

# On the Double-Chain Pantun Structure in Baudelaire's *Harmonie du soir*



Benoît de Cornulier

What is the use of metrical studies? One legitimate answer is:<sup>1</sup> given that metrics is concerned with systematic rhythmic regularities, a search for such regularities may help reveal certain relevant linguistic aspects which would otherwise not be apparent; one such example, concerning prosody, will be briefly evoked below. Or, when applied to a poem, metrical analysis, may help understand its meaning or symbolism; Baudelaire's famous *Harmonie du soir* will be examined in this perspective.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. ADAPTED NOTIONS

My first example is extracted from a French traditional song, considered as verse (i.e. as read without music). While we might be 'intellectually' tempted to analyse it as indicated on the left side of the table given below, the actually observed regularities are those shown on the right side:<sup>3</sup>

- 
- 1 This paper is a revised version of a lecture at Charles University in Prague (november 2014). Hereby I thank CEFRES, Jakub Říha, Josef Hrdlička, and other colleagues and students at Charles University for their welcome and suggestions, and particularly Anthony McKenna for the many stylistic improvements of my approximate English.
  - 2 I try to illustrate this method in Cornulier 2009.
  - 3 For ease of understanding, the phonetic form is only suggested here through the orthographic form. — The *tonic* vowel of a line refers to its last non-feminine vowel. The *anatomic* form of a sequence of words includes their tonic vowel and all the pre-tonic phonemes; the *catatonic* form includes the tonic vowel and all (if any) post-tonic phonemes. These notions are defined in the glossary of Cornulier 2009. I suppose here that 'lune' and 'plume' are dissyllabic, as they are in the song.



Total graphic form	total syllabic length	last syllable(s)	Anatonic form	Catatonic form	Anatonic form	Catatonic form
au clair de la lune	6	lu.ne	au clair de la lu-	-u.ne	5	2
mon ami Pierrot	5	-rot	mon ami Pierro(t)	-ot	5	1
prête-moi ta plume	6	plu.me	prête-moi ta plu	-u.me	5	2
pour écrire un mot.	5	mot	pour écrire un mo(t)	-ot	5	1

Similar regularities, observed in such corpuses as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or French poetry, lead us to associate the two following sub-lines with a regular 4-6 rhythm, instead of the 'intellectually' apparent 5-5 rhythm:<sup>4</sup>

French:	O Vierge mère,	fille de ton fils
Italian:	Vergine madre,	figlia del tuo figlio
apparent «rhythm»	5 syl	5 syl
real rhythm	4	6

Second example: in such nonsensical syllables as shown below (from French traditional song),<sup>5</sup> the observed regularity consists in the fact that the end of two sequences, 'aine' and 'on', contrast against the background of one and the same pre-tonic form 'Flon flon lariradond', as shown below. The point here is that the precise frontier between the similar background and the contrasting end does not coincide with a syllabic border; rather, within the syllable it occurs just before the vowel (and thus, just before the catatonic form):

Total phonemic form	Anatonic phonetic form	Catatonic form
Flon, flon, Larira, dondaine,	Flon, flon, Larira, dond-	-aine
Flon, flon, Larira, dondon	Flon, flon, Larira, dond-	-on

This metrical phenomenon, which I call counter-rhyme (*contre-rime* in French), confirms the relevance of the concept of *catatonic form* in the description of both rhyme and counter-rhyme.

<sup>4</sup> 'Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio' is a so-called *endecasillabo* of Dante in the last Canto of the *Divine Comedy*; 'O Vierge mère, fille de ton fils' is a translation of this line in French; both can be felt with a 4-6 rhythm, provided that the last, posttonic vowel of the first hemistich contributes to the anatonic rhythm of the second (otherwise, the rhythm of the second hemistich would be 5).

<sup>5</sup> Example from a 1722 vaudeville. A similar catatonic non-syllabic contrast is observed in 'miron-ton, miron-taine', 'tralala, tralalaire', etc.

## 2. ON THE METRICS AND MEANING OF *HARMONIE DU SOIR*. A FIRST APPROACH TO BAUDELAIRE'S CHAIN PANTUN



I will now try to show by a particular example the potential use of metrical studies for poetic analysis.

I present below Baudelaire's very famous poem *Harmonie du soir*.<sup>6</sup> Normally, all its lines, alexandrines as they are, are printed aligned to the left margin. However, here I employ a particular lay-out, with two different left margins and a few words in bold type, in order to help with the comprehension of the analysis to be proposed here... and, hopefully, with the poem as such.

### HARMONIE DU SOIR

---

#### Module-distichs A

---

#### Module-distichs B

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

Let us begin with a fairly traditional metrical description of the French pantun — a French form derived from the Malayan *pantun berkait* —, as the poet Theodore de Banville tried to codify it in 1872 (and without a reference to Baudelaire's pantun)<sup>7</sup> under the heading 'pantoum':

---

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

7 On this story, see Georges Voisset (1997), who insists on recognizing so-called 'pantoum' as a case of the general (chain) *pantun* family, and Jean-Louis Aroui (2010) about the French 'pantoum' tradition.



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

**Line-repetition between stanzas:** Lines 2 and 4 of each stanza become the lines 1 and 3 of the following stanza (line-repetition pattern  $xAxB AxBx$ ). This very particular repetition pattern is the most obvious — if not the main — characteristics of the ‘pantoum’.<sup>8</sup>

**Semantic alternance:** In a *regular* ‘pantoum’, two distinct semantic sequences are supposed to alternate: a sequence A, constituted by ‘the first two lines’ of each stanza (here A1 to A4), and a sequence B, constituted by the ‘last two lines’ (here B1 to B4).<sup>9</sup>

**Global line-repetition closure:** In a regular ‘pantoum’ (as defined by Banville), the last line repeats (or: returns to) the first line.

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

It is generally accepted as obvious that the ‘semantic alternance’ principle is not observed in Baudelaire’s pantoum, and it is evident that he did not observe the line-repetition clause.

I will try to show that:<sup>10</sup>

- 1) The three patterns of rhyme, repetition, and semantic alternance are related;
- 2) Baudelaire did observe the semantic alternance principle.

### Relevant metrical notions

For a better understanding of the ‘pantoum’, the following notions may be useful.

#### Rhyme structure

In French poetry, most ‘classical’ stanzas are constituted by one or two *rhyme equivalence groups* (in the following: REGs), of which each is a pair of rhyming *modules* consisting of one to three lines, such as:

<sup>8</sup> The so-called ‘pantoum’ tradition in French originates from a translation of a Malayan poem, published in a note of Victor Hugo’s *Orientales* (1829), where ‘pantoum’ was a misprint for ‘pantoun’ (= *pantun*).

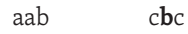
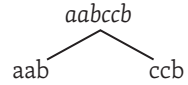
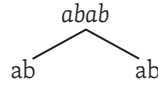
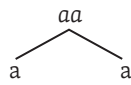
<sup>9</sup> For instance in Banville, *Petit Traité de versification française* (1872). In such descriptions, the numerical notion ‘the two [first or last] lines’ superficially compensates the lack of a corresponding unit (*module*) in metrical theory.

<sup>10</sup> A first sketch of this analysis was published in Cornulier 2005. I did not then know that Clive Scott (2000), the first to my knowledge, had already proposed a distinct interpretation of the two series of distichs (although substantially different from the interpretation proposed here).

REG

module

idem, with inversion:

**Chaining:**<sup>11</sup>

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

One familiar example of *line repetition chaining* of couplets in French traditional song is the following:

Verse 1

En passant par la Lorraine  
Rencontrai trois capitaines

Verse 2

Rencontrai trois capitaines  
Ils m'ont appelée vilaine

Verse 3

Ils m'ont appelée vilaine  
Je ne suis pas si vilaine...

**Bi-phonic alternance (intertwining)**

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

An alternating, bi-phonic structure is obvious in Baudelaire's *Abel et Caïn* (1861, *Fleurs du Mal* 119), where *ab-ab* rhyme equivalence groups are divided in a sequence of initial *ab* modules, let us say the initial A's, addressed to the 'race of Abel', and a sequence of concluding *ab* modules, let us say the B's, addressed to the 'race of Cain'. In the immediately following poem *Les Litanies de Satan*, a series of *aa* distichs is intertwined with a series of repetitions of a unique line-sentence (refrain), and the combination of each distich with the following refrain occurrence constitutes a single sentence in which the distich is a vocative. For example:

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

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère

<sup>11</sup> *Chaining* or *concatenation* (Latin *concatenatio*), a notion familiar to medievalists and folklorists. A child folklore quasi-syllabic example of chaining is: 'Trois p'tits chats — Chapeau d'paille — Paillasson...'



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

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère

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

Double-chain pantun structure

These findings allow us to present a coherent formula for the metrics and semantics of the French 'pantoum' à la Banville:

- 1) **A modular structure of stanzas:** Each stanza is a rhyme equivalence group constituted of two (distich) modules, with the rhyme schema *ab ab* (or sometimes the variant *ab ba*).
- 2) **Semantic coherence of module sequences:** Let A be the sequence of initial modules (*ab...*), B the sequence of terminal modules (*...ab*); each sequence, A or B, tends to be semantically coherent, resulting in a semantic alternance of the distichs along the poem.
- 3) **Repetition-chaining of each module sequence:** Within each sequence A or B, any two successive modules are chained according to the repetition schema *...a* [*a...*], with the first line of each module repeating the last line of the preceding one.
- 4) **Semantic parallelism and ultimate convergence of chains:** Chains A and B are supposed to be semantically parallel in some poetical way, and, according to Banville, they are supposed to converge in the last line of the 'pantoum' by the global repetition schema [*A.....A*], with the last line of the 'pantoum' repeating its first line.<sup>12</sup>

**A consequence of (2) and (3):** Any two successive stanzas have the repetition schema [*xa xb*] [*ax bx*]. From a cognitive point of view, this combination — viewed as the result of two independent principles — seems to be more plausible than the linear repetition rule in the 'traditional' metrical description recalled above; in particular, one contribution of the repetition-chaining is to make more obvious the continuity within each sequence. Describing the double-chain structure of the pantun in a purely uni-linear way sounds a bit like trying to provide a purely linear description for the double helix of a DNA molecule.<sup>13</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> The fact that the chain-pantun is a result of a combination of different partly independent properties is clearly revealed in Jean-Louis Aroui's historical study in a chart of the realization (or not) of these properties in a series of French 'pantoums' (Aroui 2010, p. 345).

The ‘pantoum’ or *chain pantun* combination can be observed in various apparently independent oral traditions of the world, for instance in some 13<sup>th</sup>-century Galician *cantigas d’amigo* by Martin Codax. This quasi bi-phonic structure can arise in oral traditions where two persons improvise alternately.



### **A non-pantun pantun in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*?**

Baudelaire was an intellectual, an admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, and a careful metrist and poet. It seems rather paradoxical that he should be seen as having chosen the fairly complicated form of a chain-pantun while neglecting its fundamental principle — i.e. semantic alternance with parallelism — and without seriously exploiting it. In this respect, it would not make much sense simply to claim that his poem is ‘musical’ or even that its form is related to ‘valse’ rhythm. In what follows, in lieu of pursuing a systematic argument from metrical form to meaning, I will try to relate these two aspects informally.

A remarkable lexical/rhyme set

It is often admitted that, in good poetry, the most efficient word in a line is its last, rhyming word. As Banville (1872, p. 42) puts it:

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

This suggests we ought to attribute stylistic importance not only to the rhyming word which concludes a line, but also to the rhyming-words which conclude larger metrical units, thus:

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

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

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

And even **poem rhyme-word**, concluding a poem (as ‘ostensoir’).

In Baudelaire’s *Harmonie du soir*, there are four modules ending in ‘ige’ and four modules ending in ‘oir’, and as many module rhyming-words. The ‘oir’ series is particularly important for the following reasons:

— Three of the four ‘oir’ module rhyming-words, namely ‘encensoir’, ‘reposoir’ and ‘ostensoir’, share certain very obvious similarities:

- Not only are they 3-syllable words (as could also be ‘passoire’), but, more relevantly, they have the same anatomic rhythm (3 anatomic vowels) and the same cadenza or catatonic rhythm (1 catatonic vowel, i. e. they all have a simple, prosodically ‘masculine’ ending). Moreover, unlike in ‘soir’ [= evening], this common



phonic ending is associated to one and same nominal suffix 'oir', characterizing the referent as a *functional* object.

- In these three words, while this common suffixal and catatonic ending already contains three phonemes (/war/), it is (graphically) preceded by the same letter 's', and (phonetically) by the same ± voiced consonant /S/; this /S/ is similarly un-voiced in the first and last words 'encensoir' and 'ostensoir', in which, moreover, the *longest common ending* 'ensoir' includes the same vowel spelled, with the same spelling 'en'.<sup>14</sup>
- These last two words freely 'rhyme' with the title *Harmonie du soir*, whose last word, or last syllable, is included in the end of 'encensoir' and 'ostensoir', and graphically in 'reposer' (same final syllable).
- These three words belong to a very specific common lexical field: they are liturgical instruments (in the Catholic Christianity, dominant in Baudelaire's culture), the use of which can be related to certain rites, as will be specified later.

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

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

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

### **Liturgical symbolism**

Do the 'encensoir', 'reposer' and 'ostensoir' simply constitute a sort of bric-à-brac borrowed from 'la religion la plus fadasse' (Étiemble)<sup>15</sup> and belonging to 'un fonds romantique assez commun' (Crépet and Blin, quoted approvingly by Pichois 1975, p. 919)?

<sup>14</sup> The *longest common ending* is not to be confused with the minimal regular common ending or *rhyme* (= catatonic form).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by G. Voisset (1997, p. 99).



Let us, instead, question this set of liturgical instruments, as it is framed in the architecture of the poem, and only then examine whether the semantic alternance principle of the chain-pantun is really neglected.

**Encensoir**, first module rhyme-word:

The censer ('encensoir') swayed by humans here below, on earth, can send perfumes ('encens') in the air towards the divinity above. For instance, during the Offertory part of a Catholic solemn mass (eucharistic service), *before being consecrated*, the bread and wine were offered to the divinity and incensed with codified gestures, with the following words (italics mine): 'Incensum istud [...] ascendat ad te, Domine, et descendat super nos misericordia tua' (= Let this incense *ascend* towards you, Lord, et let your pity *descend* on us). Note the double direction, human offerings with incense upwards towards Heaven, calling for divine pity downwards towards the Earth.

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

**Ostensoir**, final module rhyme-word:

After the mass in which it was consecrated ('transsubstantiated' into the body or flesh of Jesus), the white host could be exposed to worship in a monstrance ('ostensoir'), an instrument generally made of gold throwing out beams around the white host, in such a way that the now Holy Host (*Corpus Christi*, divine body) looked like a beaming sun.<sup>16</sup> As Giles Dimock, a Dominican, recalls in *Questions and Answers on the Eucharist* (New Jersey, 2006, p. 86):

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

Thus, in the *preparation* of the holy sacrifice (Offertory), the 'encensoir' sent a message upwards, ascending from the humans on earth towards God in heaven; and by the consecration, the divinity descended on earth into the host, in which he could be 'received' (ingested) in Communion, or exposed and worshipped as, for instance, in the evening Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, during the Vespers, commonly attended by laymen in churches where the Holy Sacrament was exposed; Vespers, that is, the evening office ('office du soir'), where the etymological notion, *soir*, is

<sup>16</sup> The censer was often named 'soleil' before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The beaming sun was a very common, traditional, analogy of God in his glory in religious texts, painting, & etc., but like a rising sun rather than a setting sun as in *Harmonie du soir*.



part of the title *Harmonie du soir*, and a rhyming-word in the first stanza, related to the long-awaited eschatological ‘fin des temps’ (cf.: ‘Voici venir les temps’...).

**Reposoir**, middle module rhyme-word:

The most common English translation of this word, namely ‘altar’, is not specific enough for this poem. The concept is aptly defined in Nodier & Verger’s 1832 *Dictionnaire*:

*terme de culte catholique: sorte d’autel qu’on élève et qu’on prépare dans les lieux où la procession passe le jour de la Fête-Dieu [Corpus Christi], pour y faire reposer le Saint Sacrement.*<sup>17</sup>

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

The specific meaning of the Corpus Christi procession, happening once a year, was, as the archbishop of Lyon (de Bonald 1841, p. 4) explained: ‘[...] le mémorial [...] du mystère d’un Dieu qui est descendu parmi les hommes [...]. Ainsi quand vous verrez Jésus, caché sous les espèces eucharistiques, porté par nos mains à travers les places de la cité, ne vous semblera-t-il pas que le Fils de Dieu [...] passe encore sur la terre en faisant le bien [...]?’ (= the memorial of the mystery of a God who has descended among the humans. Thus, when you see Jesus, hidden in the Eucharistic species, carried by our hands through the squares and streets of the city, will it not seem to you that the Son of God still walks this earth, doing good?).

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

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

**Communion**

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

The formula which performatively transforms (‘trans-substantiates’) bread (host) and wine into divine flesh and blood (*Corpus Christi*) repeats words pronounced by Je-

<sup>17</sup> I.e. a sort of altar which is raised and prepared in the places where the procession passes on Corpus Christi day, to place the Holy Sacrament.

sus offering bread and wine to his disciples at the Last Supper on the eve of his death<sup>18</sup> (underlying mine):

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

After this consecration, the host(s) ultimately could be received<sup>19</sup> and ingested by the believers in the so-called Communion sacrament. In receiving communion, the believer was supposed, according to a well-known expression, to receive Jesus in his heart ('recevoir Jésus dans son cœur') and to be intimately united with him.

In this context, after the action of the 'cœur' which 'recueille' the 'vestiges' of the sun drowned in his blood, and after the lapse of time suggested by the five suspension points which succeeds to this statement just before the last line of the pantun, the present tense of 'luit' (glowing in the dark) may suggest the state in which all this ends. Thus the result of the poem, namely the presence of 'ton souvenir' in my heart, is analogous to the real presence of God in the heart of a believer after Communion; and the 'harmonie' announced in the title can be analogous to the intimate union of the believer's heart with God, or 'ton souvenir' in 'moi'.<sup>20</sup>

This mystical symbol makes *Harmonie du soir* a poem of worshipping the lost person, who, by means of her 'sorcellerie évocatoire', can still be present in the memory of the subject.<sup>21</sup>

### Semantic alternance in *Harmonie du soir*

By the Eucharist, a God, invoked by a mystical human rite, after his human death, comes back from heaven down to Earth where he can be worshipped and received in the heart of believers. The double direction implied here seems to be reflected in the two series A and B at least throughout the first three stanzas of *Harmonie du soir*, making it a real chain-pantun.<sup>22</sup>

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

19 As in the common expression 'recevoir la sainte communion' (to receive holy communion).

20 Jesus, who had returned to Heaven after his death and resurrection, was supposed to be substantially contained, at every mass, 'under the species' of consecrated bread and wine.

21 This interpretation was only sketched in my 2005 paper. The only precise interpretation of *Harmonie du soir* as eucharistic I know of is that of Françoise Metzger (2011, pp. 231-234) which I found on the web after my Prague lecture; she mentions the formula 'Faites ceci en mémoire de moi' and the notion of 'sorcellerie évocatoire'.

22 The semantic alternance of Baudelaire's pantun was sketched by Clive Scott (2000, p. 114): 'Baudelaire observes the pattern of repetitions and, more unusually, incorporates that convention of pantoums, insisted on by Banville [1909, pp. 243-248], whereby each pair of lines of the quatrain (i.e. first and second, third and fourth), pursues, through the length



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

### First stanza

**A1**, by the rhyme-word 'tige', first of the A series and of the poem, introduces the stems of the flowers; the stem, not commonly perceived as the most poetic part of a flower, is relevant in this poem as evoking the earthly ground to which each flower is attached, as opposed to the air and sky above.

In the second line, the comparison of a flower with a censer may concern not only the fragrance (not yet named) which emanates from both ('évapore'), but also the 'vibr[ation]' of both: during a liturgical service, the censer is permanently swayed, either softly just to maintain its burning, or more strongly to activate the emanation of its fragrance during certain symbolical gestures; its movement is provoked by the chain held by a person (standing on earth), comparable to the stem which ties the flower to the ground. In a solemn mass, during the Offertory during which the 'holy sacrifice' of divine Jesus to his Father is prepared, while the prayer 'Incensum istud a te benedictum ascendat...' <sup>23</sup> was pronounced, the censer was swayed and then *rotated*, so that the fragrance might turn ('tourne') above the offered bread (host) and wine <sup>24</sup> before they were transformed by the formulæ of 'Consecration' into the flesh and blood of Jesus. — Yet by evaporation, both flowers and the censer send perfumes from earth *towards heaven*. The ascending fragrance was interpreted as a symbol of the prayers which, sent forth by the poor humans from the earth, should ascend to the divinity high above ('le Très-haut' ['the Highest']).

**B1**, line 1, explicitly introduces 'les parfums' (fragrance) only implied in A1. While the first rhyme-word in A1 tied the flowers to the ground ('vibrant sur sa tige'), the first rhyme-expression in B1 situates them (with sounds) in the 'air' ('tournent dans l'air');

of the poem, a different thematic thread: the first two lines of each stanza are devoted to the vicissitudes of the heart, while lines three and four trace the fortunes of the dying light, the poem's final line reaching across into the world of the heart'. I did not know this study when I wrote my 2005 interpretation.

<sup>23</sup> 'Let this incense ascend towards you.'

<sup>24</sup> The priest 'encense le pain et le vin, dirigeant son encensoir par trois fois au-dessus du calice et de l'hostie', and 'Ensuite il fait *tourner* son encensoir autour du calice et de l'hostie' (italics mine; in Falise 1855, p. 104).

the French 'en l'air', like the English 'in the air', can also mean that something is not supported by the ground.

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

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

The sounds ('Les sons...') in the air also come from an instrument played on the ground and yet to be mentioned.

Line 2 introduces a 'valse', which can be either a dance by couples of persons on the ground or a music in the air.<sup>25</sup> The dance is characterized by a turning movement of the dancers; however, no person has yet been introduced; the turning movement is rather ascribed to the sounds and perfumes which 'tournent dans l'air', before this movement is qualified in the second line as a waltz: a waltz of sounds and perfumes in the air.

Thus the explicit space of B<sub>1</sub> is the air, even though the melancholy and 'langoureux vertige' attributed to the waltz may evoke a human being;<sup>26</sup> the epithet 'langoureux' could also apply to music (Littré).

### **Second stanza**

**A<sub>2</sub>**, line 2, mentions the musical instrument which, handled by some human on the ground, can send music in the air. By means of a comparison with this violin, the poem introduces a yet undefined 'cœur qu'on afflige' (possibly subject to melancholy and languor).

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

The heart 'qu'on afflige' is compared with a violin which 'frémit', where the quivering of the violin is analogous to the vibration of the parallel flowers and censer. The quivering of the violin corresponds to the vibration of the instrument being played, where, as a dictionary puts it, 'Toutes les parties d'un violon qu'on joue entrent en vibration.'<sup>27</sup> Thus the heart 'qu'on afflige' vibrates or quivers like a violin 'qu'on joue'.

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

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

27 In *Nouveau dictionnaire universel des arts et métiers*. Francœur & al. — Jamar, Bruxelles 1839, p. 667, italics mine.



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

The strong liturgical framework of the poem provides religious connotations which make this precise analogy meaningful. Most commonly, human life was depicted by preachers as being ever since the original sin a miserable life on this earth during which humans, expelled from the garden of Eden (the 'passé lumineux' of mankind) and waiting for a future happy life above, pray to Heaven for consolation. The most famous and popular prayer embodying this view was the *Salve Regina*; in singing this hymn, addressed to the Mother of God, 'mother of mercy', who is above us in heaven, the faithful sang: 'To thee, [...], we banished children of Eve [...] send forth our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears' ('ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrymarum valle'), and asked her to show them Jesus 'after this exile' in the 'vale of tears' ('Jesum ... nobis ostende'). The terms 'affligé', 'afflictions', were the most commonly used to designate the sufferings of human life. According to this Catholic idea, just as perfumes and music can ascend into the air from a vibrating censer or a violin, human mourning, sighs and prayers for pity can ascend into the air from an afflicted heart. However strange such a combination of images may seem nowadays, it was far from exotic during the Catholic Second Empire, and it is clear that, on some other occasions, Baudelaire made an ostentatious, complex use of Catholic and liturgical symbolism: for instance the *Franciscæ meæ laudes* linguistically and rhythmically transpose a hymn to Mary, Mother of Jesus, into a hymn to a beloved woman; *La Mort des Amants* evokes the Last Judgment (cf. Cornulier 2015), etc.

**B2:** Line 2 explicitly mentions the sky or Heaven ('le ciel') and immediately associates it with a religious, eucharistic comparison to a 'reposoir', the place where the host can be put (as, indeed, it will be at the very end of the poem). This symbol of expectation of the divine host is coherent with the prayers of an afflicted heart. The sadness of the sky or heaven ('triste') aligns well with the fact that the consecrated host is not yet there.

### **Third stanza**

A3 specifies the afflicted heart (on earth), and perhaps its very affliction, as hating 'le néant vaste et noir' (contrasted to the lost 'passé lumineux'), in analogy to the feared expected end of the evening, which will be complete darkness. — The fact that it is 'tendre' may reinforce the sentimental interpretation of the afflicted heart, but at the same time is compatible with the religious evocation of an afflicted life in the valley or tears, taking into account a classical meaning of *tendre* (sensitive — thus sensitive to suffering).

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





Thus, so far, the A-modules concerned earthly elements, such as ‘fleurs’, ‘encensoir’, ‘violon’, human ‘cœur’, while the B-modules, elements in the air or sky (‘sons’, ‘parfum’, ‘air du soir’, ‘ciel’, ‘soleil’).

### **Last stanza**

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

However, at the same time the image of a heart which hates the ‘black’ void and ‘recueille tout vestige’ ‘du passé lumineux’, in the prevailing context of ‘soir’, alludes to the day, with its light and which passes when the ‘black’ night arrives.

By this ambivalence, the A and B series, parallel in the other stanzas, converge in the first module of the last one. This convergence is, as it were, brought to a point and made focused in the essential word ‘recueille’, designating an action which unites — one entering the other — the sun (or ‘tout vestige’ of its light) and the heart.

The final line of the poem will retrospectively specify the symbolism of ‘recueille’.

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

**B4**, line 2, the very last line of the poem, introduces three entities: in the first hemistich, a *you*, or at least the memory of you (‘ton souvenir’); second, a *me*; and finally, in the second hemistich, a *sun-monstrance* containing *the host*. This final, explicit reference to ‘you’ and ‘me’ had been carefully delayed by the indefinite notion ‘un cœur’. The ‘ostensoir’ (monstrance) has the shape of a beaming sun; the comparison presented by the final line equates you (‘ton souvenir’) and the monstrance-sun. It follows that ‘un cœur’ (heart of the subject on earth, ‘moi’) and the sun meet in the final line of the poem.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, entities belonging to the A and B series converge in the last stanza. While *Harmonie du soir* was written long before Banville’s codification of the ‘pantoum’ was published, the concluding convergence of Baudelaire’s poem could be compared to the semantic effect of Banville’s ‘pantoum’ closure rule.

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

The concluding, rhyming-word of the poem, ‘ostensoir’, prepared by the ‘encensoir’ and the ‘reposoir’, makes explicit the eucharistic meaning, as the *ostensoir* contains the consecrated host, believed to be the divine body of Jesus. It has sometimes been specified that the consecrated wine becomes the blood, and the consecrated bread (host), the flesh of Jesus; the officiating priest ingested both, but generally, in the Catholic church, the laymen received only the bread (hosts) which thus, alone,

---

<sup>28</sup> Clive Scott (2000, pp. 114–115) observes the convergence of the last line with the first two lines of the poem.



could represent the whole body of Jesus. In the last module, the blood and bread (host) respectively conclude the two lines ('son sang qui se fige', 'un ostensor'). Yet in the last line, the host alone (in the monstrance) can represent the divinity.

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

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

### The 'harmony' of Baudelaire's pantun

The 'harmony' in the title of Baudelaire's pantun is not a vague metaphor, according to which the poem or what it evokes would be just as beautiful as music. It aptly suits the progressive analogy between the two series of initial and terminal modules, their final convergence, and the eucharistic symbol of a union of human and divine.

## LITERATURE

**Aroui, Jean-Louis:** Métrique et intertexte dans le *Pantoum négligé*. In: Seth Whidden (ed.): *La Poésie jubilatoire, Rimbaud, Verlaine et l'Album zutique*. Edition Classiques Garnier, Paris 2010, pp. 327–360.

**Banville, Théodore de:** *Odes funambulesques*. 1856.

**Banville, Théodore de:** *Petit Traité de poésie française*. Bibliothèque de l'Écho de la Sorbonne, Paris 1872.

**Cornulier, Benoît de:** Métrique des Fleurs du Mal. In: Claude Pichois — Jacques Dupont (eds.): *L'Atelier de Baudelaire: «Les Fleurs du Mal»*. Édition diplomatique. Champion, Paris 2005, vol. 4, pp. 3543–3565 [= a sketch of the present analysis].

**Cornulier, Benoît de:** *De la métrique à l'interprétation. Essais sur Rimbaud*. Classiques Garnier 2009.

**Cornulier, Benoît de:** Sur la valeur *taratantara* du mètre 55 chez Verlaine, Corbière et Baudelaire. *Revue Verlaine*, 2015, Nr. 13, pp. 195–213.

**Falise, Jean-Baptiste:** *Cours abrégé de liturgie pratique*. Leroux & Jouby, Paris 1855.

**Jouet, Jacques:** *Échelles et papillons. Le pantoum*. Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1998.

**Metzger, Françoise:** *Seeing double. Baudelaire's Modernity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011.

**Pichois, Claude — Dupont, Jacques:** *L'Atelier de Baudelaire: «Les Fleurs du Mal»*, Édition diplomatique. Champion, Paris 2005.

**Scott, Clive:** *Translating Baudelaire*. University of Exeter Press, Exeter 2000.

**Voisset, Georges:** *Histoire du genre pantoum. Malaisie, Francophonie, Universalie*. L'Harmattan, Paris 1997.

## RESUMÉ / RÉSUMÉ

### Ke struktuře dvojího (z)řetezení v Baudelairově pantunu *Harmonie večera*

Baudelairova báseň *Harmonie večera* má všechny znaky pantunu. Analýza metrické alternance v této básnické formě ukazuje, že pantun obnáší sémantickou alternanci mezi dvěma alternujícími sériemi dvouveršových modulů. K porozumění této alternanci je zapotřebí pečlivě objasnit pojmy



katolické liturgie, jež se v básni nacházejí na rýmové pozici, tj. ‘encensoir’, ‘reposoir’ a ‘ostensoir’, a vzít v úvahu jejich přesné užití při svátosti eucharistie. V básni však nejde o náboženskou svátost jakožto uskutečnění Ježíšovy smrti a Boží přítomnosti, nýbrž o zpřítomnění ztracené milované v básníkově paměti.



### **On the Double-Chain Pantun Structure in Baudelaire’s *Harmonie du soir***

Baudelaire’s poem *Harmonie du soir* is a real pantun. The metrical structure of this poem-form is analysed: it implies a semantic alternance between two alternating series of distich-modules. Understanding this alternance requires a careful interpretation of the Catholic liturgical rhyming-notions in the poem, ‘encensoir’, ‘reposoir’, ‘ostensoir’, and precisely taking into account the Eucharist sacrament in which they were used. But, instead of a religious Sacrament realizing the death of Jesus and presence of God, this is a poem realizing the presence of a lost, beloved person in the poet’s memory.

### **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS**

metrická analýza; pantun; sémantická alternance; katolická metaforika  
metrical analysis; pantun; semantic alternance; catholic imagery

**Benoît de Cornulier** | Laboratoire de Linguistique de Nantes, UMR 6310  
[benoit.de.cornulier@gmail.com](mailto:benoit.de.cornulier@gmail.com)