been a persistent misconception that the secret of stained glass had been lost. Ferdinand de Lasteyrie, for example, who claims that the art had declined 'vers une complète décadence' (*Histoire de la peinture sur verre d'après ses monuments en France*, [Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1857], vol. i, p. 1), states: 'ce qui était réellement perdu, c'était le goût, et par la suite la pratique de la peinture sur verre [mais] depuis quelque temps cet art a repris faveur.' *Quelques mots sur la théorie de la peinture sur verre* (1852), pp. 2-3.

[17] See Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, pp. 43-49.

[18] Rosewell, *Stained Glass*, p. 43.

glass coloured light suggested the distinction between God's purity and mankind's impurity. Therefore, the very material of the stained-glass window was a metaphor for the relationship between man and God.[19] The lead, meanwhile, was not merely structural but offered a contrast to the brilliance of the glass – the obscurity countering the window's clarity.

By the nineteenth century, the significance of the stained-glass window had shifted, and contemporary accounts show a greater preoccupation with aesthetics than with the window's theological implications. Nineteenth-century stained glass shows evidence of a concern with realism,[20] harmony, simplicity, and clarity,[21] and with the advantages and drawbacks of diverse methods of construction: on the one hand, the medieval 'mosaic' method, where small glass pieces are assembled; and on the other, the renaissance 'tableau' method, where the design is painted onto larger pieces.[22] Moreover, for the first time, stained glass was subject to scientific scrutiny, chemical analysis being used to improve the paint's compatibility with the glass.[23] This led to an ability to create near-perfect stained glass – so perfect, in fact, that it was lamented for its very purity which did not emulate the desirable imperfections of medieval workmanship.[24] For the nineteenth-century glass artist, then, the window's appearance was as important as its ecclesiastical function. Towards the end of the century, stained glass was appropriated by the aesthetic community more boldly, becoming a favoured material for the proponents of Art Nouveau.

---

[19] Raguin states: 'glass resonated profoundly with the concepts of clarity and opacity that functioned as primary dichotomies for both moral and ontological systems. Light was transparent as it left the Creator, acquiring colour, and thus its ability to be visible, as it penetrated the material world. Colours can therefore be seen as representing the diversity and imperfection of creatures, although they still betray the radiance of their origins' (*History of Stained Glass*, p. 13).

[20] Langlois comments that nineteenth-century stained glass has 'atteint […] le nec plus ultra de l'art' whereas older examples 'sont en général plus ou moins éloignées de la nature et de la vérité' (*Essai historique*, p. 197).

[21] Lasteyrie emphasises the importance of harmony: 'car si la palette du peintre verrier étincelle de toutes les couleurs du prisme, l'art de les disposer entre elles suppose un sentiment profond de l'harmonie', *Quelques mots*, p. 9. He praises the unambiguous nature of stained glass, which 'n'admet aucun vague dans la forme' (p. 10), and its clarity: 'une des qualités les plus essentielles de la peinture sur verre est la clarté. Il faut que chacun y puisse lire sans peine' (p. 33). Finally, he complains that certain artists produce overly elaborate designs 'qui fatiguent l'œil, nuisent à l'harmonie générale et à la clarté du sujet' (p. 53).

[22] See Lasteyrie, *Quelques mots*, pp. 43-45.

[23] See Langlois, *Essai historique*, p. 196.

[24] Langlois states: 'C'est […] la perfection même des verres modernes qui constitue leur infériorité relative' (*Essai historique*, pp. 80-81), and Raguin recounts how the homogeneity of nineteenth-century stained glass led to a revival of medieval production techniques (*History of Stained Glass*, p. 41).

What is interesting about stained glass where we are concerned is that it developed in curious parallel to the written word. Although medieval church windows were not designed to illustrate biblical stories, but rather to encourage reflection, they resembled the structure of medieval narratives in that they prioritised key episodes (windows were viewed as a whole picture, rather than a linear narrative) and relied on repetition for effect (the story heard multiple times, the window viewed regularly).[25] Over time, the Gothic influence meant that churches opened up spatially, allowing for a more sequential format where consecutive windows could be read as narrative. This was concurrent with a greater literacy rate and with increased access to prayer books;[26] in other words, as more people learnt to read, windows became legible, increasingly resembling the written text and, by the nineteenth century, Lasteyrie claimed that it was common to read a church from left to right, like a book.[27]

There is, then, a persistent congruence between the stained-glass window and the written word. Given the renaissance of the medium during the nineteenth century, it is also unsurprising that it is popular in the literature of this period. Stained-glass windows feature heavily in the nineteenth-century novel, notably in Hugo's homage to the Gothic, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and Huysmans' elaborate description of the cathedral at Chartres, *La Cathédrale*. Flaubert too took stained-glass as inspiration in *La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, which recounts this saint's story 'telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, sur un vitrail d'église'.[28] Similarly, poetry seized upon this imagery, and a poem featuring the 'vitrail' became almost a rite of passage for *fin-de-siècle* poets – so much so that, in 1895, Adolphe Retté commented, in praise of Henri Degron:

> Ce m'est une joie d'ailleurs de constater chez certains de la génération qui nous talonne cette entrée en pleine vigueur hormis les complaintes de vitrail, les sonates à soi-même, […] et les lys de serre froide […].

[25] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 87.
[26] Raguin, *History of Stained Glass*, p. 111.
[27] Lasteyrie, *Quelques mots*, p. 17.
[28] Gustave Flaubert, *Trois Contes*, ed. Peter Michael Wetherill (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1988), p. 222.

Et c'est quarante mille fois tant mieux.[29]

Many of the concerns facing stained-glass artists at this time applied to poetry too: the dominance of Realism; the way form affects how we read; the differentiation between a collective audience and the individual reader; the renewal of a medium that had been in decline (is stained glass the Decadence of the vitreous world?); the symbiosis of object and frame; and the *clair-obscur*. Above all, the manipulation of light offered poetry a fertile metaphor for the way the act of reading can traverse and transform a text, while the glass itself served as a vehicle between the material and immaterial worlds. For the Abbot Suger in the twelfth century, the beauty of the church 'induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, […] it seems to me that I see myself dwelling […] in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven.'[30] Seven centuries later, France was a more secular place but the perception of glass as a mystical intermediary between the material and immaterial endured: where Suger had imagined himself transported to heaven, for nineteenth-century poets the immaterial was closer to that ineffable 'Idée' which they sought but struggled to define. As with glass architecture, technology, and décor, glass here serves as a starting point in the journey from the material towards the 'Idée' in a new ideology where aesthetics replace religion. Stained-glass windows signify this move but, as we might expect of this most self-reflexive poetry, the 'vitraux' evoked in these poems represent nothing less than the poems themselves. In other words, these texts celebrate their *own* role as intermediary between the material world which is a source of inspiration, and the 'Idée' which hardly seems accessible without the intervening pane of glass.

*

[29] Adolphe Retté, 'Chronique des livres', *La Plume* (15 June 1895), 280-283, p. 283.
[30] Suger, 'On What Was Done', p. 446.

The most obvious poetic text to deal with coloured glass is Baudelaire's 'Le Mauvais vitrier', which does not portray a stained-glass window, but does take as its central image a glazier's lack of coloured-glass panes. Thus, Baudelaire is among the first to explicitly link coloured glass and literary aesthetics. As a result, this prose poem resonates throughout the coloured-glass poetry that follows, which tends to concentrate on the *vitrail* more specifically.

Baudelaire inherited an attitude towards stained glass that saw the material as enigmatic and transcendent. If contemporary commentators are to be believed, the most common quality the nineteenth-century viewer ascribed to stained glass was mystery: Langlois states that 'en interceptant une partie de l'éclat du jour, [la peinture sur verre] maintint dans les temples […] cet effet mystérieux',[31] while Lastyerie claims that 'cette lumière diaprée […] qui colore l'atmosphère de je ne sais quelle teinte pieuse et mystique, tout reporte l'imagination vers les croyances mystérieuses'.[32] The effect of stained glass had changed little since the advent of the Gothic and this material was still viewed as a mystical conduit towards the divine. This is something Gautier, writing in 1838, emphasises in his homage to Hugo and Notre Dame:

Pour me refaire au grand et me rélargir l'âme,
Ton livre dans ma poche, aux tours de Notre-Dame;
Je suis allé souvent, Victor
[…]

Ainsi que sa patronne, à sa tête gothique,
La vieille église attache une gloire mystique
Faite avec les splendeurs du soir;
Les roses des vitraux, en rouges étincelles,
S'écaillent brusquement, et comme des prunelles, 35
S'ouvrent toutes rondes pour voir.

[…]

Aux losanges de plomb du vitrail diaphane,
Plus frais que les jardins d'Alcine ou de Morgane,
Sous un chaud baiser de soleil, 45
Bizarrement peuplés de monstres héraldiques,
Éclosent tout d'un coup cent parterres magiques

[31] Langlois, *Essai historique*, p. 15.
[32] Lasteyrie, *Histoire,* p. 2.

Aux fleurs d’azur et de vermeil.

Légendes d’autrefois, merveilleuses histoires
[…]
Licornes, loups-garous, chimériques oiseaux,

Dogues hurlant au bout des gouttières; tarasques, 55
Guivres et basilics, dragons et nains fantasques,
Chevaliers vainqueurs de géants
[…]

Mais qu'est-ce que cela? Lorsque l'on a dans l'ombre
Suivi l'escalier svelte aux spirales sans nombre
Et qu'on revoit enfin le bleu,
Le vide par-dessus et par-dessous l'abîme, 70
Une crainte vous prend, un vertige sublime
A se sentir si près de Dieu!

[…]

Et dans le gouffre immense où le corbeau tournoie,
Bête apocalyptique, en se tordant aboie,
Paris éclatant, inouï!

Oh! le cœur vous en bat, dominer de ce faîte, 85
Soi, chétif et petit, une ville ainsi faite;
Pouvoir, d'un seul regard, embrasser ce grand tout,
Debout, là-haut, plus près du ciel que de la terre,
Comme l'aigle planant, voir au sein du cratère,
Loin, bien loin, la fumée et la lave qui bout! 90

[…]

Et cependant, si beau que soit, ô Notre-Dame,
Paris ainsi vêtu de sa robe de flamme,
Il ne l'est seulement que du haut de tes tours.
[…]

Car les anges du ciel, du reflet de leurs ailes,
Dorent de tes murs noirs les ombres solennelles,
Et le Seigneur habite en toi.
Monde de poésie, en ce monde de prose, 130
A ta vue, on se sent battre au cœur quelque chose;
L'on est pieux et plein de foi!

Aux caresses du soir, dont l'or te damasquine,
Quand tu brilles au fond de ta place mesquine,
Comme sous un dais pourpre un immense ostensoir; 135
A regarder d'en bas ce sublime spectacle,
On croit qu'entre tes tours, par un soudain miracle,

Dans le triangle saint Dieu se va faire voir.[33]

For the young Gautier, this poem is an exercise in Romanticism, so steeped in cliché we are almost tempted to read it as parody, and dedicated to the Romantic doyen, Hugo.[34] All the markers of Romanticism are here: Notre Dame is a tower, halfway between God and the earth, allowing the poet a bird's eye view. The ivory-towered poet is literalised: his soul soars above Paris and, from this vertiginous vantage point, the heavens and the abyss are visible, the sublime and grotesque. Notre Dame, this place of legend and fantasy, is the poetry to the city's prose and its beauty allows communion between the poet and God. Most importantly, the stained-glass windows are associated with a 'gloire mystique' (l. 32) and the view their lead filaments frame is magical.

Gautier responds both to the Romantic aesthetic which dominated early-nineteenth-century poetry and to the collective understanding of stained glass as a mystical intermediary between the terrestrial and the divine. But what would this mean for Baudelaire, writing twenty-four years later? Baudelaire's take on coloured glass both corroborates and dismantles the Romantic attitude as illustrated by Gautier. In 'Le Mauvais vitrier', the narrator explains that there are certain people who, while not usually prone to action, occasionally act impulsively, and gives as examples a friend who set fire to a forest, another who lit a cigar next to a barrel of gunpowder, and a third who exuberantly embraces an old man. The narrator attributes such action to an 'esprit de mystification', which is the result of inspiration and is explained by doctors as a hysterical mood, and by 'ceux qui pensent un peu mieux que les médecins' as a satanical one.[35] The narrator then relates an incident where he, opening his window and

[33] Théophile Gautier, 'Notre Dame', *La Comédie de la mort* (Paris: Desessart, 1838), pp. 247-257.

[34] Hugo himself dispels the association between Notre Dame and mystery, distinguishing between mystery (the Church's domain) and fantasy (the poet's) in *Notre Dame de Paris*: 'la face de l'architecture est changée […]. La cathédrale elle-même, cet édifice autrefois si dogmatique, envahie désormais par la bourgeoisie, par la commune, par la liberté, échappe au prêtre et tombe au pouvoir de l'artiste. L'artiste la bâtit à sa guise. Adieu le mystère, le mythe, la loi. Voici la fantaisie et le caprice. […] Le livre architectural n'appartient plus au sacerdoce, à la religion, à Rome; il est à l'imagination, à la poésie, au peuple.' Hugo, *OC*, p. 621.

[35] All quotations from Baudelaire, 'Le Mauvais vitrier', *OC*, i, pp. 285-287.

spying a glazier one day, invites the man up to showcase his wares. Perceiving that the glazier offers only clear glass and not coloured glass, the narrator chastises him:

> Comment? vous n'avez pas de verres de couleur? des verres roses, rouges, bleus, des vitres magiques, des vitres de paradis? Impudent que vous êtes! vous osez vous promener dans des quartiers pauvres, et vous n'avez pas même de vitres qui fassent voir la vie en beau!

Furious, the narrator ejects the glazier onto the street and throws a flower pot on him from his balcony, causing him to fall and break his glass. The narrator cries 'La vie en beau! la vie en beau!' and concludes by asking 'qu'importe l'éternité de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l'infini de la jouissance?'

This poem deliberately echoes Arsène Houssaye's prose poem, 'La Chanson du vitrier' (1850), in which the narrator encounters a glazier and offers him a drink ('un verre'), inadvertently causing the man to fall and break his glass.[36] Indeed, the collection in which 'Le Mauvais vitrier' appears is dedicated to Houssaye, and Baudelaire says of Houssaye's poem:

> Vous-même, mon cher ami, n'avez-vous pas tenté de traduire en une *chanson* le cri strident du *Vitrier*, et d'exprimer dans une prose lyrique toutes les désolantes suggestions que ce cri envoie jusqu'aux mansardes […]?[37]

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Baudelaire appears to compliment Houssaye, who was a powerful figure in publishing, by producing his own *vitrier* poem, also in prose.[38]

---

[36] Arsène Houssaye, 'La Chanson du vitrier', *Poésies complètes* (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1852), pp. 275-278.

[37] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 276.

[38] The relationship between Baudelaire and Houssaye has been well documented: as editor of both *La Presse* (in which 'Le Mauvais vitrier' was published in 1862) and *L'Artiste*, Houssaye had literary influence; he also had political aspirations; and he at one time directed the Comédie Française. Steve Murphy reads 'Le Mauvais vitrier'as a parody of 'La Chanson du vitrier', concluding that Houssaye is the true 'mauvais vitrier', in 'Le Mauvais vitrier ou la crise du verre', *Romanic Review,* 81 (1990): 339-349. Murphy traces the history of the slang term 'vitrier', which designated the 'chasseurs de Vincennes' – soldiers who quashed the 1848 and 1851 insurrections. Richard Burton expands on Murphy's argument, explaining that the 'vitriers' were ambiguous figures; as outsiders in Paris, halfway between artisans and artists, they occupied an uncertain social position and their political leanings are difficult to ascertain. Similarly, Burton claims, Houssaye himself was ambiguous, an artisan-artist of limited talent and a moderate Republican who nonetheless prospered under the Second Empire. See 'Destruction as Creation: "Le Mauvais Vitrier" and the Poetics and Politics of Violence', *Romanic Review* 83.3 (May 1, 1992): 297-322. Aimée Boutin has studied the relationship between these two poems in the context of sound poetics, arguing that Houssaye's poem, which attempts to harmonise the glazier's cry in an experimental fusion of song and prose, is less of a failure than critics have tended to assume. See *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), pp. 82-104.

However, as numerous critics have pointed out, the dedication to Houssaye is laced with irony:[39] that verb 'tenté', combined with the italicisation of 'chanson', implies a sneer and we must conclude that Baudelaire was less impressed by Houssaye's poem than he claimed. This irony carries forward into 'Le Mauvais vitrier', which is less an imitation of Houssaye's poem than a correction of it – in which coloured glass was central. In his 'Chanson du vitrier', Houssaye's narrator adopts a sentimental tone: passers-by head 'à l'or, à l'amour, à la vanité'; the setting sun is reflected in the windows; the glazier is a miserable creature who murmurs 'Il faudra donc mourir de faim' and whose family have 'donné une année de misère à la République, sans compter toutes celles données à la royauté'. Yet, for all this, the narrator translates the man's misfortune into a song and fails to observe the irony of his own action: that, in offering the glazier 'un verre', he causes the devastation of the man's entire vitreous repertoire. In other words, as Maria Scott remarks: 'one of the most objectionable elements of the 'Chanson du vitrier' is, precisely, Houssaye's rose-tinted presentation of life'.[40] He applies to the glazier's socio-economic plight a rose-coloured glass pane, romanticising his lifestyle.

On the face of things, Baudelaire's narrator, in chastising *his* glazier for failing to provide coloured glass, appears to applaud Houssaye's Romantic approach. By extension, this would also corroborate Gautier's understanding of coloured glass, for, Baudelaire claims, coloured glass is 'magique' because it beautifies reality, transporting the viewer to a 'paradis': it is transcendent.

However, given the evident irony of the dedication, we may interpret 'Le Mauvais vitrier' as equally insincere and, indeed, Sonya Stephens has dissected the numerous ironies in this

[39] In particular, Ross Chambers questions whether Baudelaire's dedications may be credited in 'Baudelaire's dedicatory practice', *SubStance*, 56 (1988), 5-17. Sonya Stephens concludes that Baudelaire's dedications to powerful figures like Houssaye allowed him to exploit their social status, while the ironic tone of his dedications preserved his individuality. See *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 8-15.

[40] Maria Scott, *Baudelaire's* Le Spleen de Paris*: Shifting Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 191.

poem.[41] And if we accept that Baudelaire is, in fact, critiquing Houssaye, then any exhortation to render 'la vie en beau' through rose-coloured panes is dubious. Houssaye himself is a 'mauvais vitrier' precisely because in his poetry he does the very thing Baudelaire condemns the glazier for *not* doing. If Houssaye is a glazier, Baudelaire's flowerpot (his own 'fleurs du mal') breaks the glass (i.e. poetry) he has to offer. Houssaye's narrator's actions led to the ruin of a man's livelihood but the financial implications of this for the glazier are overlooked in his poem. Baudelaire's narrator, on the other hand, is only too aware of the consequences of his actions and deliberately aims for the glazier. There is a conscious eschewal of Romanticism, as if to suggest that a clear-glass pane is, in fact, the only viable option in that particular social context. Baudelaire's narrator looks at the reality of the glazier's situation directly, through transparent glass.

'Le Mauvais vitrier', then, can be read as an indictment of Romanticism and it is significant that Baudelaire's narrator is considerably less lofty than Gautier's poetic voice – he looks over Paris not from Notre Dame's towering heights but from his own balcony: with characteristic Baudelairean ambivalence he is still positioned on a vertical axis, but is closer to street level and opens his *window* to spot the glazier below. This change in stance is also reflected in the context of the coloured glass for, where Gautier had retained the glass within the cathedral, Baudelaire does not mention Christian architecture and, indeed, knowingly undermines the Christian framework with his comical allusion to Satan and the 'Démons malicieux'.[42] Instead, the question of stained glass is brought into a social, economic, and even political reality, in which the sale of glass, coloured or otherwise, is a man's livelihood. Stained glass is no longer, as Gautier would have it, a matter of Christian transcendence to a

[41] Stephens identifies the tension between the philosophical apostrophe of the parenthesis and the comic tone of the rest of the poem. She points to hyperbole, pseudo-scientific discourse, competing narrative registers, shifts in tone and tempo, and the 'pot de fleurs' (a pun on Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* and a nod to Poe's influence) as markers of irony, which create ambiguity of meaning and genre. See *Baudelaire's Prose Poems*, pp. 65-71.

[42] Boutin explores the demonic nature of the glazier's cry. She suggests that Houssaye's narrator, while ostensibly striving towards Christian fraternity by offering the glazier a drink, 'befriends his victim to secure his downfall', thereby committing an act of Mephistophelian violence (*Ciy of Noise*, p. 102).

divine ideal, and where Notre Dame represented a 'Monde de poésie, en ce monde de prose' because it facilitated contact with God, Baudelaire brings stained glass into the prosaic world and, moreover, into prose itself.

Ross Chambers argues that Baudelaire's poetry occurs during a transition from Romanticism to fetish aesthetics (the latter of which is 'tinged as much with erotic and even commercial desirability as with a religious or quasi-religious response in the presence of the transcendent'),[43] and he points to the windowpane as demonstrative of Baudelaire's 'growing mistrust of an art of the ideal dependent on techniques that could produce only an illusion of compatibility between levels of experience as distant as a sense of the sacred and the material triviality of the urban everyday.'[44] Chambers suggests that, as Baudelaire's poetry progresses, the poet renounces 'the magical refracting windowpane of idealizing aesthetics'[45] – a move symbolised in the moment when the narrator of 'Le Mauvais vitrier' throws open his window – and seeks a new window poetics more suited to a modern world. In other words, the new aesthetics illustrated through Baudelaire's recurring window metaphors is less sacred, more urban and ordinary than what came before. Nonetheless, this move away from the aesthetic and theological connotations of coloured glass does not preclude the possibility of transcendence. In fact, Baudelaire's poem is a comment on the continuing transcendent power of art: the nature of that aesthetic transcendence has simply changed.

While Baudelaire's rejection of coloured glass implies a similar rejection of its transformative power – its ability to mystify its viewer and transport them to an illusional paradise – 'Le Mauvais vitrier' itself operates as a sort of 'mystification', as Baudelaire states. For, upon reading the poem, the reader is initially tricked into believing that it praises Houssaye while it actually undermines his aesthetic values: the text acts as a coloured-glass pane, distorting reality, mystifying the viewer. But this is not the only mystifying machination

---

[43] Chambers, *Atmospherics*, p. 26.
[44] Chambers, *Atmospherics*, p. 27.
[45] Chambers, *Atmospherics*, p. 32.

in this text: in addition to the narrator's hoax on the glazier, and the hoax on the reader that sees us naively believe in Romanticism, René Jasinski suggests that a further hoax is the fact that the narrator tricks us into believing his rash act was prompted by a flash of inspiration when, in fact, it was premeditated.[46] Maria Scott goes further still and claims that the true mystification of the text is that it encourages the alignment of Baudelaire the man with the poem's narrator. In acting rashly, she argues, the narrator belies what Baudelaire considered to be the basis of artistic beauty – premeditated effort. In her interpretation, it is the glazier who puts effort into his work, while the idle and spontaneous narrator 'rather than representing the Baudelairean artist […] might be interpreted as the target of the poet's contempt'[47] – the narrator himself is the 'mauvais vitrier'.

All of these interpretations are possible and indeed, it is crucial to our understanding of the poem that we keep all ambiguities in play – because ultimately this is the true function of the glass metaphor. Rose-coloured glass is rejected, along with its mystifying powers. Clear glass, though, is equally inadequate, for Baudelaire's narrator perceives the reality of the glazier's situation but still chooses pleasure over ethics. The only possible alternative, as he demonstrates, is to break the glass entirely. And it is this fragmentation that, conversely, upholds the mystifying ability formerly attributed to coloured glass. The act of breaking allows us to consider multiple layers of irony and several interpretations of the poem at once. By breaking the glass, Baudelaire ruptures the poem: the resulting shards cannot offer a coherent transparent view in the way clear glass might, nor can they produce an idealisation characteristic of coloured glass. Instead, they introduce ambiguity: when the reader looks at the broken glass, hoping to see reality (distorted or otherwise) or perhaps a reflection of himself, the image is shattered into several pieces, each reflecting and refracting at different

[46] René Jasinski, *A travers le XIXe siècle* (Paris: Minard, 1975), pp. 353-354.
[47] Scott, *Shifting Perspectives*, pp. 189-193.

angles. If we recall the dedication to this collection, we see that Baudelaire emphasises the text's fragmentary nature:

> un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu'il n'a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement. Considérez, je vous prie, quelles admirables commodités cette combinaison nous offre à tous, à vous, à moi et au lecteur. Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture; car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d'une intrigue superfine. [...] Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l'espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j'ose vous dédier l'ensemble du serpent tout entier.[48]

Baudelaire suggests a poetry based on plurality, where a single reading is impossible and even undesirable. The new poetry will be fragmented rather than rose-tinted but this breaking action, in itself, brings a kind of 'jouissance' and, consequently, a different type of transcendence. Art still facilitates an encounter with a type of paradise but it is an art based on fragmentation. The 'mystification' of coloured glass was encapsulated in the way it manipulated light: what Baudelaire seeks, in his own relationship with glass, is still a manipulation of light but, rather than the sacred tinting of light through a rose window, it becomes an 'éclat' – a burst of brightness produced by breakage. It is no coincidence that two of the other examples given in this poem – the forest fire-setter and the smoker who lights up next to a case of gunpowder – are also images of explosive light.[49]

Baudelaire's broken glass removes one quality of the *vitrail*, the colour, but substitutes it for another – the brokenness. The shattered glass is as mystical, as mysterious, and as *mystifying* as coloured glass previously was: perhaps more so because its fragmentary nature allows for multiple 'mystifications' at once. Poetry is breaking out of its mould and embracing a new model which favours discontinuity, discord, ambiguity and irony.

---

[48] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 275.

[49] Burton explores the recurring image of breaking in Baudelaire's prose poetry, arguing that the window-maker is also a window-breaker. See 'Bonding and Breaking in Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*', *Modern Language Review*, 88.1 (1993): 58-73.

Baudelaire breaks poetry apart: it will be up to later poets to put it back together again. They do so by re-inserting coloured glass into the context of the *vitrail*: yet, they cannot reinsert the divine, and the ideal sphere which they aspire to reach through glass – and therefore through poetry – is none other than poetry itself.

*

Three years after 'Le Mauvais vitrier' was first published, Mallarmé sent a poem to Mme Cécile Brunet, his daughter's godmother and wife of a master glassmaker. This poem, originally entitled 'Sainte Cécile jouant sur l'aile d'un cherubin', which was revised and published in *Lutèce* in 1883 under the new title 'Sainte', also takes stained glass as its motif, but here in a more traditional *vitrail* setting. Nonetheless, Mallarmé deals with a similar theme to Baudelaire, namely the replacement of religion with aesthetics, and the transcendent and mystifying qualities of coloured glass. Mallarmé's poem evokes Saint Cecilia in a stained-glass window:

A la fenêtre recélant
Le santal vieux qui se dédore
De sa viole étincelant
Jadis avec flûte ou mandore,

Est la Sainte pâle, étalant 5
Le livre vieux qui se déplie
Du Magnificat ruisselant
Jadis selon vêpre et complie:

A ce vitrage d'ostensoir
Que frôle une harpe par l'Ange 10
Formée avec son vol du soir
Pour la délicate phalange

Du doigt, que, sans le vieux santal
Ni le vieux livre, elle balance
Sur le plumage instrumental, 15
Musicienne du silence.[50]

[50] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, pp. 26-27.

At first, this subtle verse poem seems a far cry from 'Le Mauvais vitrier'. The structure of the poem, its regular octosyllabic lines and *rimes croisées*, offer a more traditional venue for stained glass than Baudelaire's exuberant prose offering.

However, the text's complex design quietly corroborates Baudelaire's poem. Like 'Le Mauvais vitrier', this poem is a statement about aesthetics, and about the poem as a transcendent medium to a new spirituality, best represented by the mystification of poetry itself. Pearson has explored the symmetries in the text, not only in terms of versification, but also thematically: the lines of stanza 2 echoing stanza 1; the negation of the images of the first half of the poem ('le vieux livre' (l. 14), 'le santal vieux' (l. 2)) in the final stanza; the phonological resonance between phrases such as 'viole' and 'vol du soir', and 'santal' and 'Sainte, recélant'. He states: 'the binary structure of the poem serves to reinforce a central theme of substitution'.[51] The viola, flute, and mandora, and the Magnificat yield to a new art: a silent music – in other words, a poetry of absence. It is in this process of substitution that Mallarmé's poem can be seen as an unlikely extension of Baudelaire's.

In 'Le Mauvais vitrier', we saw religion downplayed and a new aesthetics introduced, which emphasised fracture, ambiguity, and plurality. Mallarmé's own understanding of religion was no less complex and, for Sartre, the absence at the centre of the poet's work was that of God. Explaining that the notion of divine inspiration was lost in the early nineteenth century, Sartre concludes that, although God was missing from Mallarmé's work, the poet nonetheless had to rest his faith in something, namely, in art:[52]

> En ce singulier moment de l'histoire littéraire, l'Artiste ne croit plus à l'Art parce qu'il ne peut l'asseoir sur la garantie divine; mais comme cette caution fait défaut à tout l'univers, c'est à l'Art seul qu'il donne sa foi.[53]

---

[51] Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé*, p. 63.

[52] Sartre states: 'Les poètes de la génération précédente étaient des prophètes mineurs: par leur bouche, Dieu parlait. Mallarmé ne croit plus en Dieu. […] Après avoir tué Dieu de ses propres mains, Mallarmé voulait encore une caution divine; il fallait que la Poésie demeurât transcendante bien qu'il eût supprimé la source de toute transcendance: Dieu mort, l'inspiration ne pouvait naître que de sources crapuleuses. […] Mais c'est par une mystification, car le vers neuf qui va naître, c'est en fait un vers ancien qui veut ressusciter.' *Mallarmé: La Lucidité et sa face d'ombre*, ed. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 152-153.

[53] Sartre, *Mallarmé*, p. 48

Sartre traces Mallarmé's definitive loss of faith to the 'crise de Tournon': Mallarmé's 'année effrayante', which tested his faith in God and in poetry. The period spent in Tournon (November 1863-October 1866) coincided both with his initial plans for 'Hérodiade' and with the first draft of 'Sainte'.[54] Mallarmé described his struggle as:

> Ma lutte terrible avec ce vieux et méchant plumage, terrassé, heureusement, Dieu. Mais comme cette lutte s'était passée sur son aile osseuse […] je tombai, victorieux, éperdument et infiniment – jusqu'à ce qu'enfin je me sois revu un jour devant ma glace de Venise, tel que je m'étais oublié plusieurs mois auparavant.[55]

Mallarmé's terms are suggestively similar to those imagined in 'Sainte', but where the God with whom Mallarmé grapples has bony wings and a 'méchant plumage', the reimagined stained-glass Saint is delicate, her feathers ('plumage' – that familiar Mallarméan nod to the pen) an integral part of the new religion of music. We might note that salvation is provided by another glass surface – the mirror.

If Sartre's hypothesis is correct, what we witness in 'Sainte' is the gradual negation of a traditional understanding of religion. Accordingly, the markers of Catholicism are present in the poem but are systematically negated in the final stanza: thus, the new music functions 'sans le vieux santal, /Ni le vieux livre' (ll. 13-14). This is far from Gautier's sublime celebration of Catholic ornament: here, the traditional emblems of Catholicism are deemed redundant.

However, as Bertrand Marchal points out, Mallarmé's religious incredulity does not translate to a lack of spirituality in his work and, indeed, Mallarmé's poetry remains full of religious allusions, while several pieces in *Divagations* discuss the question of religion.[56]

---

[54] For detailed analysis of stained glass in 'Hérodiade' and 'Sainte', see Bertrand Marchal, 'Le fantôme d'Hérodiade *Don du poème* et *Sainte*', in *Mallarmé: Actes du colloque de la Sorbonne du 21 novembre 1998,* ed. André Guyaux (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998), pp. 123-132.

[55] Mallarmé, letter to Cazalis (14 May 1867), *OC*, ii, p. 714.

[56] In *La Religion de Mallarmé* (Paris: José Corti, 1988), Marchal identifies in Mallarmé's œuvre a unity of thought, which is, itself, a kind of religion. He states: 'Tout le projet de Mallarmé consiste donc à revivre en lui, par les voies de la conscience réflexive, un développement spirituel de l'univers – de l'innocence païenne à la conscience matérialiste du néant en passant par l'illusion chrétienne – qu'il a vécu une première fois de façon inconsciente à travers la crise d'Hérodiade, et c'est parce qu'il constate une relation presque homothétique entre

Marchal explains: 'A la fin du siècle […], le catholicisme paraît anachronique à la classe intellectuelle et voué […] à une disparition prochaine. Mais cette désaffection pour la foi et les dogmes s'accompagne curieusement d'une redécouverte esthétique de la religion romaine'.[57] While Mallarmé may not have credited religion, he nonetheless was willing to exploit its decorative characteristics and transpose the sacredness of an outdated mode of thought – Catholicism – onto the new spirituality afforded by art ('il n'y a de vrai, d'immuable, de grand, et de sacré que l'Art' he wrote, in a letter to Cazalis)[58]. Furthermore, Mallarmé recognised the social need for a religion of sorts and, interestingly, he sees music as fulfilling this role in modern society. In 'Plaisir sacré', where he claims that 'la Musique s'annonce le dernier et plénier culte humain',[59] he likens the concert audience to a congregation:

> Quel rapport existe entre une assemblée contenue, sobre et des exaltations tout à l'heure jaillissant, avec orgie, d'immémorialité, de soirs et de gloire; ou autres bouffées infinies: sinon, se prête-t-on, en raison du caractère disproportionné quant à soi de tels éclats, à une mystification – [60]

For Mallarmé, music fills the gap left by traditional religion. In 'Sainte', penned almost thirty years before the publication of 'Plaisir sacré', Mallarmé is already exploring this idea: in the poem, Catholicism recedes and music, the new religion and the pinnacle of aesthetics (what poetry aspires to be), comes to the fore. This music is a subtle art: played by the angel's 'délicate phalange' (l. 12), it is a balancing act between sound and silence, aspiring at once to be heard and to conceal.

This is where the stained-glass window is important, for it is 'recélant'; it simultaneously contains Saint Cecilia and conceals. If, as with Mallarmé's other vitreous poetry that we have

---

sa propre évolution spirituelle et celle de l'humanité qu'il peut rêver de retrouver celle-ci par la simple réflexion, en se cloîtrant en lui, et prétendre, sans outrecuidance, qu'il est arrivé à l'idée de l'Univers par la seule sensation […]. C'est par la poésie […] que Mallarmé veut retrouver la constitution logique de l'univers et la loi du développement humain' (pp. 76-77).

[57] Marchal, *La Religion*, p. 289.

[58] Mallarmé, letter to Cazalis (24 July 1863), *OC*, ii, p. 650.

[59] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 236.

[60] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 236.

seen, we take the glass as representative of the poem, it is possible to see 'Sainte' as the embodiment of the stained-glass window it depicts. The tight versification of this poem fixes the saint in poetic form – the lead lines of the *vitrail* holding her in place. And yet, she is composed of glass fragments, noun phrases and disembodied clauses, and the poetry she heralds – of which 'Sainte' is both the announcement and the first example – is likewise fragmented. That is not to say that it is incoherent, but rather that this single-sentence poem consists of multiple, disjointed clauses, the meaning and cohesion (i.e. the syntax) of which only come to light gradually – we do not, for example, encounter the subject of the sentence until the second stanza.

And 'come to light' is precisely what the lines of the poem undergo, for if we recall Mallarmé's conception of the congregation and the concert audience, he highlights two things: the 'éclat' and the 'mystification' – both of which, we remember, are central to Baudelaire's poem. We might think of the lines in this poem as pieces in a stained-glass window: they are held in place ('recélés') by a framework, just as the saint is, but their meaning also shifts as we read and new connections appear. Thus, for instance, we see the word 'or' contained in 'mandore', and 'soir' in 'ostensoir'. These two hidden words are of paramount importance, for it is the evening sun that gilds the poem and brings to mind the windows of Mallarmé's 'Les Fenêtres', which were also rendered golden, and therefore opaque, by the sun's rays, serving to reflect a speaker who '[se] voi[t] ange'.[61]

In 'Sainte', associations are made during the reading process, and the reader, like the setting sun, moves across the pane and shines light on different lines consecutively, never illuminating the same line twice – until the next reading, when the *drame solaire* recommences. In this way, the poem withholds something, encouraging us to entertain multiple possibilities at once – it is a 'mystification' – but it also comes to life with an 'éclat', the fragmentation of poetry by the light of reading. The ability of words to reflect light is

[61] Marchal studies the recurring image of gold in Mallarmé's work. See *La Religion*, pp. 403-444.

something Mallarmé articulated more than once, most succinctly stating that '[les mots] s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux',[62] and, more elaborately:

> je crois que, les lignes si parfaitement délimitées, ce à quoi nous devons viser surtout est que, dans le poème, les mots – qui sont déjà assez eux pour ne plus recevoir d'impressions du dehors – se reflètent les uns sur les autres jusqu'à paraître ne plus avoir leur couleur propre, mais n'être que les transitions d'une gamme.[63]

Mallarmé outlines a spectrum of linguistic colour, only reached through reciprocal reflections, which seek not to portray external images, but find their meaning internally. We might see this spectrum as represented by the stained-glass window in which, incidentally, lines are 'parfaitement délimitées'. Yet, in 'Sainte', the window's colours are not mentioned and – as in Baudelaire's case – it is less the colourful nature of the *vitrail* that appeals to the poet than its brokenness. Indeed, the only colour that matters to Mallarmé is gold, precisely because it embodies light. Like 'Le Mauvais vitrier', Mallarmé's poem hails brokenness and does so because in being broken, it is plural and allows for multiple meanings at once. The poem does this by simultaneously acting as a 'mystification', hiding its secrets from us, and an 'éclat', illuminating those secrets. The window is 'recélant' in both senses of the word.

The new broken poetics, which rejects the old religion and the coloured 'vitres de paradis', nonetheless still provides a form of transcendence. This new transcendence operates both through and towards poetry. Mallarmé aspires to reach a new religion – aesthetics (music, and by extension poetry) – by means of the stained-glass window that is the poem. Where Baudelaire broke the poem, Mallarmé reassembles it but retains its brokenness.[64] He

---

[62] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 211.

[63] Mallarmé, letter to Coppée (5 December 1866), *OC*, i, p. 709.

[64] Patrick McGuinness writes about Mallarmé and stained glass in the context of the poet's article about Fénéon's attack on the restaurant Foyot, during which Tailhade (who wrote the collection *Vitraux*) was wounded. Mallarmé recasts Fénéon's bomb as a flowerpot, evoking the flower poetics we have seen. The shattered restaurant window is aligned with a stained-glass window, which is protected by virtue of its pre-broken state. McGuinness comments: 'Mallarmé asserts that poetry – because it is already broken, because it has absorbed or internalized the damage – is in fact 'cuirassée' or armoured against further harm. Poetry's fragility is what helps it survive; indeed, like a stained-glass window, its wholeness is a result of, and a *victory over*, brokenness. [...] Poetry, as Mallarmé here defends it, is a scattered wholeness [...], able to survive

capitalises on the 'mystification' so that the 'éclat' might be better felt. As a mystifying poem, 'Sainte' may be considered an early experiment with Mallarmé's theory of 'Le livre, expansion totale de la lettre, […] qui confirme la fiction.'[65] In other words, 'Sainte' is a prime example of literature as a 'glorieux mensonge'.[66]

*

Baudelaire and Mallarmé were far from alone in taking coloured glass as inspiration. In fact, in the second half of the century, it was almost a given that any poet associated with Symbolism and Decadence would produce a *vitrail* poem. This is true to such an extent that to examine a complete inventory would be impossible, but a handful of examples suffices to demonstrate the tone and themes of such poems.

Shortly after the composition of both 'Le Mauvais vitrier' and 'Sainte', François Coppée offered a less avant-garde rumination on the *vitrail*:

> Sur un fond d'or pâli, les saints rouges et bleus
> Qu'un plomb noir délimite en dessins anguleux,
> Croisant les bras, levant au ciel un œil étrange:
> Marc, brun, près du lion; Mathieu, roux, près de l'ange[.][67]

This poem sets the tone for much of the stained-glass poetry to follow, which favours simple description and romantic or devotional themes. We see this trend throughout the 1880s and 1890s:

Raoul Russel's 'Vitrail' (1885):

> Dans un cadre fleuri d'ornements liturgiques,
> Sur le fond lumineux du vitrail et du ciel
> Tu m'apparais drapée en tes atours magiques
>
> — Oh! belle d'un éclat artificiel!
> Telle aux jours de candeur, sur le seuil de l'enceinte,

---

marginalization, calumny, and violence precisely because it has already internalized them, reconfigured them, and projected them back out.' *Poetry and Radical Politics*, pp. 179-180.

[65] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 226.

[66] Mallarmé, letter to Cazalis (28 April 1866), *OC*, i, p. 696.

[67] François Coppée, 'Vitrail' (1869), *Poésies complètes de François Coppée*, (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1923), p. 52.

La Vierge souriait au peuple d'Israël.

[…]

La pompe des soleils couchants te solennise.

Ton corps semble grandir… Parmi les floraisons
Du vitrail ta Beauté devient éblouissante.[68]

Jose-Maria de Heredia's 'Vitrail' (1893):

Cette verrière a vu dames et hauts barons
Étincelants d'azur, d'or, de flamme et de nacre,
Incliner, sous la dextre auguste qui consacre,
L'orgueil de leurs cimiers et de leurs chaperons;

Lorsqu'ils allaient, au bruit du cor ou des clairons,
Ayant le glaive au poing, le gerfaut ou le sacre,
Vers la plaine ou le bois, Byzance ou Saint-Jean d'Acre,
Partir pour la croisade ou le vol des hérons.[69]

And Laurent Tailhade's 'Vitrail' in his 1894 collection *Vitraux*:

Le vitrail que nul art terrestre ne profane
Jette sur le parvis d'incandescentes fleurs.

Car l'ensoleillement du coucher diaphane
Dans l'ogive où s'exalte un merveilleux concept
Intègre des lueurs d'ambre et de cymophane.

Les douze Apôtres, les cinq Prophètes, les sept
Sages appuyés sur les Vertus cardinales
Se profilent en la rosace du transept.

Améthystes! Béryls! Sardoines! Virginales
Emeraudes au front chenu des Confesseurs
Montrant le Livre où sont inscrites leurs annales.

[…]

Telle, incarnant aux yeux les divines paroles,
Chaque verrière dans l'or mystique reluit,
Comme un jardin semé d'aveuglantes corolles.

---

[68] Raoul Russel, 'Vitrail', *La Basoche*, n. 10 (August 1885), p. 362.
[69] Jose-Maria de Heredia, 'Vitrail' *Poésies complètes: les trophées, sonnets et poèmes divers* (Geneva-Paris: Slatkine, 1981), p. 97.

Mais l'ombre gagne et le vain prestige s'enfuit
Et les arceaux quittés n'ont plus de fleurs écloses
Pour les répandre sur la robe de la Nuit

La sacrilège Nuit par qui meurent les Roses.[70]

These poets use the stained-glass window trope as a platform to celebrate a revived medievalism. They focus on the effect of light on the window and on the glorification of biblical or mythical figures. Nonetheless, their treatment of the *vitrail* tends to accept the trope without questioning it. The result is that such poems are practically interchangeable and, while picturesque and technically accomplished, they tell us little about the evolution of poetry during this period.

On the contrary, it is those poets who challenge the stained glass cliché who reveal most about poetry's development as an increasingly self-reflexive and avant-garde art. We might consider, for example, Rimbaud's evocation of stained glass in 'Les Pauvres à l'église':

Heureux, humiliés comme des chiens battus,
Les Pauvres au bon Dieu, le patron et le sire,
Tendent leurs oremus risibles et têtus.

[…]

Et tous, bavant la foi mendiante et stupide,
Récitent la complainte infinie à Jésus,
Qui rêve en haut, jauni par le vitrail livide,
Loin des maigres mauvais et des méchants pansus,

Loin des senteurs de viande et d'étoffes moisies,
Farce prostrée et sombre aux gestes repoussants;
– Et l'oraison fleurit d'expressions choisies,
Et les mysticités prennent des tons pressants[.][71]

For Rimbaud, there is nothing admirable about the church: he portrays a scene of humiliation where the worshipping poor are foolish and laughable. He goes further than Mallarmé's 'Sainte', for here religion is not merely undermined but openly derided. This is the anti-

[70] Laurent Tailhade, *Vitraux*, (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1894), pp. 20-22.
[71] Rimbaud, *Poésies*, pp. 103-104.

Romantic, all sentimentality removed and the sublime negated until only the grotesque remains, exaggerated and repulsive. The verticality of Gautier's poem is still evident, as the figure of Jesus outlined in the stained-glass window 'rêve en haut' but, where Gautier soared above Paris, a bird atop Notre Dame, Rimbaud situates the worshippers in deliberate vertical opposition to that which they worship: ascension is impossible.

Moreover, the window has none of the beautifying potential evident in other, contemporary poetry: it is 'livide', its colour drained, its Christ jaundiced. The act of worship is deemed a 'farce' – a hyperbolic performance of faith, all surface and no substance. For Rimbaud, the stained-glass window, a Catholic emblem, is part of a risible and pointless ritual. Traditional religious imagery is subverted and, rather than endorsing the understanding of stained glass as transcendent, the medium pales. By comparison, the poem itself *is* colourful and vivid: it contrasts with the window it depicts, draining the glass of colour and infusing the text with intensity. As the window presents a yellowed Jesus, so does the poem present a discoloured version of Catholicism.

This subversion of Catholic imagery is taken up, albeit in subtler terms, by Laforgue in his 'Rosace en vitrail' (published posthumously in 1901):

Vraiment! tout ce qu'un Cœur, trop solitaire, amasse
De remords de la vie et d'adoration,
Flambe, brûle, pourrit, saigne en cette rosace
Et ruisselle à jamais de consolation.

Oh! plus que dans les fleurs de fard de Baudelaire, 5
Plus que dans les refrains d'automne de Chopin,
Plus qu'en un Rembrandt roux qu'un rayon jaune éclaire,
Seuls aussi bons aux spleens sont les couchants de juin.

Vaste rosace d'or, d'azur et de cinabre
Pour ce coin recueilli mysticisant le jour, 10
Tu dis bien notre vie et splendide et macabre,
Et je veux me noyer en toi, crevé d'amour!

D'abord, ton Cœur, calice ouvré de broderies,
Semble, dans son ardeur d'âme de reposoir,
Un lac de sang de vierge, où mille pierreries 15
Brûlent mystiquement, nuit et jour, sans espoir!

De ce foyer d'essors, féerique apothéose,
Jaillissent huit rayons, échelle de couleurs,
Où des tons corrompus, mourants, se décomposent,
Symboles maladifs de subtiles douleurs, 20

Ô blancs neigeux et purs, ò pétales d'aurore,
Blancs rosés, lilas blanc, fleurs des vierges écrins,
N'êtes-vous pas l'enfance, où le remords encore
Et les spleens furieux n'ont pas cassé nos reins?

Et vous, l'âpre jeunesse éclatant en vingt gerbes 25
D'ivresse, vers le calme éternel du soleil,
Bleus francs, verts des juillets, écarlates superbes,
Lits chauds de tresses d'or, braises de rut vermeil?

Alors, le grand bouquet tragique de la Vie!
Les mornes violets des désillusions, 30
Les horizons tout gris de l'ornière suivie
Et les tons infernaux de nos corruptions!

Ah! quel riche trésor l'artiste Amour étale!
Orangés sulfureux, or roux, roses meurtris,
Blancs de cold-cream; et la splendeur orientale 35
Des verts, des lilas noirs et des jaunes pourris!

L'alcool, les cuivres chauds des alambics; les bières,
Gamme de blonds; les ors liquides et vermeils,
Les verts laiteux, les blancs, les bleus incendiaires,
L'opale des crachats et le plomb des réveils. 40

Toussez, ô gris du spleen, défilé monotone
Des tons neutres, plâtreux, enfumés, endeuillés;
Sépias, roux déteints, averses, ciels d'automne;
Soleils soufrés croulant dans les bois dépouillés;

C'est la mort, la catin en cire, aux fards malades; 45
Et son clavier de verts, ses algues au fiel;
Ses jaunes luxueux, ses roses de pommades
Ses bitumes fondant dans le noir éternel!

Chaste rosace d'or, d'azur et de cinabre,
Va, je viendrai souvent lire en toi, loin du jour, 50
L'Illusion, plus morne en son chahut macabre,
Et me noyer en toi, crevé, crevé d'amour![72]

Laforgue’s detailed depiction of the rose window employs much of the imagery and vocabulary that other poets associate with the *vitrail*: the reference to the setting sun; the

[72] Laforgue, *OC*, i, pp. 392-394.

verbs of light ('flambe', 'brûle', 'éclaire'); the window that is 'mysticisant le jour' (l. 10); the association with love, death, and treasure, suggesting the chivalric code apparent in poems like Heredia's. Laforgue takes the pieces of other stained-glass poetry and reassembles them in a circular structure.

But, in fact, this poem goes further, for, in addition to collating the many tropes of the *vitrail* poem, it also alludes to a number of Decadent and Symbolist tropes on a wider scale. Thus, we see the familiar clichés of Decadence: alcohol, cold-cream (and by extension, Pierrot), the language of decay ('des tons corrompus, mourants, se décomposent' (l. 19)). Moreover, not only does Laforgue allude to Baudelaire's poetry (the 'fleurs du mal' becoming 'fleurs du fard', again evoking makeup but also artifice, embellishment), but the multiple references to 'spleen', and the opposition of 'splendide et macabre' (l. 11), so close to 'spleen et idéal', are also reminiscent of Baudelaire's work. We might also detect traces of Mallarmé in this poem – the 'pierreries', and the 'lac de sang de vierge' (l. 15). Laforgue's poem recalls the defining images of two of his greatest predecessors, and it is clear that this poem is less about stained glass than about poetry. We should note how often the phoneme 'ver-' occurs (verts, vermeil, vers…). 'Rosace en vitrail' may purport to be about religious architecture but it is really a comment on the state of poetry.

'N'êtes-vous pas l'enfance?' (l. 23) Laforgue asks the delicate, pastel flower petals evoked in the window's subtle tones. These petals are the poems of the previous generation and the question is a nod to the poetry on which Laforgue cut his teeth. At the same time, we are to understand that this poetry is dying: decomposing, spluttering a cough and cloaked in grey mourning. But, as we saw in Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*, from this decline a new poetry may be born.

Consequently, the rose window is doubly useful to Laforgue. At this point, the *vitrail* poem is a cliché: it epitomises aesthetic stagnation, poetry caught in a cycle, unable to find new direction. The circular structure of the rose window, symmetrical and repetitive, reflects this:

it is an endless cycle. The structure of Laforgue's poem, too, has a certain circularity. Clearly, there is a circular aspect to the rhyme (*croisées*), which constantly refers us forward two lines or back two lines, but there is also substantial repetition in the poem: images and terminology recur; Chopin's autumn refrains (suggesting the seasonal cycle) and the 'Rembrandt roux' (so close to 'roue') (ll. 6-7), have barely faded from our minds before they are re-evoked in 'Sépias, roux déteints, averses, ciels d'automne' (l. 43). And if, at first, we might consider a thirteen-stanza poem an odd length given its otherwise circular nature, we might recall that the rose window, typically segmented into twelve or sixteen petals, is in fact an odd-numbered structure, for there is always a central pane holding the radial petals together. Thirteen, then, is perfectly apt, an alexandrine bursting at its seams.

This poem offers not only an example of a Decadent trope, but also a comment on that trope. Like the rose window, poetry is circular at this time. Its childhood days of Baudelairean spleen and Mallarméan virginity are gone, and it is now in decline for lack of inspiration. And if we were in any doubt about this, Laforgue confirms the analogy in the final stanza where he declares: 'je viendrai souvent *lire* en toi, loin du jour,/ L'Illusion, plus morne en son chahut macabre,/ Et me noyer en toi, crevé, crevé d'amour!' (l. 50-52) [my emphasis]. The rose window offers an illusion which can be read – Laforgue seems to be saying that the poetry he has inherited does likewise, perhaps recognising the mystification in the work of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. And yet, this illusion is fading, growing old, and Laforgue's hyperbolic final line, with that characteristic ironic exclamation mark, leaves us certain that this illusion is less welcome than he would have us believe, and that the *vitrail* poem has reached its use-by date.

*

By the 1890s, while poets like Heredia and Tailhade are still pronouncing the glory of stained glass, linking it to a renaissance in medievalism, others are recognising the decline of the *vitrail* poem. Verhaeren's 'Les Cathédrales' (1895), for example, displays a similarly scornful

attitude towards Catholic worship to that seen in Rimbaud’s poem. This poem begins in a tone not dissimilar to more conventional stained-glass poems:

Au fond du chœur monumental,
D'où leur splendeur s'érige
– Or, argent, diamant, cristal –
Lourds de siècles et de prestiges,
Pendant les vêpres, quand les soirs 5
Aux longues prières invitent,
Ils s'imposent, les ostensoirs,
Dont les fixes joyaux méditent.[73]

Our first impression is simply of an ornate description of cathedral architecture, much like we have encountered elsewhere. Verhaeren employs familiar Catholic terminology – ‘vêpres’, ‘ostensoir’ – and his poem is visually rich with precious materials and the weight of history.

However, the tone of the poem shifts when, two stanzas later, the poet states that the church ‘dresse avec ses arcs et ses voussoirs/ Jusqu’au faîte, l’éternité du culte’, suggesting that all this ornamentation is simply that: a purely decorative cult, the function of which has become obsolete. He goes on to introduce a refrain:

– O ces foules, ces foules,
Et la misère et la détresse qui les foulent!

Voici les corps usés, voici les cœurs fendus, 40
Voici les cœurs lamentables des veuves
En qui les larmes pleuvent,
Continûment, depuis des ans.

[…]

– O ces foules, ces foules
Et la misère et la détresse qui les foulent!

Voici les enfants las de leur sang morne
Et qui mendient et qui s'offrent au coin des bornes. 55

– O ces foules, ces foules
Et la misère et la détresse qui les foulent!

[…]

[73] All quotations from ‘Les Cathédrales’ are in Verhaeren, *Villes tentaculaires*, pp. 123-128.

Voici les grands bourgeois de droit divin
Qui bâtissent sur Dieu la maison de leur gain.

– O ces foules, ces foules
Et la misère et la détresse qui les foulent!

In total, the exclamative couplet is repeated nine times in quick succession, each time gaining in absurdity what it loses in sincerity. Where Rimbaud was repulsed, Verhaeren overdoes the crowd's misery, undermining the opulence with which he formerly portrayed the cathedral. The repetitive use of 'voici' to introduce each category of worshipper robs them of individuality, turning them into mere components in the perpetuation of the pointless cult. Finally, the poem concludes by shifting its attention to the stained-glass window:

Et les vitraux, peuplés de siècles rassemblés
Devant le Christ – avec leurs papes immobiles
Et leurs martyrs et leurs héros – semblent trembler
Au bruit d'un train lointain qui roule sur la ville. 90

Verhaeren's tone is weary as he evokes centuries' worth of congregations 'avec leurs papes immobiles/ Et leurs martyrs et leurs héros', all contained in the window, which is witness to this history. But, tellingly, this window trembles as a distant train – emblem of modernity – rumbles past, and the pomp of Catholic worship is threatened by the new urban environment, where technology and speed will become the new cult.

Verhaeren's compatriot, Rodenbach, also suggests that the magic of the *vitrail* is dwindling in 'Le Jour s'éteint dans les vitraux d'or endurci', which appears in the 'Le Soir dans les vitres' section of *Les Vies encloses* (1896):

Le jour s'éteint dans les vitraux d'or endurci
Et de bleu clair auquel l'air du ciel collabore.
L'église est grise; elle devient tout incolore;
Et déjà les vitraux ont un aspect transi,
Eux qui tantôt encor blasonnaient le silence. 5
[…]
L'église, contre l'ombre, à peine se défend;
Un reste d'encens plane en pâle mousseline 10
Qui fil à fil se désagrège dans les nefs;

Quelques cierges ont par instants des éclats brefs
De flamme horizontale et dont l'ombre s'évente.
Dans les vitraux foncés, s'est amarré le soir;
Translucide tantôt, leur verre est presque noir, 15
Bassins d'une eau froidie et qui se désargente!
Volupté de cette ombre et de subodorer
La maladive odeur des églises: bougies,
Encens fané, nappes du culte défraîchies,
Et les cires qui sont mortes de se pleurer![74] 20

Rodenbach too evokes the traditional ornaments of the Catholic church but it is a church that is fading in importance. His use of light is significant: the day is dying; the church darkens to grey, 'incolore' (l. 3), the stained glass no longer bathing the interior with a magical coloured light; the candles stutter, their 'éclats' brief. The past participles (transi, endurci, foncés, froidie, fané, défraîchies) suggest stagnation or decline and the whole movement of the poem is from illumination to translucidity (trans + lucid – that which light may pass through), and finally to black. We saw in Rodenbach's aquarium poetry that he is interested in the interplay between the 'clair' and the 'obscur', but here the 'obscur' is winning. The mystifying glory of the stained-glass window present earlier in the century has faded to irrelevance, and the *vitrail* poem itself, 'translucide tantôt' and therefore legible, is now 'presque noir' (l. 15): its appeal as a poetic trope has ceased.

Stained glass, then, was fading from poetry and its final indictment came from Saint-Pol-Roux, one of the founders of *La Pléiade* and the poet to whom Breton dedicated *Clair de terre*, on account of his ability to 's'offr[ir] le magnifique plaisir de se faire oublier'.[75] His own stained-glass prose poem, 'Le poète au vitrail', was first published in 1905 and was dedicated to Marinetti:

> Je naquis en cette Tour qu'aujourd'hui seulement, à l'âge d'homme, j'ai quittée.
> La salle, où captif moral autant que physique je vécus comme en un tronçon de serpent gigantesque érigé sur soi, ne recevait l'impression du dehors qu'au moyen d'un vitrail scellé au sud-est et figurant une Dame bariolée dont le verre épousait les lignes de plomb.

[74] Rodenbach, *Œuvres*, ii, pp. 41-42.
[75] André Breton, *Clair de terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 35.

> Clos, je ne savais du monde que ce m'en transmettait, tamisé, la mince et transparente Image aux mains ouvertes comme pour épandre les heures, et d'elle nécessairement, dispensatrice dont il me fallait subir les caprices, me parvenait la Vie.
> […]
> Successivement nourrice, mère, gouvernante, compagne, selon mes années, la Dame du vitrail symbolisait pour moi la nature et l'humanité, et je devais fatalement aboutir à cette conclusion que l'Univers c'était elle.
> 'Je suis la Vérité!' lisait-on d'ailleurs sur la banderole émanée de sa bouche, en zigzags.
> Soucieux de gloire, j'entrepris d'écrire.
> L'œuvre achevée, je la mandai, par-dessus les créneaux de ma prison, vers la lointaine humanité.
> Combien grande fut ma déception de voir l'œuvre me retourner vitement sur les folles ailes d'un vent d'ironie!
> Or les hommes n'avaient pu me comprendre. A même les marges des notes déclaraient ma vision incompatible avec la vérité commune, ajoutant que, phénomène étrange, la Vie se présentait dans mon poème comme dans une chambre obscure en quelque sorte déformée par un passage à travers un prisme.
> — 'L'arc-en-ciel n'est pas plus toute la nature qu'Arlequin n'est toute l'humanité,' avait conclu un signataire autorisé.
> Confondu, je me campe en point d'interrogation devant la Dame du vitrail.
> En guise de réponse, la banderole incendiée par le soleil levant me crie plus encore que jamais:
> — 'Je suis la Vérité!'
> L'encrier saisi, rageusement je le jetai contre le vitrail qui vole en éclats, l'Image s'éparpillant en vaines lamelles, à mes pieds sa banderole disloquée.
> O miracle!
> Par la soudaine initiation de la baie spontanée, la Vie m'est apparue dans sa plénitude première d'instincts et de passions. […] Là, sans masque, nue, resplendissait enfin la Vérité jusqu'ici cultivée sous l'emprise déformatrice. Le spectacle de la moindre fleur émancipe mes yeux, le monde entier m'envahit dans un jet de brise, et directement je la divine Beauté délivrée de ses prêtres et de leurs mensonges.
> M'élançant alors dans l'espace, je courus baiser sur la bouche une bergère alentourée de ses brebis, tandis que le soleil m'enrichissait de son sourire prodigieux.
> Toujours plus loin derrière moi, pareille à l'emblème d'Onan, fuyait la Tour de Servitude.[76]

This poem is an obvious riposte to the stained-glass poetry that precedes it. The poet is situated within a tower, a clear nod to Romanticism, but this is more punishment than privilege as he is trapped there, bound by the walls of poetic tradition. Indeed, the tower resembles 'l'emblème d'Onan': phallic and forced by a divine hand to (re)produce. The stained-glass window is the only access to the world and proclaims a certain 'vérité', yet the

[76] Saint-Pol-Roux, 'Le Poète au vitrail', *Poesia*, vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1905), p. 29.

view is ‘tamisé’, skewed and deformed by the glass. In this poem, the ‘vitrail’ does not magically bestow glory (although the ‘Dame’ still believes she does), but instead distorts reality. Thus, the poem appears to echo ‘Le Mauvais vitrier’ rendering explicit what was implicit in Baudelaire’s poem: that the ‘vitres de paradis’ fail to represent a true image of the world. Instead, they present a ‘mensonge’, preached by the ‘prêtres’ – the poets who came before. The use of stained glass in poetry is as clichéd as Harlequin in the commedia of life, his diamond-patterned costume a moving counterpart to the coloured panes of intersecting glass. In another echo of ‘Le Mauvais vitrier’, the poet smashes the glass, breaking tradition.

However, this is not simply a reprise of Baudelaire’s poem, for Baudelaire’s own work is one of the very constraints trapping Saint-Pol-Roux’s poet. The walls of his tower resemble ‘un tronçon de serpent gigantesque’, recalling Baudelaire’s description of his own prose poetry collection as a fragmented serpent: ‘Dans l'espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire […], j'ose vous dédier l'ensemble du serpent’. Therefore, the very fact that this poem is written in prose means that it is not breaking free from Baudelairean tradition but adhering to it.

Significantly, though, the poet does not use a flowerpot to smash the glass, but an inkwell, the tool of writing serving as a weapon to destroy the status quo. Moreover, the aspect of the glass that is singled out as being smashed is the ‘banderole’ – the banner through which the stained-glass woman speaks. Her voice is denied in the moment when the inkwell destroys her: poetry is pitted against poetry. In breaking the glass, Saint-Pol-Roux points to the futility of former poetic convention, which becomes, like Onan’s wasted seed, ‘éparpill[é] en vaines lamelles’. Where Baudelaire smashed the glazier’s wares – raw poetic material – to create a new form from this material (poetry in fragments but still salvageable, more beautiful for being disjointed), Saint-Pol-Roux eradicates the glass completely, leaving the aperture ‘nue’. The result is that stained-glass poetics are abolished entirely and the absence of glass is proclaimed as the future of aesthetics. This poem, dedicated to Marinetti, who championed

modernity louder than anyone, confronts the vitreous sheen that has coated nineteenth-century poetry and declares its redundancy. This poet at his stained-glass window is the last emblem of a dying age and, recognising his fate, he pre-emptively destroys tradition, choosing an aesthetics of *de*-mystification and thereby sealing the fate of glass poetics as the century turns.

Final Reflections

> […] playing, whose end, both at the
> first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the
> mirror up to nature; […][1]

T. S. Eliot, writing in 1919, opines that every literary generation claims Hamlet as their own:

> Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order [...]. These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization. [Goethe and Coleridge] make their critical aberrations the more plausible by the substitution – of their own Hamlet for Shakespeare's – which their creative gift effects.[2]

This charge could certainly be levelled against the Decadent and Symbolist poets, for Baudelaire's Hamlet is an 'histrion en vacances' with a 'regard indécis';[3] Mallarmé's is a 'seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir', on the verge of action like his 'pitre châtié' astride a window;[4] Laforgue's is a petulant adolescent, an 'homme d'action' who cares more about his artistic calling than unveiling the truth; Maeterlinck's Hamlet is a soul in a sleep state who 's'avance à chaque instant jusqu'au bord du réveil';[5] and Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* is haunted by the spectre of Ophelia. For his part, Eliot's own Prufrock is himself a clown figure bound to inaction: attempting to discard the shackles of the nineteenth century, he is explicitly 'not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;/ [Is] an attendant lord, […]/ Almost, at times, the Fool.'[6] Eliot contends that Hamlet appeals to every generation because there is nothing to him: *Hamlet* is an artistic failure because the strength of the protagonist's feeling is unmatched by the events that occasion it.

---

[1] William Shakespeare, 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark', *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 2006), p. 1101.

[2] T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and his Problems', *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 95.

[3] Baudelaire, *OC*, i, p. 117.

[4] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 167.

[5] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Le Trésor des humbles*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Paris: Grasset, 2008), p. 37.

[6] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 7.

In answer to this discrepancy, Eliot outlines his theory of the 'objective correlative':[7] 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of [a] particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.'[8] Eliot reconciles the material world of objects and events with the immaterial world of emotions, arguing that art must find an equivalence between the two. For Eliot, the material world is a method to articulate abstraction.

Some thirty years earlier and on the other side of the channel, this expression of the immaterial by means of material form is essentially what we encounter in Moréas' 'Manifeste du symbolisme'. We recall that Moréas describes Symbolism as the 'Ennemie de […] la description objective,' which aims to 'vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible'. The 'Idée' itself 'ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures; car le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la concentration de l'Idée en soi.' Moréas' manifesto is problematic not least because, as we have seen, many of the writers associated with Symbolism did not officially subscribe to the movement – indeed, there are as many Symbolisms as there are Hamlets. But, in avoiding direct evocation of the Idea and recommending an analogical method, Moréas essentially amalgamates Baudelairean 'correspondances' with Mallarmé's aspiration to 'peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.' Symbolism, we are to understand, operates through analogy between material substance and immaterial – and inexpressible – thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

This is the tension that this thesis has exposed, challenging the dialectical opposition between reality/ the material/ the objective, and fiction/ the imagination/ the subjective ideal,

---

[7] In a letter to Edmund Gosse (10 January 1893), Mallarmé appraises his own work in terms similar to Eliot's theory. Responding to an article Gosse wrote about Mallarmé, the poet states: 'Il y a, entre toutes, une phrase où vous écartez tous voiles et désignez la chose avec une clairvoyance de diamant, la voici: "His aim... is to use words in such harmonious combination as will suggest to the reader a mood or a condition *which is not mentioned in the text,* but is none the less paramount in the poet's mind at the moment of composition.' Tout est là. Je fais de la Musique, et appelle ainsi non celle qu'on peut tirer du rapprochement euphonique des mots, cette première condition va de soi; mais l'au-delà magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole, où celle-ci ne reste qu'à l'état de communication matérielle avec le lecteur […].', *OC*, i, p. 807 [Mallarmé's italics].

[8] Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, p. 100.

which has informed critical responses to this poetry. Symbolism is not a Hamletic mirror which reflects the world, but it nonetheless relies on the representation of the material in order to touch upon the metaphysical. This is what Moréas gestures towards and what Eliot states outright, and it is far from the abstract characterisation of Symbolism to which we are accustomed. In the first chapter, we examined the intersection of reality and the imagination in the windowpane – the transparent, 'realist' glass as opposed to the subjective reflective pane – and the link between glass and the frame, which offered a route towards the infinite. Chapter Two moved between reality and the imagination through the metaphor of lens technology: the lorgnette, telescope, microscope, and camera help to observe, magnify, and capture the real, while the magic lantern and kaleidoscope depict fantasy and correspond to the imagination. In Chapter Three, glass walls prompted the interrogation of artifice and exoticism by enclosing a hermetic, Decadent soul, which alternatively luxuriates in and resists its separation from the exterior world. Chapter Four pitted material presence against absence, examining how empty glass containers suggest without stating the absent flower which exists in ideal terms, and, conversely, how a material response to poetry in glass art is unsuccessful in expressing abstract thought. The final chapter analysed glass as a means of transcendence of the material world in pursuit of an ideal one based on aesthetics. Poetry adopts the role that stained-glass windows formerly held, becoming a tool through which art reaches an understanding of itself.

In almost every manifestation of glass in the poetry of this period, the central question is the interaction between materiality and the unseen and imagined 'Idée'. Certainly, the 'Idée' was important to Symbolist poets, but the importance of the material in relation to it should not be overlooked. The material is crucial to depicting abstraction, to expressing philosophy, sensibility and, ultimately – because Symbolist poetry is always attempting to define itself even as it grapples with its environment – aesthetics. The paradox of the movement is that,

while it has been characterised as the most abstract of aesthetics, its own conception of the new aesthetics must be formulated in non-abstract terms.

But this thesis is not just about materiality in general: it is about one particular material. Glass resonates with these poets because it encapsulates the very dilemma they address. Glass is liminal and full of contradictions: it is solid and unbreachable, yet also transparent, allowing the gaze to pass where the body cannot; it is intermediary, embodying a borderline between subject and object, reality and fiction, presence and absence. Using glass as a metaphor therefore allows writers to engage with materiality while still facilitating access to the immaterial. If we recognise that this poetry was attempting to leave reality behind in favour of a pure and self-reflexive aesthetics, glass is interesting because it is involved in every step of this process. It is, first, an aspect of the material world and consequently poetry's starting point; second, as it is frequently used by poetry as a metaphor *for* poetry, and by extension for aesthetics, it is the end point – the representation of the 'Idée' these writers aim for; and finally, it is the embodiment of the figurative device which enables correspondence between the material and ideal – that is, analogy. Glass interests the Symbolists, in the end, not because it is the least material element of the material world, nor because it is the most material representation of the immaterial: it is because glass facilitates the meeting of the material and immaterial and signifies the transition between them. Thus, lenses create an optical field that is based on material substance but which does not materially exist; the windowpane, in being reflective as well as transparent, creates an image that differs from the external view without erasing it; the hothouse encloses the subject, confining him to a world of the interior but leaving the exterior in full view; the empty vase suggests what is absent, and thereby brings it into existence; and coloured glass invites spiritual transcendence. In sum, Symbolism is built on varying understandings of analogy, which, operating on the line between two things, is necessarily liminal. Glass too is liminal, and therefore aptly represents analogy. Both glass and poetry are tools of transition. The Symbolists do not

merely reckon with reality through glass: they use it to harness the real as a route towards the ideal.

*

This thesis has covered a range of writers associated with Decadence and Symbolism, and has focussed on poetry, interrogating the role of glass in articulating an evolving aesthetic. For many of these poets, though, poetry was only one aspect of their creative output: accompanying their interest in the page was inevitably an interest in the stage, and it is here that glass comes closest to the elusive 'Idée.' The qualities that had made glass appealing in poetry were equally attractive in a theatrical context: in fact, in their theatrical writing, these poets return to vitreous imagery but, if anything, they enhance it, all the implications of glass writ large through being dramatised.

Theatre offered the Symbolists further scope to experiment with materiality and the Ideal. Where poetry poses the question of materiality, theatre forces this question, the physical environment leaving less to the reader's – or spectator's – imagination. A case in point is Rodenbach's adaptation of *Bruges-la-Morte* for the stage, *Le Mirage*.[9] The play essentially follows the novel's plot but, whereas in the novel thoughts and feelings are evoked by a third-person narrator, in the play they are vocalised or, as Gorceix phrases it: 'le principe de suggestion, conforme à la ligne symboliste du roman, a reculé pour céder le pas à la verbalisation.'[10] Already, then, the play is more explicit than the novel for, by virtue of its form, it cannot leave things unsaid.[11]

---

[9] *Le Mirage* was never staged in Rodenbach's lifetime. However, his play *Le Voile* was the first Belgian play shown at the Comédie Française (1894). In this play, Jean the protagonist becomes infatuated with a nun whose hair is hidden in her veil. The scenery includes glass windows and the dialogue refers to many Rodenbachian vitreous tropes: the nun has 'l'air d'une sainte/ Descendue un matin d'une verrière peinte' (p. 17); her lifestyle is 'comme derrière un verre/ D'où le monde nous est visible mais fermé' (pp. 5-6); Jean sees his reflection as 'l'effet d'être mort et sous verre' (p. 23); and he describes mirrors as 'des fidèles gardiennes/ Des visages de tant de morts qui s'y sont vus!' (p. 9). See Georges Rodenbach, *Le Voile* et *Le Mirage*, ed. Richard Bales (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). When Jean finally sees the nun without her veil, however, he becomes disenchanted. As Paul Gorceix states: 'la vue de la réalité détruit donc ce qui chez Jean n'était qu'une vision de l'esprit'. *Georges Rodenbach*, p. 166.

[10] Gorceix, *Georges Rodenbach*¸ p. 153.

[11] Richard Bales summarises this dilemma: '[Rodenbach] se trouvait confronté à la nécessité d'extérioriser une action qui, dans le roman, était tout interne.' *Le Voile* et *Le Mirage*, p. xviii.

But the most striking difference between the two forms is in their treatment of Hugues' dead wife. In the novel, the dead woman is created by memory and desire, a product of Hugues' psyche rather than a tangible aspect of reality. Of course, Hugues attempts to render her physical by locating her mirror image in Jane. The novel's chiastic structure and mirror imagery (the 'espions', the reflective canals and windows, the mirrors)[12] underline the theme of doubling that drives the plot: the correlations between Jane and the wife, the wife and Bruges, Hugues and Bruges. Nonetheless, the mirrors are misleading and the similarity between the two women loses credibility as the novel progresses.[13]

In the play, however, Hugues' dead wife (given the name Geneviève) is not merely the product of his mind: Geneviève appears on the stage and talks to Hugues. Although she is described as an 'apparition', the introduction of the object of Hugues' obsession as a physical and animate being – as visible to the audience as to Hugues – reduces the ambiguity of the novel. Hugues speaks of 'des présences dans la nuit',[14] and the 'effrayants mystères de l'invisible',[15] which the other characters cannot perceive: the audience, however, *can*. Hugues longs to escape reality and inhabit the ideal, resenting Jane because she grounds him in the real ('Je sais maintenant, à cause d'elle, qu'on ne peut pas vivre dans l'idéal, que la réalité nous attire comme la terre', he states).[16] But, unlike in the novel, here the ideal infringes more definitively on the real, making the audience complicit in the fiction.

The use of glass corroborates this. In *Bruges-la-Morte*, references to glass emphasised the theme of doubling: in *Le Mirage*, glass continues to do this but it also embodies the shifting line between reality and fiction. The play opens with the breakage of the glass panel that protects Geneviève's portrait: picking up the broken glass, Barbe confides in her friend:

---

[12] For discussion of the chiastic structure and themes of *Bruges-la-Morte*, see Lowrie, 'Ophelia becomes Medusa' pp. 41-62: 'Linear progression is abolished […] reality might be nothing other than a petrified reflection in a looking glass, revealing that the future is merely a duplication of the past.' (p. 55).

[13] Mosley relates the deceptive quality of mirrors to Lacan's theory of the 'mirror-stage', where the infant fixates on an external and ideal image of itself. See 'The Soul's Interior Spectacle', p. 37.

[14] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 63.

[15] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 57.

[16] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 56.

'Surtout que c'est de mauvais présage, un bris de vitre, de verre, de glace…'.[17] Later, we learn that, for Hugues, the destruction of the portrait would have been 'comme si [s]a morte mourait encore une fois'.[18] The glass preserves the portrait and, by extension, preserves the fictive ideal in which Hugues is immersed. The breakage of the glass in the first scene, as Barbe states, foreshadows loss: the loss of Jane, the double, and also of the illusion of Geneviève reincarnated. The play culminates with Hugues gazing into his mirror, after he has killed Jane, and expressing a desire to enter it.[19] The mirror still offers what Hugues has just lost; the continuation of the ideal, fiction perpetuated in its glassy depths.

Le Mirage may lack the subtle suggestiveness of *Bruges-la-Morte*, but the play is interesting in its own right because it explores the possibility of a through-the-looking-glass world. The glass screen preserves a fiction (that Hugues' dead wife exists still) that is about to be broken by the intrusion of a real woman in the form of Jane, but also of a physical version of the wife herself, who is both more and less perfect than her image preserved behind glass. Meanwhile, the mirror which, according to Hamlet, should reflect the real, instead offers the refuge of fiction. The fact that the audience witnesses Geneviève's return means that a fictional product of Hugues' psyche is rendered visible and therefore, within the play's parameters, 'real': the play enacts the realisation of the fiction. In turn, this encourages the audience to suspend their disbelief and enter into the very fiction of *Le Mirage* itself. The meta-dimension of the play is that, not only are fiction and reality merged within it, but the fiction of the play and the reality inhabited by the audience are conflated in the mirror, which encourages the destruction of the fourth – we might imagine glass – wall.

Glass in a theatrical context, then, is a way to further interrogate the question of materiality that fascinated the Symbolists in their poetry. The poet who applied glass imagery most successfully to the stage was undoubtedly Maeterlinck, most of whose plays involved glass

[17] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 32.
[18] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 39.
[19] Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, p. 79.

scenery or props. Two particularly striking examples are *L'Intruse* (1890) and *Intérieur* (1894), both of which deal with the unknown or unseen and are thus an extension of the Symbolist preoccupation with the immaterial.

Maeterlinck's lifelong interest in the invisible has been well documented,[20] and was strengthened by his studies of Ruysbroeck's Flemish mysticism,[21] and Novalis' magical idealism. He conceived of dreams as a way to communicate with the unknown: relating a fictional dream in 'Onirologie', Maeterlinck states that 'cette nuit d'octobre, j'avais communié sans intermédiaire, avec l'invisible et l'inexplicable'.[22] Maeterlinck uses the image of a mirror to explain the dream. Having dreamt he was drowning, his narrator recounts:

> j'avais appris que les noyés, à l'instant de leur mort, revoient, en une espèce de miroir, leur vie entière […] j'eus l'idée de cette espèce de miroir et alors, […] j'eus immédiatement en main ce miroir même auquel j'avais songé.[23]

To the narrator's horror, the mirror in which his dream-self expects to see his life reflected is empty; what should be visible is missing. Images of glass also occur in this short story when, attempting to recall the content of his dream, the narrator describes seeing dream scenes as 'comme si on les entrevoyait à travers quelque verre grossissant qui éloigne outre mesure',[24] and again later as 'comme *à travers des glaces obscurcies*'.[25] Glass is a potent metaphor because, in the ordinary circumstances of conscious everyday life, it can be seen through, yet here it prohibits or distorts vision, and what should be known is left unknown.

---

[20] See Paul Gorceix, *Maurice Maeterlinck: L'arpenteur de l'invisible* (Brussels: Le Cri: Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises, 2005). Maeterlinck's tale 'Onirologie' dates from 1889, twenty-six years before the publication of Freud's 'The Unconscious'.

[21] In his introduction to Ruysbroeck's *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles*, Maeterlinck uses glass to explain Ruysbroeck's understanding of the unseen: 'Le miroir de l'intelligence humaine est entièrement inconnu dans ce livre; mais il existe un autre miroir, plus sombre et plus profond, que nous recelons au plus intime de notre être; aucun détail ne s'y voit distinctement et les mots ne peuvent se tenir à sa surface; […] mais autre chose s'y montre par moments; est-ce l'âme? est-ce Dieu lui-même? ou l'un et l'autre à la fois? On ne le saura jamais; et cependant ces apparitions presque invisibles sont les uniques et effectives souveraines de la vie du plus incrédule et du plus aveugle d'entre nous.' (Brussels, Paul Lacomblez, 1910), pp. 11-12.

[22] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 139.

[23] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 132.

[24] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 135.

[25] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 139 [Maeterlinck's emphasis].

For Maeterlinck, dreams were a theatrical space, and he refers to 'le théâtre nocturne',[26] 'le théâtre de mon rêve',[27] and 'cet état spécial entre la veille et le sommeil, qui est comme l'entracte des songes' (recalling his Hamlet, who moves between dreams and waking).[28] Not unlike glass, theatre should facilitate seeing: on the stage, thought must be externalised in language and action. We might imagine that in the theatre, the unseen will be dramatised: in a sense, the Idea will be given a form.

However, just as the glass in Maeterlinck's fictional dream is obscured or empty, his theatre operates by withholding, rather than staging, vision. The dream is important to Maeterlinck because: first, it allows for communion with the invisible; and second, it gives only half the picture, resisting as much as it yields.[29] This is why glass is an apt metaphor, because it should be legible but in every instance it disappoints, obfuscates. Consequently, as one set of images – those that *should* be visible – recede, the unseen surfaces in the darker, deeper mirror Maeterlinck associates with the Ruysbroeckian unknowable.

This is effectively what Maeterlinck's plays achieve, using the physical components of theatre, visible onstage, to suggest what is missing. For example, *L'Intruse* shows a family onstage, including an old blind man, while offstage the mother is dying. The room on stage features doors to the right and left, a 'petite porte masquée', a lit lamp, and 'des fenêtres à vitraux où domine le vert, et une porte vitrée s'ouvrant sur une terrasse.'[30] The characters discuss the dying woman, and their dialogue is menaced by some invisible and unspecified figure, whom only the old man perceives. At regular intervals, he enquires of the other characters: 'Il n'y a personne à la porte vitrée?'; 'Il n'est venu personne?'[31] However, while

[26] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 134
[27] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 138
[28] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, i, p. 135
[29] For more detail on the interrelation of dream and theatre in Maeterlinck's work see McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, pp. 21-26.
[30] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 245.
[31] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 259.

he insists that someone unseen has arrived, the other characters and the audience remain unable to see anyone else, although we do hear someone else moving.

L'Intruse transfers the dynamics of material presence and absence from the self-contained, private parameters of poetry to the public arena of the theatre. The question Maeterlinck asks, sixty years before Ionesco revisits it, is whether there is someone at the door. This explains the importance of glass, for, by rights, we should be able to see through this door and yet, what our ears tell us we should see is only visible to the one character who cannot see. Maeterlinck's use of light emphasises this paradox. The old man erroneously believes the light to have been lowered and declares that he is 'tout seul, dans des ténèbres sans fin!',[32] but we are told that he 'distingue les grandes clartés'.[33]At the end of the play, just before the mother's death, light invades the stage through the window:

> Ici un rayon de lune pénètre par un coin des vitraux et répand, çà et là, quelques lueurs étranges dans la chambre. […] il semble à certains qu'on entende, très vaguement, un bruit comme de quelqu'un qui se lèverait en toute hâte.[34]

We are back in the realm of the *clair-obscur*: lucidity and legibility are granted to the character who lives in darkness and perceives a different kind of light. This light becomes visible to the others only at the last moment, when death is near. This may explain why Maeterlinck speaks of the unease the spectator feels at the theatre: 'Est-ce peut-être la crainte d'un monde intermédiaire auquel ne correspond aucun de nos sens manifestes ou secrets?'[35] Theatre for Maeterlinck is a tool for communication with an unknown world, an indefinable spirituality.[36] It suggests to the audience the possibility of what is absent through what is

---

[32] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 268.
[33] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 258.
[34] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 279.
[35] Maurice Maeterlinck, 'Un Théâtre d'Androïdes', *Annales de la Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck*, 31 vols (Ghent: Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck, 1955-1999), xxiii, 22-33, p. 33.
[36] As with stained glass, this transcendence occurs in a Godless context. McGuinness states: 'Maeterlinck's drama presents a perpetual confrontation between the human being and the unknowable, shapeless, and frequently destructive forces around him. […] He is aware of operating in a kind of theological void, in which the concept of a guiding God has been replaced by an indeterminate, centreless, and hybrid 'Inconnu', *Maurice Maeterlinck*, pp. 231-232.

present. Glass corroborates the old man's intuition because it creates an expectation of seeing which is unfulfilled, and thus we become aware of what we cannot see. The doors and windows in *L'Intruse*, which delineate an intermediary space between the exterior terrace and the interior room, embody the process the spectator undergoes at the theatre: the passage between the present, material world and that of the abstract idea.[37] As in the poetry we have seen, the materiality of glass evokes that which is immaterial, an effect that is all the more powerful in the theatre, which we might assume to be inherently material.[38]

Intérieur resembles *L'Intruse*, and features a family inside a house, visible through three lit windows. Their actions, we are told, are 'comme spiritualisés par la distance, la lumière et le voile indécis des fenêtres.'[39] They are watched by an old man and a stranger, positioned outside the house, whose conversation reveals that one of the daughters has drowned and a crowd is bringing her body home. Like *L'Intruse*, the play portrays an enclosed family who cannot see out their windows (the remaining daughters approach the windows and 'regardent longuement dans l'obscurité'),[40] while an unseen presence approaches. In this play, we know that this presence is the approaching crowd but, although death has already occurred, it has not yet happened *to* the family. Essentially, we witness a waiting game. *Intérieur* dramatises the immaterial in a similar way to *L'Intruse*: this time, however, we know what the encroaching unknown is: like the old man and the stranger, we are on the other side of the glass.

---

[37] McGuinness remarks that doors in this play create 'a transitional space [...]; they are both protective (closed *against*) and threatening (opening *into*). [...] In Maeterlinck's theatre, a door is analogous to a verbal utterance 'referring to' unseen spaces. [...] It is a physical object which 'alludes' to something beyond itself, while remaining visible on one side only. Like the unanswered question, it is the intelligible half of something addressed as the unknown.' *Maurice Maeterlinck*, p. 187.

[38] For detail about Maeterlinck's position in relation to Symbolist theories about the abstract in the context of the physical stage, see McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, pp. 48-124.

[39] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 503.

[40] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 510.

Intérieur is also an important contribution to Maeterlinck's œuvre because of its metadimensionality, for the two exterior characters act as a second audience, watching the family drama and even narrating it:

L'ÉTRANGER: … mais voici que le père met un doigt sur les lèvres…
LE VIEILLARD: Il désigne l'enfant endormi sur le cœur de la mère…
L'ÉTRANGER: Elle n'ose pas lever les yeux, de peur de troubler son sommeil…
LE VIEILLARD: Elles ne travaillent plus… Il règne un grand silence.
L'ÉTRANGER: Elles ont laissé tomber l'écheveau de soie blanche…
LE VIEILLARD: Ils regardent l'enfant…
L'ÉTRANGER: Ils ne savent pas que d'autres les regardent…
LE VIEILLARD: On nous regarde aussi…[41]

Their words confirm that which we see. But elsewhere they also recount that which we do not see: the body being brought home. The two characters function as intermediaries between the visible and invisible. *Intérieur* is a comment not just on the immaterial, but also on what it means to stage the immaterial. This play without action is worth our attention *because* it is staged. As McGuinness states, the play '"stages" an audience. It is *spectatorship itself* that ensures that whatever is seen or heard, however mundane or everyday, is to some extent "spiritualisé".'[42] By placing a glass barrier between the family and those watching them, Maeterlinck highlights the act of spectatorship, which we both witness and perform. The glass, transparent but one-way, not only frames the family within but also, by exclusion, frames those watching, turning watching itself into a spectacle. This focuses our attention on that which is not seen at the theatre – the audience.

But for the ultimate example of theatrical dematerialisation we must look to Mallarmé, whose work demonstrates a recurring ambivalence towards the theatre, which is at once 'd'essence supérieur',[43] a 'milieu de sublime nature',[44] and inferior to reading: 'un livre dans

[41] Maeterlinck, *Œuvres*, ii, pp. 507-508.
[42] McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, p. 205.
[43] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 179.
[44] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 180.

notre main [...] supplée à tous les théâtres, non par l'oubli qu'il en cause mais les rappellant impérieusement'.[45] Mallarmé claims:

> le livre essaiera de suffire, pour entr'ouvrir la scène intérieure [...]. Un ensemble versifié convie à une idéale représentation: [...] Un théâtre, inhérent à l'esprit, quiconque d'un œil certain regarda la nature le porte avec soi, résumé de types et d'accords; ainsi que les confronte le volume ouvrant des pages parallèles.[46]

Mallarmé's 'théâtre de l'esprit', where the act of reading stages its own performance, is an alternative space for the dialogue between the material and immaterial but, unlike Rodenbach and Maeterlinck, Mallarmé does not render this space physical. An illuminating interpretation of Mallarmé's theatre is Evlyn Gould's concept of 'virtual theater' – theatre that exists in the mind, rather than in reality. Gould defines this notion in optical terms:

> 'Virtual' is a term borrowed from optics which refers to the potential or energetic existence of optical counterparts for objects that only occur within a psychical or mental space but give the impression of existing in a physical reality. [...] The optical system of the telescope offers a scientific or technological metaphor for the psychical apparatus so that the term 'virtual' identifies the elusive figurations emanating from unconscious thought processes that bend or refract conscious foci as the telescope does light rays. 'Theater' supposes the externalization of these optical phenomena in a physical space designed for representation. 'Virtual Theater' is thus a paradox that proposes the externalisation of internal and energetic optical phenomena in the physical space of textual representation.[47]

In Gould's definition, virtuality is lenticular, but the other context in which we speak of a virtual image is in mirrors, which also bend light to form an image that exists as other to the physical object reflected. Virtuality is a product of glass, which designates a space adjacent to reality.

The concept is useful because mirrors are a Mallarméan trope and lend themselves to several themes identifiable in the poet's œuvre.[48] Mallarmé's theatrical writing pays them

[45] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 201.
[46] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 195.
[47] Gould, *Virtual Theater*, p. 1.
[48] The mirror can represent the sterility of Mallarmé's early work, and Hérodiade refers to 'la froideur stérile du métal' (*OC*, i, p. 18). It can represent the self-containment of Mallarmé's logocentric poetry, where meaning bounces between words like reflected light, as in 'Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx', the first version

special attention, and the mirror is a talking point between Hérodiade and her nurse in the 'Scène'. Hérodiade evokes her surroundings and herself through a mirror image:

> Ô miroir!
> Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée
> Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée
> Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont
> Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond,
> Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine.[49]

> Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie,
> Et tout, autour de moi, vit dans l'idolâtrie
> D'un miroir qui reflète en son calme dormant
> Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant..[50]

Hérodiade and her environment are viewed not directly, but through the mirror's image, existing only on a virtual plane. The fact that this play is not staged underlines this: if it were staged, the mirror image would have a physical counterpart in the actor and scenery. But, as this is a 'théâtre de l'esprit', the Hérodiade who speaks the lines we read is as much a linguistic construct as the one she herself describes in the mirror. Our first introduction to Hérodiade is the nurse's question: 'Tu vis! ou vois-je ici l'ombre d'une princesse?'[51] She cannot be certain that the princess is anything more than a shadow, a pattern of the light. In fact, that is precisely what Hérodiade is – an interplay of shadow and light, ink and page, constructed through words. The virtual image of her, a reflection of that light, is made of the same substance as the non-virtual Hérodiade, that is, language. The mirror allows for a potentially infinite interchangeability between the virtual and non-virtual or, in other words, between what is 'real' and what is fiction. Moreover, it disrupts and extends consciousness,

---

of which Mallarmé described as a 'sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons' (*OC*, i, p. 732). This poem ends with a constellation framed in a mirror: 'Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor/ Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe/ De scintillations sitôt le septuor' (*OC*, i, p. 38). It can represent Mallarméan elusiveness, as in the Venetian glass of 'Frisson d'hiver', which prompts the speaker to ponder: 'peut-être verrais-je un fantôme nu si je regardais longtemps' (*OC*, ii, p. 85).

[49] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 19.

[50] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 21.

[51] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 17.

facilitating an exchange between the subject (Hérodiade seeing herself, her spoken words evoking her own image) and the object (Hérodiade seen through the words she herself is speaking).[52] As with *Intérieur*, the play stages its own audience but, in this case, the watcher is the same as the watched – Hérodiade.

In 'L'Action restreinte', Mallarmé states that the writer must 's'instituer, au texte, le spirituel histrion': the writer is a performer, the text his stage. He continues:

> Plancher, lustre, obnubilation des tissus et liquéfaction de miroirs, en l'ordre réel, jusqu'aux bonds excessifs de notre forme gazée autour d'un arrêt, sur pied, de la virile stature, un Lieu se présente, scène, majoration devant tous du spectacle de Soi […].
> Une salle, il se célèbre, anonyme, dans le héros.[53]

The stage, which belongs to the 'real' order of things and is therefore in some way material, is dematerialised in this process, the space emerging from a mirrored fluidity in which we might imagine the lights of the 'lustre' flicker. This mobile reflectiveness is the basis for a 'spectacle de Soi' and yet it is not a venue for the expression of the writer/performer, for he is rendered anonymous, represented by an archetypal hero. Therefore we may infer that the 'Soi' that is dramatised is that of the audience who, reflected in this 'liquéfaction de miroirs' and united under the *drame solaire* of the chandelier, find their subjectivity projected before them. As in 'Hérodiade', the interchangeability between performer and audience, subject and object of a gaze, is produced by a reflective trickery which casts doubt on the division between fiction and reality.

Mallarmé's 'virtual theatre' is so deemed because it exists only on the page and in the psyche, but the virtuality *within* this writing is also informative. Mirrors effect an equivalence between the real and ideal because both are constructed of language. Moreover, given that

[52] Gould sees a similar mechanism in the 'Ouverture' with the window and the nurse: the nurse, as both actor and spectator, is at once subject and object: 'although the text makes a point of creating a doubled theatrical space by separating the outside from the inside of a room and placing a window frame between them, the Nurse's looking turns this window frame into an imaginary proscenium arch by projecting an imaginary performance into the stillness.' The shift in the nurse's perspective 'mobilizes the scene', and the window becomes a rotating proscenium arch, dramatising the interchange between that which is onstage and that which is not, i.e. the audience. *Virtual Theater*, p. 150.

[53] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, pp. 215-216.

‘Hérodiade’ is a ‘virtual’ play, the text too functions *as* a mirror: the figures and scenes evoked therein become as credible as the material world existing outside the text. In other words, the fiction of ‘Hérodiade’ becomes interchangeable with the reality of its writer and readers. Shakespeare’s Hamlet aspired to hold up a mirror to nature. In Mallarmé’s conception of Hamlet, however, ‘tout se meut *selon une réciprocité symbolique des types entre eux ou relativement à une figure seule*.’[54] Characters merge, only Hamlet himself standing out, but this reciprocity recalls that ‘obnubilation de tissus’, suggesting that not only do the characters merge, but also those watching them. The mobile mirroring effect of the virtual text creates an exchange between nature and fiction.

The impression of liquified mirrors comes to further prominence in another of Mallarmé’s texts which may be considered ‘virtual’: ‘Igitur ou La Folie d’Elbehnon’, which ‘s’adresse à l’Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en scène, elle-même’.[55] Igitur, Mallarmé’s most Hamletic character, constantly faces the fluid questions of subjectivity, fiction, and the ideal. Like Hamlet, he is caught in-between: indeed, his very name (Latin for ‘therefore’ or ‘consequently’) suggests his liminality. This in-between quality plays out in Mallarmé’s use of mirrors.

Igitur’s drama is one of light and shadow. He inhabits an environment where presence and absence are a creation of light, and one version of the text begins with the possibility that ‘les souffles de ces ancêtres veulent souffler la bougie (grâce à laquelle peut-être subsistent les Caractères du grimoire)’.[56] The letters in the ‘grimoire’ Igitur reads exist only because the candle enables reading and, by extension, our own reading of the text depends equally on light. Igitur himself is divided: the titular madness he senses comes from the fact that he is ‘esprit’, pure thought, but he seems to create his physical environment (‘les choses ambiantes lui semblent provenir de lui-même’).[57] Therefore, Igitur’s environment is an extension of his

[54] Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, p. 168.
[55] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 475.
[56] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 473.
[57] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 474.

subjectivity and he can make it all disappear by blowing out the light ('Plus rien, restait le souffle, fin de parole et geste unis – souffle la bougie de l'être, par quoi tout a été.').[58] Igitur is simultaneously the potential negation of everything and the potential creator of everything. Thus, the 'substance du Néant' is said to be contained in the pure glass walls of a 'fiole' – anagram of the 'folie' that consumes Igitur himself.[59]

The mirror reveals this paradox. Igitur looks to the mirror for confirmation of himself: 'j'étais obligé pour ne pas douter de moi de m'asseoir en face de cette glace'[60] (bringing to mind Mallarmé's own statement to Cazalis: 'J'ai encore besoin [...] de me regarder dans cette glace pour penser.').[61] And yet, we learn earlier that the appearance of images in the mirror's surface disrupts its purity: 'la vision importune du personnage qui nuisait à la pureté de la glace chimérique […] la pureté ne peut s'établir – voici que l'obscurité la remplacera'.[62] Igitur, the last of the pure race, causes the disruption of purity: he is the shadow interrupting the light.

But that reference to 'vision' reveals the ambiguity of this text, for 'vision' may be understood as both 'apparition' and 'view': in other words, is the mirror's purity disrupted by the presence of a figure (the object seen), or by the act of looking (the subject seeing)? For this reason, the space of reflection is the focal point of this drama. Several versions of the 'sortie de la chambre' evoke shining walls or panels which trap light and shadow:

> il n'y avait sur les parois luisants aucun[e] trame, à laquelle pussent s'attacher même les pattes arachnéennes du *soupçon*: tout était luisant et propre; et si quelque plumage avait jamais frotté ces parois, ce ne pouvait être que les plumes de génie d'une espèce intermédiaire soucieuse de réunir toute poussière dans un lieu spécial, afin que ces ombres des deux côtés multipliées à l'infini apparussent comme de pures ombres portant chacune le volume de leurs destinées, et la pure clarté de leur conscience. Ce qu'il y avait de clair c'est que ce séjour concordait parfaitement avec lui-même: des deux côtés les myriades d'ombres pareilles, et de leurs deux côtés, dans les parois opposées, qui se réfléchissaient, deux trouées d'ombre massive qui devait être nécessairement à l'inverse de ces ombres,

[58] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 474.
[59] 'Sur les meubles, vacants, le Rêve a agonisé en cette fiole de verre, pureté, qui renferme la substance du Néant.' Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 475.
[60] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 498.
[61] Mallarmé, letter to Cazalis (14 May 1867), *OC*, i, p. 714.
[62] Mallarmé, *OC*, i, p. 480.

non leur apparition, mais leur disparition, ombre négative d'eux-mêmes: c'était le lieu de la certitude parfaite.[63]

Shadow is caught between reflecting panels, unable to get a purchase. Paradoxically, the shadows are endowed with a kind of clarity and their reflections in the walls are 'trouées d'ombre', at once holes made of shadows and holes where the shadows should be. The 'plume', meanwhile, evokes the pen, inking shadows across the purity of the page. This place of perfect certitude is predicated on ambiguity, any appearance of certainty only achieved by disappearance. In another draft, this one in the first person, Igitur seems trapped within the same space:

> Toutefois mon inquiétude s'accroît: ces deux ouvertures de portes, qui se mirent aussi parfaitement que les deux panneaux opposés se répètent, engendrent une certaine ambiguïté nouvelle et le doute: serai-je prise dans les panneaux de mon propre songe? Mais ne sont-ils pas le mirage l'un de l'autre, à travers ma réflexion, un reste de doute causé par le prolongement absurde de mon hôte antérieur, qui sembla fuir indéfiniment. Je prends au hasard: l'un est l'autre.[64]

Igitur wonders if the reflective walls are the substance of his own dream, a product of his mind. We might see these vitreous walls as analogous to those of the phial containing the 'Néant', an 'agonie de rêve chimérique et pur':[65] the nothingness that Igitur himself both effects and annihilates is held between the reflective surfaces of his own mind. It is his 'prolongement' that causes the mirror effect, his own reflection that prompts doubt. Consequently, as well as being the shadow that disrupts the mirror's purity, he is also the original light ray that is refracted in all the subsequent versions of him. The effect is a hall of mirrors: a place of certitude that confirms his existence through reflection, yet also the place where existence is most disrupted and precarious. Igitur may be trapped in the walls of his

[63] Mallarmé, *OC,* i, p. 490.
[64] Mallarmé, *OC,* i, p. 496.
[65] Mallarmé, *OC,* i, p. 480.

mind, but this is his only possible reality and he is fated to linger, like Hamlet, on the border between action and dreams, the real and the virtual. We recall Hamlet's soliloquy:

> To be, or not to be – that is the question:
> [...] To die, to sleep –
> To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause.[66]

Hamlet's articulation of his dilemma informs that of Igitur: trapped in his own dreams, existence is only possible insofar as his mind can conceive of it. This is why Igitur must die, having drunk a drop of the 'Néant' from a phial that is now empty: he cannot resolve the dilemma between being and not being. Mirrors both confirm Igitur's existence and throw it into doubt. As a creature of light and shadow, who disrupts and prolongs the purity of nothingness, everything depends on him. Consequently, nothing exists except within his mind, which is to say, virtually. Like 'Hérodiade', the text itself uses language – the meandering and repetitive syntax, the layering of clauses – to replicate the effect of a 'liquéfaction de miroirs', creating its own virtual plane on which the reader projects and directs an image that is not 'real' but which nonetheless exists. Just as Igitur's surroundings depend on his mind, so the text, and possibly even the circumstances *beyond* the text, depends on the reader's.

The hall of mirrors reminds us that everything is virtual, even the very thing that seemed to cast the original reflection. It therefore seems fitting to end by mentioning that most virtual of Mallarméan concepts – mime. As the poet explains in 'Mimique', the mime is associated with the poetic task: a blank figure ('fantôme blanc comme une page pas encore écrite'),[67] he is connected with Mallarmé's preference for absence, whiteness, and the pure page, and like the

[66] Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, p. 1100.
[67] For quotations from 'Mimique' see Mallarmé, *OC*, ii, pp. 178-179.

poet, he 'tradui[t] le silence'. Mime is the most appealing form of theatre to Mallarmé because it is the closest physical theatre gets to the virtual:

> La scène n'illustre que l'idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d'où procède le Rêve), vicieux mais sacré, entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir: ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé, sous une apparence fausse de présent. Tel opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans briser la glace: il installe, ainsi, un milieu, pur, de fiction.

Famously, this passage prompts Derrida's reading of Mallarmé in 'La Double Séance', where Derrida outlines his rebuttal of the mimetic principle. He claims that Mallarmé illustrates

> une mimique qui n'imite rien, […] un double qui ne redouble aucun simple, que rien ne prévient, rien qui ne soit en tous cas déjà un double. Aucune référence simple. C'est pourquoi l'opération du mime fait allusion, mais allusion à rien, allusion sans briser la glace, sans au-delà du miroir.[68]

For Derrida, only the copy exists and imitation of any real model is impossible: there can only be copies of copies. This is effectively what Mallarmé demonstrates in both 'Hérodiade' and 'Igitur', where we can only be certain of the virtual image, so interchangeable is it with reality. The mirror image – the one created by the text – is as important as anything extra-textual and fiction trumps reality. Derrida focuses on the dual function of the hymen in 'Mimique' – both uniting and separating, and we might note that the hymen is the origin of dreams here, just as Igitur's glass room was formed of his dreams. The 'glace' in this text, the mirrored surface, is itself a hymen: a liminal point between stage and audience, it is where fiction and reality meet. The mime must not pierce this wall because the glass screen preserves the integrity of fiction, or the virtual, behind it. But the glass wall must also remain intact because it is the very thing that raises fiction to superiority, precisely by creating the conditions for virtuality that mean that the performer and the reader/spectator can become interchangeable and, as a result, suggesting that not just that which we see onstage but *everything* might, in fact, be a 'milieu, pur, de fiction'.

[68] Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 234.

Hamlet's mirror – the use of art to reflect reality – has become a clichéd metaphor for realism. However, theatrical mirrors in a Symbolist context are anything but realist. The theatrical mirror, as analogous to the text itself, is used instead to emphasise fiction, the virtual, the ideal, and the subjective, once again through material means. When used in theatre, the mirror, which creates virtual existence on its surface and prompts existential questioning, is the perfect culmination of a convergence of glass and poetic culture during this period. While these poets may have aspired to reach an ideal world, their journey began with and was made possible by the material world they inhabited. It is in the mirror's depths, then, that they ultimately grapple with the question, 'to be or not to be' – there's the rub.

*

Throughout their tumultuous and ill-defined existence, the Decadent and Symbolist movements endeavoured to resolve the contradiction between the material world and the abstract and unknown 'Idée.' This thesis has shown that the contradiction is not an obstacle to their poetic method but, rather, it is the source of their creativity. While these movements may have proclaimed their identities in opposition to Naturalism's explicit materiality – proclamations which have helped shape critical reception of their work – their prolonged investment in the material world is proof that their interests were more aligned than they would admit. If materiality were a house to be appropriated, the Naturalists bought the keys and cut the ribbon; the Symbolists, meanwhile, were sneaking in through the back door – or perhaps, through an open window.

The recurrence of glass in poetry throughout the second half of the nineteenth century speaks to its lasting influence in the literary consciousness. By the early twentieth century some of this influence had fallen away. Glass continues to appear in the work of later poets, but less frequently and only in passing. The vitreous fixation is very much a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Nonetheless, the Symbolist use of glass as a means to unite the material and immaterial had a more durable legacy: as Eliot's objective correlative demonstrates,

early-twentieth-century poetry owed a great debt to the Symbolist dramatisation of their dilemma over materiality. By the time Ezra Pound was advising his contemporaries to ‘go in fear of abstractions’, his French predecessors had long since faced that fear.[69]

[69] Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, p. 60.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

André, Édouard, 'Serre-Galerie', *La Revue horticole* (1883), pp. 159-160.
Apollinaire, Guillaume, *Calligrammes*, ed. Vincent Vivès, Paris: Gallimard, 2003.
Aragon, Louis, *Le Paysan de Paris*, Paris: Gallimard, 1953.
Banville, Théodore de, *La Lanterne magique*, Paris: Charpentier, 1883.
— *Petit traité de poésie française*, Paris: A. Le Clère, 1872.
Baudelaire, Charles, *Correspondance*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
— *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, 2 vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1975-1976.
Beaurepaire, Edmond, *La Chronique des rues*, Paris: Sevin & Rey, 1900.
Bing, Siegfried, 'The New Art', in *Quotations and Sources on Design in the Decorative Arts*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
Breton, André, *Clair de terre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966.
Cendrars, Blaise, *Du monde entier*, ed. Paul Morand, Paris: Gallimard, 1967.
Charton, Édouard (ed.), *Le Magasin pittoresque* (23 April 1855).
Coppée, François, *Poésies complètes de François Coppée*, Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1923.
Corbière, Tristan and Charles Cros, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Forestier and others, Paris: Gallimard, 1967.
Déterville, *Le Palais-Royal ou les filles en bonne fortune*, Paris: Chez l'Écrivain, 1815.
Du Camp, Maxime, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle*, 6 vols, Paris: Hachette, 1875.
Eliot, T.S., *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber, 1974.
— *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-17*, ed. Christopher Ricks, London: Harcourt Barce, 1996.
— *The Sacred Wood*, London: Methuen, 1960.
Flaubert, Gustave, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, ed. Lea Caminiti, Napoli: Liguori; Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1966.
— *Madame Bovary*, ed. Bernard Ajac, Paris: Flammarion, 1986.
— *Trois Contes*, ed. Peter Michael Wetherill, Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1988.
Gallé, Émile, *Émile Gallé*, New York: Parkstone International, 2014.
Gautier, Théophile, *Albertus: Légende théologique*, Paris: Le Phénix, 1930.
— *Émaux et Camées*, ed. Jean Pommier and Georges Matoré, Lille: Librairie Giard; Geneva: Droz, 1947.
— *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6 vols, Paris: Hetzel, 1859.
— *La Comédie de la morti*, Paris: Desessart, 1838.
— *Œuvres: choix de romans et de contes*, ed. Paolo Tortonese, Paris: Laffont, 1995.
— *Victor Hugo*, Paris: Charpentier, 1902.
Ghil, René, *Traité du verbe*, Paris: Giraud, 1886.
Goncourt, Edmond and Jules, *Germinie Lacerteux*, ed. Philippe Desan, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990.
— *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire,* 4 vols (1866-1886), ed. Robert Ricatte, Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956.
Grégoire, Henri, *Rapport fait au nom des comités des finances, des domaines et d'instruction publique, par Grégoire. Séance du 11 prairial, l'an deuxième de la République*, L'Imprimerie nationale, 1794.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, with an introduction by Lori Campbell, New York: Race Point, 2013.
Hartmann, Eduard von, *La Philosophie de l'Inconscient*, trans. D. Nolen, Paris: G. Baillière, 1877.
Haussmann, Georges Eugène, *Mémoires du Baron Haussmann*, 3 vols, Paris: Victor Havard, 1890.
Heredia, Jose-Maria de, *Poésies complètes: les trophées, sonnets et poèmes divers*, Geneva-Paris: Slatkine, 1981.
Houssaye, Arsène, *Poésies complètes*, Paris: Victor Lecou, 1852.
Hugo, Victor, *Choses vues: souvenirs, journaux, cahiers, 1830-1885*, ed. Hubert Juin, Paris: Gallimard, 2002.
— *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Seebacher and others, 15 vols, Paris: Laffont, 1985.
— *Postscriptum de ma vie*, Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1961.
— *Promontorium Somnii*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961.
Hulme, T.E., *Selected Writings*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, Manchester: Carcanet, 2003.
Huysmans, J.K., *A rebours,* ed. Daniel Grojnowski, Paris: Flammarion, 2004.
— *Croquis parisiens; A vau l'eau; Un dilemme*, Paris: P.V. Stock, 1905.
— *La Cathédrale,* Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1908.
Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, London: Penguin, 1996.
— *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
Kahn, Gustave, *La Pluie et le beau temps*, Paris: Léon Vanier, 1896.
— *Symbolistes et décadents*, Geneva: Slatkine, 1902.
Krysinska, Marie, *Rythmes pittoresques*, ed. Seth Whidden, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003.
Laforgue, Jules, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Debauve, 3 vols, Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1986-2000.
Langlois, Eustache Hyacinthe, *Essai historique et descriptif sur la Peinture sur Verre ancienne et moderne et sur les vitraux les plus remarquables de quelques monuments français et étrangers*, Rouen: Édouard Frère & Bibliothèque de la ville, 1832.
Lasteyrie, Ferdinand de, *Histoire de la peinture sur verre d'après ses monuments en France*, Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1857.
— *Quelques mots sur la théorie de la peinture sur verre*, 1852.
Maeterlinck, Maurice, *Carnets de travail*, ed. Fabrice van de Kerckhove, 2 vols, Brussels: Archives & Musée de la Littérature; Labor, 2002.
— *La Vie des abeilles*, Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1901.
— *Le Trésor des humbles*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, Paris: Grasset, 2008.
— *Œuvres*, ed. Paul Gorceix, 3 vols, Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1999.
— 'Un Théâtre d'Androïdes', *Annales de la Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck*, 31 vols, Ghent: Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck, 1955-1999, xxiii, pp. 22-33.
Mallarmé, Stéphane, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1998-2003.
Malo, Charles, *Bazar parisien, ou Annuaire raisonné de l'industrie des premiers artistes et fabricants de Paris: offrant l'examen de leurs travaux, fabrications, découvertes, produits, inventions, etc.: ouvrage utile à toutes les classes de la société*, Paris: 1826.
Marion, Fulgence, *L'Optique*, Paris: Hachette, 1869.
Montesquiou, Robert de, *Œuvres poétiques*, 7 vols, Paris: G. Richard, 1906-1912.
Moréas, Jean, 'Le Symbolisme', *Le Figaro. Supplément littéraire du dimanche*, 18 September 1886, pp. 150-151.
Nordau, Max, *Dégénérescence*, trans. Auguste Dietrich, 2 vols, Paris: F. Alcan, 1894.

Plowert, Jacques, *Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998.
Poe, Edgar Allan, *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poetry, Tales, and Essays, Authoritative Texts with Essays on Three Critical Controversies*, ed. Jared Gardner and Elizabeth Hewitt, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.
Ponge, Francis, *Le Parti pris des choses*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
Pound, Ezra, *Instigations of Ezra Pound*, New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920.
— 'A Retrospect', *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, London: Longman, 1972, pp. 58-68.
Proust, Marcel, *Du côté de chez Swann*, ed. Jean Milly, Bernard Brun and Anne Herschberg-Pierrot, Paris: Flammarion, 1987.
— *Contre l'obscurité et autres articles*, La Nerthe, 2012.
Quillard, Pierre, *La Lyre héroïque et dolente*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1897.
Régnier, Henri de, *Le Mariage de minuit: roman*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1903.
— *Le Miroir des heures*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1910.
— 'Spectacles en plein air', *La Vogue*, August 1889, pp. 157-160.
Renan, Ernest, *Essais de morale et de critique*, Paris: Michel Levy, 1859.
Retté, Adolphe, 'Chronique des livres', *La Plume*, 15 June 1895, pp. 280-283.
Rimbaud, Arthur, *Poésies. Une saison en enfer. Illuminations*, ed. Louis Forestier, preface by René Char, Paris: Gallimard, 1999.
Rodenbach, Georges, *Bruges-la-Morte*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Daniel Grojnowski, Paris: Flammarion, 1998.
— *Œuvres de Georges Rodenbach*, 2 vols, Paris: Mercure de France, 1923-1925.
— *Le Voile* et *Le Mirage*, ed. Richard Bales, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999.
Ruskin, John, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, London: George Allen, 1903-12.
Russel, Raoul, 'Vitrail', *La Basoche*, n. 10 (August 1885), p. 362.
Ruysbroeck, Jan van, *L'Ornement des noces spirituelles, de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable*, trans. Maurice Maeterlinck, Brussels: Lacomblez, 1910.
Saint-Pol Roux, 'Le Poète au vitrail', *Poesia*, vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1905), p. 29.
Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Art of Literature*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders, Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004.
Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander, London: Collins, 2006.
Suger (Abbot), 'On What Was Done under His Administration' (*Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis*), trans. Edwin Panofsky, *The Christianity Reader*, ed. Mary Gerhart and Fabian Udoh, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 444-447.
Tailhade, Laurent, *Vitraux*, Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1894.
Texier, Edmond, *Tableau de Paris*, 2 vols, Paris: Paulin et Le Chevalier, 1852-1853.
Valéry, Paul, *Regards sur le monde actuel*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
Verhaeren, Émile, *De Baudelaire à Mallarmé* suivi de *Parnassiens et Symbolistes*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Baronian, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2008.
— *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Paul Aron, 2 vols, Brussels: Archives et Musée de la littérature; Labor, 1997.
—'L'Aquarium', *La Wallonie* (May 1890), pp. 161-162.
— *Les Villes tentaculaires*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1917.
Verlaine, Paul, 'La Décoration et l'art industriel à l'Exposition de 1889', *L'Artiste* (November 1890), pp. 321-327.

— *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Octave Nadal and others, 2 vols, Paris: Le Club de meilleur livre, 1959-1960.

Vigny, Alfred de, *Œuvres de Alfred de Vigny*, Editions la Bibliothèque Digitale, 2012.

Wilde, Oscar, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, London: Wordsworth, 1997.

Zola, Émile, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand and others, 21 vols, Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2002-10.

Secondary Sources (books)

Archer, Michael, *An Introduction to English Stained Glass*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1985.

Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Glassworlds; Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Barthes, Roland, *La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, Paris: Cahiers du cinéma; Gallimard, 1980.

Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999.

Bertrand, Antoine, *Les Curiosités esthétiques de Robert de Montesquiou*, 2 vols, Geneva: Droz, 1996.

Bertrand, Jean-Pierre and Pascal Durand, *Les Poètes de la modernité. De Baudelaire à Apollinaire*, Paris: Seuil, 2006.

Besnier, Patrick, *Henri de Régnier: de Mallarmé à l'Art Déco*, Paris: Fayard, 2015.

Bloch-Dermant, Janine, *The Art of French Glass, 1860-1914*, trans. Marian Burleigh-Motley, London: Thames and Hudson, 1980.

Boutin, Aimée, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Brewster, David, *The Kaleidoscope: its History, Theory, and Construction*, London: John Murray, 1858.

Brox, Jane, *Brilliant: The Evolution of Artificial Light*, London: Souvenir Press, 2010.

Brunner, Bernd, *The Ocean at Home: An Illustrated History of the Aquarium*, trans. Ashley Marc, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003.

Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.

Catani, Damian, *The Poet in Society: art, consumerism, and politics in Mallarmé*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Chambers, Ross, *An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

— *Mélancolie et opposition: les débuts du modernisme en France*, Paris: José Corti, 1987.

Choffel, Jean, *Saint-Gobain: du miroir à l'atome. Histoire des grandes entreprises*, Paris: Plon, 1960.

Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

Croft, William J., *Under the Microscope: A Brief History of Microscopy*, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2006.

Dällenbach, Lucien, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Daviet, Jean-Pierre, *Un destin international: La Compagnie de Saint-Gobain de 1830 à 1939*, Paris: Ed. des Archives contemporaines, 1988.

— *Une multinationale à la française: Histoire de Saint-Gobain, 1665-1989*, Paris: Fayard, 1989.

Derrida, Jacques, *La Dissémination*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972.
Evans, David, *Théodore de Banville: constructing poetic value in nineteenth-century France*, Leeds: Legenda, 2014.
Foucault, Michel, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
Gorceix, Paul (ed.), *Fin de siècle et symbolisme en Belgique: Œuvres poétiques*, Brussels: Complexe, 1998.
— *Georges Rodenbach (1855-1898)*, Paris: Champion, 2006.
— *Maurice Maeterlinck: L'arpenteur de l'invisible*, Brussels: Le Cri: Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises, 2005.
— *Maurice Maeterlinck: Le Symbolisme de la différence*, Saint-Pierre-du-Mont: Eurédit, 2000.
— *Réalités flamandes et symbolisme fantastique: Bruges-La-Morte et Le Carillonneur, de Georges Rodenbach*, Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1992.
— *Le Symbolisme en Belgique*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1982.
Gordon, Rae Beth, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-century French Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
Gould, Evlyn, *Virtual Theater from Diderot to Mallarmé*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
Green, Anne, *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire*, New York: Anthem Press, 2011.
Grego, Peter and David Mannion, *Galileo and 400 Years of Telescopic Astronomy*, Springer: New York, 2010.
Grojnowski, Daniel, *Jules Laforgue et l'originalité*, Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1988.
Grøtta, Marit, *Baudelaire's Media Aesthetics: The Gaze of the Flâneur and Nineteenth-Century Media*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.
Halls, W.D., *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of his Life and Thought*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960.
Hamon, Philippe, *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle*, Paris: J. Corti, 1989.
Jasinski, René, *A travers le XIXe siècle*, Paris: Minard, 1975.
Jenny, Laurent, *La Fin de l'intériorité*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002.
Jourde, Pierre, *L'Alcool du silence: sur la Décadence*, Paris: Champion, 1994.
Knight, Philip, *Flower Poetics in Nineteenth-Century France*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
Leavis, F.R., *New bearings in English poetry: a study of the contemporary situation*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1961.
Lessing, G.E., *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E.A. McCormick, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
Ligo, Larry, *Manet, Baudelaire and Photography*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.
LoDato, Rosemary, *Beyond the Glitter: The Language of Gems in Modernista Writers Rubén Darío, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and José Asunción Silva*, London: Associated University Press, 1999.
Madsen, Stephan Tschudi, *The Art Nouveau Style: A Comprehensive Guide with 264 Illustrations*, trans. Ragnar Christopherson, Mineola: Dover, 2002.
Mannoni, Laurent, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.
Marchal, Bertrand, *La Religion de Mallarmé*, Paris: José Corti, 1988.
Marquèze-Pouey, Louis, *Le Mouvement décadent en France*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.
Marrey, Bernard and Jean-Pierre Monnet, *La Grande Histoire des serres & des jardins d'hiver: France 1780-1900*, Paris: Graphite, 1984.
Mattie, Erik, *World's Fairs* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

McGuinness, Patrick, *Maurice Maeterlinck and The Making of Modern Theatre*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
— *Poetry and Radical Politics in* fin-de-siècle *France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Mendelson, David, *Stéphane Mallarmé: "Le blanc souci de notre toile": Du livre à l'ordinateur*, Paris: Orizons, 2013.
— *Le Verre et les objets de verre dans l'univers imaginaire de Marcel Proust*, Paris: Corti, 1968.
Michaud, Guy, *Le Message poétique du Symbolisme*, Paris: Nizet, 1951.
Moss, Howard, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, London: Faber and Faber, 1963.
Palacio, Jean de, *Figures et formes de la décadence*, Paris: Séguier, 1994.
Pearson, Roger, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
Pierrot, Jean, *L'Imaginaire décadent (1880-1900)*, Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2007.
Prendergast, Christopher, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
— *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
Raguin, Virginia Chieffo, with a contribution from Mary Clerkin Higgins, *The History of Stained Glass: The art of light medieval to contemporary*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2003.
Richard, Noël, *Le Mouvement décadent*, Paris: Nizet, 1968.
Riffaterre, Michael, *La Production du texte*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979.
Robb, Graham, *Rimbaud*, London: Picador, 2000.
Rosewell, Roger, *Stained Glass*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2012.
Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Mallarmé: La Lucidité et sa face d'ombre*, ed. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, Paris: Gallimard, 1986.
Schincariol, Andrea, *Le Dispositif photographique chez Maupassant, Zola et Céard: Chambres noires du naturalisme*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014.
Scott, Clive, *Vers libre: The Emergence of Free Verse in France 1886-1914*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
Scott, Hannah, *Broken Glass, Broken World: Glass in French Culture in the Aftermath of 1870*, Oxford: Legenda, 2016.
Scott, Maria, *Baudelaire's* Le Spleen de Paris*: Shifting Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
Silverman, Debora L., *Art Nouveau in fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin, 1979.
Stephens, Sonya, *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Symons, Arthur, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, New York: Dutton, 1919.
Wall-Romana, Christophe, *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
Walls, Alison M. K., *The Sentiment of Spending: Intimate Relationships and the Consumerist Environment in the Works of Zola, Rachilde, Maupassant, and Huysmans*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
Woods, May and Arete Swartz Warren, *Glass houses: a history of greenhouses, orangeries and conservatories*, London: Aurum, 1990.
Zachmann, Gayle, *Frameworks for Mallarmé*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

Secondary Sources (chapters)

Castiglione, Vera, 'Futurist before Futurism: Émile Verhaeren and the Technological Epic', *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. Günter Berghaus, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 101-124.

Christie, Ian, 'Toys, Instruments, Machines: Why the Hardware matters', *Multimedia Histories*, ed. James Lyons and John Plunkett, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, pp. 3-17.

Emery, Elizabeth, 'Misunderstood Symbolism: Rereading the Subjective Objects of Montesquiou's first *Maison d'un artiste*', *Symbolist Objects: Materiality and Subjectivity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Claire O'Mahony, High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009, pp, 19-37.

Godfrey, Sima, 'From Memory Lane to Memory Boulevard: Paris change!', *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991, pp. 158-171.

Guy, Madeleine, 'Jules Laforgue, Hartmann and Schopenhauer: From Influence to Rewriting', *Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature*, ed. Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 58-70.

Laude, Patrick, 'Belgian Symbolism and Belgian Literary Identity' in *Symbolism, Decadence and the* Fin de Siècle: *French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 194-208.

— 'Souls under Glass', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Mosley, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, pp. 113-128.

Lowrie, Joyce O., 'Ophelia becomes Medusa: Reversals and Ambiguity in *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Mosley, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, pp. 41-62.

Marchal, Bertrand, 'Le fantôme d'Hérodiade *Don du poème* et *Sainte*', *Mallarmé: Actes du colloque de la Sorbonne du 21 novembre 1998*, ed. André Guyaux, Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998, pp. 123-132.

McGuinness, Patrick, 'Belgian Literature and the Symbolism of the Double', *From Art Nouveau to Surrealism: Belgian Modernity in the Making*, ed. Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, and Patrick McGuinness, London: Legenda, 2007, pp. 8-22.

— 'Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*: Modernism and the Decadent Micro-climate', *La Belgique entre deux siècles: Laboratoire de la modernité 1880-1914*, ed. Nathalie Aubert, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, Patrick McGuinness, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 235-259.

Mosley, Philip, 'The Soul's Interior Spectacle: Rodenbach and *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Mosley, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, pp. 17-40.

O' Mahony, Claire, 'René Lalique and the Subjectification of the Jewel', *Symbolist Objects: Materiality and Subjectivity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Claire O' Mahony, High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009, pp. 293-328.

Plunkett, John, 'Depth, Colour, Movement: Embodied Vision and the Stereoscope', *Multimedia Histories,* ed. James Lyons and John Plunkett, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, pp. 117-131.

Scott, Clive, 'The Poetry of Symbolism and Decadence', *Symbolism, Decadence and the* Fin de Siècle: *French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuinness, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 57-71.

Sicotte, Geneviève, 'D'un coffret de verre. Sur quelques sources intertextuelles de *Bruges-la-Morte*', *Le Monde de Rodenbach: études et documents*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Brussels: Labor, 1999, pp. 119-134.

Strehlow, Harro, ‘Zoos and Aquariums of Berlin’, *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. R.J. Hoage and William A. Deiss, Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 63-72.

Halls, W.D., ‘Some Aspects of the Relationship between Maeterlinck and Anglo-American Literature’, *Annales de la Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck*, 31 vols, Ghent: Fondation Maurice Maeterlinck, 1955-1999, i, pp. 9-25.

Secondary Sources (articles)

Bertrand, Jean-Pierre, ‘La poétique du fil: *Odes funambulesques* de Théodore de Banville’, *Études françaises*¸ 43. 2 (2007): 73-83.

Burton, Richard, ‘Bonding and Breaking in Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*’, *Modern Language Review*, 88.1 (1993): 58-73.

— ‘Destruction as Creation: “Le Mauvais Vitrier” and the Poetics and Politics of Violence’, *Romanic Review* 83.3 (May 1, 1992): 297-322.

Chambers, Ross, ‘Baudelaire’s dedicatory practice’, *Sub Stance*, 56 (1988): 5-17.

Coste, Didier, ‘Robert de Montesquiou, poète critique: la cristallisation du décoratif’, *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 11.3-4 (1983): 334-349.

Godfrey, Sima, ‘Baudelaire’s Windows’, *L’Esprit créateur*, 2.4 (1982): 83-100.

Murphy, Steve, ‘Le Mauvais vitrier ou la crise du verre’, *Romanic Review,* 81 (1990): 339-349.

Pearson, Roger, ‘Mallarmé’s Interior Designs’, *Romance Studies*, 22:1 (March 2004): 3-15.

— ‘The Voice of the Unconscious: Laforgue and the Poet as Lawgiver’, *Dix-Neuf*, 20.1 (February 2016): 125-144.

Rees, Kate, ‘Scenes of Debris in Charles Fenestrier’s *La Vie Des Frelons*: The Conflict and Convergence of the Newspaper and the Novel at the Fin de Siècle’, *Dix-Neuf*, 17.3 (November 1, 2013): 251–264.

Scott, Hannah, ‘Vert versus verre: vegetal violence in Huysmans's *En rade*’, *French Studies*, 69.3 (July 2015): 305-317.

Silverman, Willa Z., ‘Unpacking his library: Robert de Montesquiou and the Esthetics of the Book in *Fin-de-siècle* France’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32.3-4 (Spring-Summer 2004): 316-331.

Wall-Romana, Christophe, ‘Mallarmé’s Cinepoetics: The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinématographe, 1893-8’, *PMLA*, 120.1 (2005): 128-147.

Secondary Sources (theses)

Dekeyser, David, ‘Béton armé et logement collectif en région parisienne/ cinq exemples: 1930 – 2000’, Master’s thesis, École d'architecture de Paris-Belleville, 2003.

Opsitch, Yann, ‘Etude comparative et intertextuelle sur le thème des “fenêtres” dans quatre poèmes de Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Marie Krysinska et Guillaume Apollinaire’, Master’s thesis, University of North Texas, 2011.

Works of Reference

Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe Siècle, 17 vols, Geneva: Slatkine, 1982.

Grand Larousse encyclopédique, 10 vols, Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1960.

Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia, ed. Thomas F. Glick, Steven John Livesey, and Faith Wallis, New York: Routledge, 2005.

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Websites

Le Foll, Typhaine, Conservatrice du Musée de la Lunette, ‘Histoire de la lunette: Deux siècles d'histoire industrielle à Morez’ (2009), *Lunetiers du Jura* [accessed 18 December 2016]. <http://www.lunetiers-du-jura.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=18&lang=fr&limitstart=1>