

Grander Things:  
A Collection of Original Work and Analysis of French and American Influences

Submitted by  
Jessica Born

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Mentor: Alison Powell, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of English  
Department of Creative Writing  
Oakland University

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# Grander Things

Jessica Born

“...Oh, tourist,  
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,  
and a better life, and complete comprehension of both at last, and immediately,  
after eighteen days of suspension?”

Elizabeth Bishop, “Arrival at Santos”

To Professor Alison Powell,  
The Avrillé Girls,  
Thérèse et Jean,  
and to the experience.

*C'est bon.*

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## Avrillé

She remembers at her arrival, she was told she'd be staying with a family in Avrillé, a small subdivision fifteen minutes out from the city. Assured she was much safer here, where nothing much happens.

She switches off the lamp. Through the screenless windows tiny green gnats rush the blue light of her phone. Motorized shutters stay open and she'll be chastised in the morning for letting the neighbors see in. They tell her about the other Americans, the ones that had to be ushered inside after a vulgar display of sunbathing in the front yard.

The lights in her suburb are turned off to conserve energy. A quiet curve of houses sleep deeply with pastures, rolls of hay, cows two miles down the road uninterested in trouble. Walking back after midnight, she passes a man; he finishes pissing on a street sign. He follows her halfway home.

Two houses down from chez Berthelot  
a front yard floodlight watches resentfully.

Warm asphalt calls her down from the dark.  
She stretches out, aligning with the white stripe  
on the road. The dipper spills a glow that barely reaches her face.

The infernal windchimes shout  
her safe arrival as she opens the door.

## Tramway Sketches

Oddball cue-ball-headed man  
wearing an oversized cowboy hat,  
from Amsterdam.

Studs on his boots all glinting,  
looks for his gate with a cup of soup,  
squinting.

\*

Grey faced, walked  
crumpled and humped  
three legged stumbled  
to the metro car  
the frank buzzer and slide of  
“too slow too slow!”

Then, broad shoulders  
seized grey hunched ones  
dragged the holey shirt  
and shoes and exposed  
toes inside, disappeared.  
Did not watch his step.  
Took priority seat, grey nose  
slowly dipped towards floor.

\*

Watching tramway cars;  
three heads of wet hair, someone  
carrying flowers.

\*

Woman with short brown hair  
and a blue bike  
riding even with the tram  
curving around buildings,

finding each other  
on the straightaway.

Did she make it across  
the bridge first or did we?

I imagined catching  
hold of her mustard scarf  
and slipping along  
on the wind behind her;

past gleaming office buildings  
and red café chairs  
just unstacked,  
waiting barefaced in the drizzle.

Pigeons scattering  
with a rustle, landing above  
men sweeping waterfalls  
of broken green glass.

\*

Balding academic,  
too-small cross body bag  
(French equivalent  
of fanny pack?),  
bow tie and checked  
shirt tucked equally around  
the perimeter of his belt.  
Attentive posture,  
gets off at University stop.

\*

Woman, chestnut shoes.  
Periwinkle scrubs, olive  
sweater, purse in lap,  
small head tilt like on  
a first date.

Always a small paperback  
propped on one knee.  
Exits at hospital stop.

\*

A woman's dreadlocks  
dipping and dancing.  
I don't understand  
much except her mother is sick.

Hat comes off, hands  
pat shoulders, backs.  
Sturdy black shoes squeak  
and a lone pink umbrella bursts  
out toward the rain.

\*

"Look blue hair!"  
comes from one of three  
sets of astonished,  
dessert-plate eyes.

Mother's hands wafting  
an apology and shushing  
three purple red green  
puffer jackets back  
to their parrot perches.

\*

Spiky black hair  
and tan leather briefcase.

Only this weekday running,  
two American girls quietly  
cheering and craning, watching  
as he cuts the curve on bias



to catch the 8:18am apartment  
complex stop.

Bastille Day fireworks,  
spiky hair with wife  
and folding chair. Falls  
into the American,  
pulled back into the  
cheering French mass.

\*

Little boy, age six.  
Mother is his base camp  
as he claims his seat  
always in the middle row.

Runs back and forth  
to restock provisions  
for the long journey  
to swim school.

\*

Thigh high, smooth vegan  
leather boots.  
Sharp shiny bob. Army general  
jacket, cut for fashion  
not power. Glint of metal  
buttons, sharpened fingernails.  
Front of the tram, knee neatly  
crossed, toe bounce, bounce.

## The Walk Home

Passing packed bars: the Joker with gaudy green yellow  
twinkles and crackling choruses of clinking glasses.

Then Wallaby's, Australian theme, with a mounted gator head  
and Irish beer and French terrace chairs creeping out toward the curb.

Walking past orange discs of lampshine and tilted bus stop lurkers,  
past police signs and locked gates to the fecund public gardens,  
stopped by a man garbling French and bad English, asking,  
asking for a bar or a good beer or a favor.

Suddenly feeling unsettled, like when you enter the subway platform,  
only you see the train you wanted has just fled from the other  
side of the tracks; like the biggest firework finally bloomed  
into the sky and made no sound at all; like an animatronic  
baby doll, in the moment between when it turns its head  
with its painted eyes and lets out its programmed gurgle.

Like after you smash a centipede with a hiking boot  
and it has disappeared somewhere into the shag of your carpet;  
like seeing blood on the veggie-only cutting board with the zucchini  
and the carrot sticks the moment before feeling any pain;  
like every raucous noise of a county carnival piped through headphones;  
like turning on the bedroom light and finding nobody there.

## Things I Bought

Four apples, bought one at a time. Each eaten on excursion, to châteaux, Normandie circa WWII, spectacle of fireworks, and Mount St Michel the isolated monastery on a tidal island.

Ten bars of soap; little luxuries make cold showers easier to bear. Forty tickets for the Paris metro. Three cups of cidre in stoneware mugs. A realization that European cider is adult apple juice, not a family friendly orchard affair.

Dip pen nib ink. Asked a recommendation in French; received correct product.

French pastry cookbook in English for my sister, who increased her output of baked goods to deal with the fear that I may not come back.

Rose and white patterned dress. Practiced looking pretty for myself.

Two day-passes to the Paris zoo. Spent watching penguins or staring at grained wood table and underfoot crumbs. Spent sleeping in a corner of the manatee exhibit, feeling connected to their vacillating blankets of algae, pulled along by the roots. Awoke to children pointing and adults politely not noticing.

French lingerie, one set red  
one set teal, made in Taiwan.

Egg and cheese sandwich,  
eaten alone in Departures.

A Lai for Charles.

Dear Monsieur Baudelaire,

In my letters such as these,  
Can I call you Charles, please?  
I will.

*Ennui*, your pet disease  
This lust you're so loathe to appease  
Can kill.

Treading ever with unease  
sing sweetly to Persephone.  
That thrills.

Why'd I pick you, remind me?  
Apathy into art, with ease-  
What skill!

## Sad Millennial Dream

My goal as a twentysomething is a city oasis  
apartment that's not completely shitty  
and has more plants than people.  
What a sad millennial dream.

Eleven coffee mugs in a cupboard,  
running the dishwasher every three days  
because I cook for one. Warm white  
Christmas lights wrapped year round  
around my headboard. Sloping to a canopy  
ceiling, they soothe like the fluorescents shout.

Maybe I'll get to look out on the side of someone  
else's balcony. Even if the balcony  
is splintery and looks out over the parking lot  
I'll sit and play queen of all I see.

The walls exude a faint scent of must  
but I always have a pine or cinnamon candle lit.  
My tiny pot of basil on the counter hasn't died yet  
and I still strip a leaf or two to throw into my warped  
pan of cheap spaghetti sauce and leftover pasta.

## For the Man on the Street Who Called Me Mademoiselle Palindrome

Grander things  
 open up when I stop expecting Notre Dame  
 to give me radiant streams of sun passing through the glass  
 and instead  
 let the roar of the rain dampen my bilingual confession  
 in this holy, commercialized place.

Here is not an ideal. It is the City of Love  
 where people walk not in pairs but in solos,  
 the basic intent of travel is to break all idols.

Was it a cat I saw? There, in the window.  
 Each eye on me sounds the radar. Redder  
 the sun shines as the alleycat boys shout me their sagas,  
 the more I gag, for these streets are not the haven I thought.  
 Dammit I'm mad.

Deified things all are destroyed.  
 Destroyed are all things deified.

"Dammit!" I'm mad.  
 The more I gag, for these streets are not the haven I thought.  
 The sun shines as the alleycat boys shout me their sagas,  
 each eye on me sounds the radar, redder.  
 Was it a cat I saw, there? In the window.

The basic intent of travel is to break all idols.  
 Where people walk not in pairs but in solos,  
 here is not an ideal, it is the City of Love.

In this holy commercialized place,  
 let the roar of the rain dampen my bilingual confession  
 and instead  
 give me radiant streams of sun passing through the glass.  
 Open up when I stop expecting, *Notre Dame*.  
 Grander things.

## Fifteen Minutes

At exactly 8:07am she sits  
down with legs planted wide.  
Stunning androgyny.  
Gold chain, hair shaved sides-up  
her pompadour a declaration  
and eyes like a brown velvet couch  
worn smooth. Lips that croon  
a jazz song only hours  
after shouting along to a protest  
chant in a restless plaza.  
Sharp elbows dig into black  
denim thighs, staring not at her phone  
but at the reflection of the faint  
tally marks between her eyebrows.

She is the stuff magnets are made from.  
She is Saturn, with heavy silver  
rings on her fingers, ears and nose;  
not the perfect eyeliner flick,  
but the accidental khol smudge across one temple.

At 8:22am, she slides out the doors,  
leaving a bright haze, the moment just after  
a photo bulb flash.



## Villanelle on Sleep

There's something skewed about the daylight,  
With a block of grey cement, I become Queen.  
I must wander this gloom without a flashlight.

Blanket for a cape, what a miserable knight;  
No protection at all from the things I have seen.  
Now there's something skewed about the daylight.

Pink faces swaying in black-irised fright,  
The sounds from their mouths unexpectedly keen.  
I must wander this gloom without a flashlight.

When my eyes blink closed they don't shut quite right.  
My neck, a vulture, bends and a guillotine  
Reflects something skewed about the daylight.

Inside I do feel these tendrils of blight,  
They curl round my eyes and they snuff out the gleam.  
I must wander this gloom without a flashlight.

With a grin and a twitch I perform a great slight:  
When I say that I'm tired they don't know what I mean  
Is that there's something skewed about the daylight,  
And I wander this gloom without a flashlight.

## On Coffee

### *Vandenberg Cafeteria*

Sourbitter & lukewarm.  
 Caffeine tears dripping  
 & staining the table, Saturn  
 rings leaking & a clump of  
 instant hazelnut latte like dread  
 stuck at the bottom.  
 Finals week in a flimsy cup.

### *Asian Specialty Café*

Comes in a cartoon frog cup  
 with a strawberry macaroon.  
 First sip is sour mudwater  
 thick acid burns.  
 Cringe sip gulp.  
 Damn, I paid for this.

### *Home*

Regular is cinnamoncold  
 iced from refrigerator,  
 second pot always decaf.  
 A fluctuating ratio of grounds,  
 sugar coffee water half & half.  
 Every few weeks I mistake make  
 the perfect cup.  
 Tastebud pleasure like languorous  
 stretch of silly putty  
 through the morning.

### *France, Champs Elysées*

Rolling from cup lips throat  
 gulp fall splash.  
 Un-intrusive gurgling gone,  
 grains collected in soggy rings.  
 One long sweet stick to cut just bitter,  
 only a mask to peek over  
 when people watching,  
 a mild cup for a rich city.

## Out of the Corner of my Eye: Fragments Translated from French

3 liters of liquid milk

Ascension of the Eiffel Tower

Watch your step when getting off the train

“Hello, I am a yellow.”

“No, you are a youth.”

Book of tickets

Great in cooking!

Memoires

“Ah, the fireworks!”

Forbidden

Life, instead

Yes, okay

Personnel only... (and Scarlett Johanson)

Toi la! Je t'aime!

Pas moi!

## Ambivalence

I.

Je m'ennuie, I bore myself.  
 Here in France, in a grand city  
 with garret-window apartments,  
 murals and streamers over the street  
 and people everywhere,  
 if this city is to be mine I must  
 claim it when I am alone.

The Avrillé girls:  
 Jess, Amanda, Katrine, Alison,  
 and Jenny all cherry-tongued from  
 a single Cointreau-sorbet cocktail,  
 rocking the wrought iron chairs back  
 in their echoing fits of laughter.

Family dinners out on the patio,  
 Grand-maman Thérèse shuttling dishes  
 inside outside, as if a happy evening was  
 measured by the number of courses  
 finished by these American girls.

Amanda swishing *des mouches* and *des guêpes*  
 off the rims of glasses and the covered  
 basket of baguette. Plates and silverware  
 heavy rattling on the glass table,  
 and the last soft kisses of gold-leaf sunlight  
 on the fruit trees by the high red fence.

Grand-père Jean always careful to match  
 food with the appropriate wine. Dark  
 and dry to wash down chalky white  
 goat cheese. Four faces incarnadined  
 from laughter and sunset and wine.

At such a welcoming table  
 I am the shard of pit in the cherry jam.

I want to glitter like the  
sunlight on silverware but I am  
the dusty corner of a fresh-swept room.  
I want to be alone.

## II.

Gate 33A: flight to Paris.  
People boarding behind me  
are speaking Dutch.  
The little girl with braid beads  
across the aisle holds out a candy.  
I accept with weak fingers.

What must the man in seat F think of me?  
Seat E, silently crying in panic,  
not able to text mom *I'm okay*.

At the security line I had to run,  
my tiny suitcase tripped me, she said  
I love you, you have to go,

I should have hugged her longer.

The hand towels the flight attendants pass  
out of a waxed cardboard box are hot  
and smell like pine trees.

The seven-year old with braid beads  
counting her money up to a thousand  
flashes a US hundred bill.

The man in seat F speaks English  
to the flight attendant  
but not to me, except *thank you*

for a pine tree towel.  
Warm, "from Amsterdam  
with love."

## III.

In the beginning, it felt like the end.

Now, at the end, a last mug  
of pre-dawn coffee  
and a hug for Thérèse.  
A silky crimson and blue  
bathrobe folds me in  
with a teary kiss on the cheek.

I set my keys on the dresser  
in the entry way  
and clunk my suitcase  
down the front steps.

I blink goodbye  
to the front yard geraniums,  
the neighbor's accusatory  
spotlight, the sunrise  
reflected in my bedroom window.

A first and final airport hug  
for Jean, who is gruff  
and pats my shoulder too many times.  
He whispers  
huskily to Amanda and I  
that we were very good girls,  
a delight.

It does not feel like the end.

IV.

The night I felt like if I ever moved to France,  
I'd move *here*, a middling city in the Loire Valley,

with its one resident castle  
tempting boys to climb and fall

with hidden art galleries  
in deconsecrated churches

and cobblestone half-streets that I  
could finally walk without a map,

was the night I called you crying.  
You had just started your morning.

I've spent two weeks learning  
the exact time it takes to gulp

my coffee, take my bread and run  
to catch the 8:07 tram to school.

I will spend three more weeks  
visiting the art shop yet again,

finally going out for a fancy  
meal with a reservation,

allowing myself to order a drink  
without looking over my shoulder.

Naturally, when I leave this city  
I expect it to wrench like losing a friend.

I wonder how beautifully  
and terribly I have been transformed,  
or if I haven't at all.



V.

Why can't I get a decent  
croissant around here?  
Afraid to try the espresso  
because I prefer acid  
over American sludge coffee.  
My body rejecting the GMO'd  
and preserved food of my own country.  
Suddenly missing vinaigrette  
poured over every vegetable.

I'm still not passionate about politics,  
but maybe I could be interested in history.

Thank God for clothes dryers,  
air conditioning,  
for toilets don't sound like the depths of hell  
are chasing you  
as you tug up your underwear.

After thirty-three meals ending in cheese  
a bowl of cereal for dinner is a joy,  
but so is waking up to strong coffee,  
Nutella crêpes, and apricots.

Michigan may not have mountains  
but we haven't stuck castles on our hills like  
consolation crowns.  
I expected brand new eyes  
but instead all that is illuminated  
is my own ignorance.

I can't unpack my thoughts and air them out  
on the bed like the clothes in my suitcase.  
Our cities change, buildings  
point declarative fingers, poking clouds,  
while the Paris sky remains unpierced.

Awe

I stand under the Eiffel Tower.

Drop.

Please,  
not bird poo.

*C'est magnifique.*

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Tourist, Non-Transformed:

An analysis of the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Baudelaire, Anna de Noailles, and myself.

Jessica Born

As a companion to my chapbook of poems, this paper will discuss the three poets I studied for this creative project, and present an analytical reflection on their work, as well as some connections to and analysis of my own poetry.

I picked Elizabeth Bishop for her perspective as a 20<sup>th</sup> century woman and American poet. I, among others, refer to her work in “Questions of Travel” (one of her books in the collection *Poems, Prose & Letters*) as “tourist poetry.” I was somewhat hostile to the phrase in the early stages of my project, as I felt that the term “tourist” negated the validity of the poetry’s observations. I found that instead, it allowed the poet to recognize the lens through which they are showing their subject to the reader. I did not seek to imitate Bishop in my own writing; instead I found myself connecting more deeply with her work as I was in the process of writing “Ambivalence.” During my study abroad trip, I had bought into the expectations of a study abroad experience that others had described to me as “transformative” and “the best thing I ever did in college.” My experience in France was not quite either of those things. I felt a mixture of positive and negative emotions, and often felt guilty for not having a decidedly *different* experience than I would have gotten at home, and not finding myself transformed by it. I expected Bishop’s work to contain a set of instructions on how to write good poetry as a tourist, but found instead my own expectations exposed. Like the “oh, tourist” in Bishop’s “Arrival at Santos,” I was the young American tourist with “immodest demands for a different world, / and a better life, and complete comprehension of both at last, and immediately,” (*Poems* 71, l. 9-10).

In the early stages of my writing especially, I had an anxious drive to write poetry that was respectful to French culture, as unbiased as possible, and honest; one that distilled some essential nugget of understanding into a handful of well-crafted lines. Reading Bishop's poetry actually helped alleviate that anxiety. Recognizing my own identity as an American tourist went hand in hand with the process of trusting that my audience will be able to read my poetry as an authentic, not a perfect, body of work. My observations were made more sincere and impactful when I stopped trying to craft a universal sentiment and instead acknowledged that I wrote through the lens of a young American woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Part of the process of allowing myself to create authentic poetry was to acknowledge that my experiences in France often brought up more questions than they did answers. Again, I felt connected to Bishop's skilled use of questions in her poetry; specifically her aptly-named poem "Questions of Travel," which allows the speaker an introspective space for her conflicting feelings and insecurities:

Think of the long trip home.  
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?  
Where should we be today? (*Poems* 74, l. 13-15)

This poem values the questions just as much as it does the possible answers. There was a point during my study abroad, during week two of five, where I asked myself if I should have just stayed home instead of welcoming so much uncertainty in my life for five weeks. Later, when I was about to leave, I was also asking myself both if I was returning home as the same person who left, but also wondering what I *should* feel like. Should I feel different? Should I feel wiser, happier, more disillusioned with my own life and culture? I still connect strongly with Bishop's "Questions of Travel," because they are still questions I am pondering months after my return from France. Bishop's emphasis on the value of questions and a space for a poem to explore

insecurities and conflicting feelings helped shape my poetry for this project. Two poems that explore these topics are my poems “The Walk Home” and “Avrillé,” which each take a scene and attempt to process unsettling feelings, and a situation that was not what the speaker had expected.

Like the process of using Bishop’s work to help realize my insecurities and questions regarding my travel, I also had to work through some insecurities and questions in regard to my original goals for this project. In the proposal for this creative project, I stated that by analyzing the work of Charles Baudelaire and Anna de Noailles, I would be able to provide insight into the themes and distinctions of French poetry as a whole. Perhaps I was slightly naïve, or a tad overzealous. I have certainly benefited from reading *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and *The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris, Petits Poèmes en prose*, by Baudelaire, as well as Anna de Noailles collected works, *A Life of Poems, Poems of a Life*. Although I now believe it would be overconfident of me to assert that from my limited touristic experience, of analyzing two French poets, I can speak on French poetry in general. I will simply limit myself to discussing my experience and analysis of the two great poets I was able to study. For my analysis of Charles Baudelaire and Anna de Noailles, I will address some general characteristics of their poetry, and focus my discussion on how the topics of *ennui*, love, and nature appear in each poet’s work. I will conclude with a discussion of my own poetry: the process of realizing my emotions in regards to my experiences, the difficulties of translating and knowing when to use the original language in poetry, and final observations on my work.

Charles Baudelaire delights in depravity, writing prolifically on the subjects of death, lust, love, *ennui*, and sins of all sorts throughout his poetry. His poems are often infused with a morbid humor. Baudelaire was not just a man in search of a raunchy laugh, however. He also

demonstrated his knowledge of art and culture through his writing. Multiple poems in both *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *The Parisian Prowler* comment on specific pieces of art or artists, such as Edouard Manet, that Baudelaire was familiar with. Sometimes ekphrasis poems, sometimes a shade more abstract, his writing set an example for future poets by dialoguing with other forms of art. Baudelaire's poem "Guiding Lights" names eight different artists, from Rubens to Delacroix, and offers each a stanza of his reflections on their work (*Les Fleurs* 16-18, l. 1-52). This seems to me to be a predecessor to how the American Modernist poets would later work in communion with other art forms, such as W. H. Auden's poem, "Musée des Beaux Arts," written in conversation with the painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Bruegel.

As a poet of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire's poetry was significantly more structured than the free-verse of the twenty-first century. Some of the forms I noted in Baudelaire's work include sonnets, epigraphs, ekphrastic, and prose poems (concentrated in *The Parisian Prowler*). My French is not developed enough to be able to read all of Baudelaire's poems in the original language, but I did note that the majority of the poems I read in French have a strong end-rhyme scheme. However, Richard Howard translates them to English, often without adhering to any end-rhyme scheme.

Baudelaire's poem "Destruction" is one that I feel exhibits some of his representative qualities, quoted here in its entirety:

Destruction  
 I come and go – the Demon tags along,  
 hanging around me like the air I breathe;  
 each time I swallow he fills my burning lungs  
 with sinful cravings never satisfied.

Sometimes (for he knows my love of Art)  
 he visits in a seductive woman's form  
 and with the specious alibis of despair  
 inures my lips to squalid appetites.

Thereby he leads me out of God's regard,  
 spent and gasping – out to where the vast  
 barrens of Boredom stretch infinitely,

and here he hurls into my startled face  
 the open wounds, the rags they have soaked through,  
 and all Destruction's bloody bag of tricks! (*Les Fleurs* 121, l. 1-14)

Sometimes characterized as a sonnet, “Destruction” has the typical fourteen lines, but is split into two quatrains and two tercets – most similar to the Petrarchan Sonnet, which has an octave and a sestet. The original poem is not written in iambic pentameter, though some lines sound similar. The original poem also has a rhyme scheme of abab cdcd eef gfg, unlike Howard's translation, in which no end-rhyme is present. The poem focuses on many of the themes Baudelaire explores in the rest of his poetry: “sinful cravings” (lust, excess), his love of art, *ennui*, injury, gore, deceit, religion, and his relationship to God.

Baudelaire devotes a good many words in both the books I have read to commenting on his overwhelming sense of *ennui*, about which Edward Kaplan, translator of Baudelaire's *The Parisian Prowler*, notes, “the untranslatable French word *ennui*, usually rendered as ‘boredom,’ refers to a pathological deadening of the will to live, experienced as clinical depression or suicidal apathy” (132). In Baudelaire's poem “Destruction” *ennui* is capitalized (“Boredom”), as well as capitalized in his introductory poem to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, “To the Reader”:

I speak of Boredom which with ready tears  
 dreams of hangings as it puffs its pipe.  
 Reader, you know this squeamish monster well,  
 – hypocrite reader, – my alias, – my twin! (6, l. 37-40)

The *ennui* that Baudelaire speaks of is much more than a mundane sense of boredom. It is both personified by its capitalization and as another monstrous form of the poet himself. Though Kaplan's translation of *ennui* is too strong to describe the sense of boredom I felt at points during



my study abroad, there was a sense of apathy which stemmed from being both over- and underwhelmed, which I found allowed me to better sympathize and engage with Baudelaire's poems.

Anna de Noailles also references *ennui* in two of her poems found in *A Life of Poems, Poems of a Life*: "CXIX," and "XLI." In "CXIX," Norman Shapiro did not translate "*l'ennui*" as "boredom," but instead "chagrin":

CXIX

Happiness and chagrin, like two  
Rivers that stream night's darkness through –  
Dreaming, daring – course on till they  
Join in life's acrid waterway. (de Noailles *Life of Poems* 251, l. 1-4)

Chagrin is more connotative as an emotion resulting from an action, or being acted upon, whereas "boredom" is more connotative of a state where no action is happening, or an action that is insufficient to avoid the state of boredom. In the context of this poem, it is odd that the state of *ennui*, which based on Kaplan's explanation of the term could be a very difficult state to remove oneself from, is rendered here as a passing emotion. De Noailles even writes in the last stanza of the poem that neither happiness nor chagrin "lasts but a day" ("CXIX" *Life of Poems* 251, l. 7). If Shapiro's translations had been published in the 1900s I would venture to say that his translation of "*l'ennui*" may have been colored by the notion that women were too delicate to feel a strong *ennui* in the sense of Kaplan's definition. However, since Shapiro's translations are copyrighted 2012, I think that the difference in translation is an effort to make the individual words in English all work toward the transient feeling of the poem overall.

De Noailles' poem "XLI" (quoted below in its entirety) is reminiscent of Baudelaire, in more than just the use of the untranslated word *ennui*. Like Baudelaire, de Noailles references sickness of both the body and mind, citing "feverish, biting distress" and "a body's idleness"

(“XLI” *Poems of a Life* 293, l. 1, 3). She also rallies against fate, and the resignation that she feels something even stronger than the sense of *ennui* that pervades the poems of her predecessor, Baudelaire:

XLI

I knew the feverish, biting distress,  
The stupor; distant-hued cacophony  
That swathes no more a body’s idleness.

– Now, plunged deep in a strange night, ponderously  
I pit against the fate that harries me  
A heart’s pure, barren void, grown struggleless—  
A camp serene, more weary than ennui! (de Noailles *Life of Poems* 293, l. 1-7)

The treatment of nature is the second of the three topics I focus on in my analysis of de Noailles’ and Baudelaire’s poetry. Catherine Perry analyzes de Noailles’ work, with comparisons to Baudelaire in her article, “In the Wake of Decadence: Anna de Noailles’ Reevaluation of Nature and the Feminine.” Caught between the 1800s and early 1900s, where the male identity stemmed from urban culture and the female from nature, de Noailles stood by the theme of nature in her writing (94). In contrast, Baudelaire, whom Perry calls “the ‘spiritual father’ of Decadent and Symbolist writers,” considers nature something to be denied and overcome (95).

Baudelaire calls nature “sorceress without / mercy, ever victorious rival” in his prose poem “The Artist’s *Confiteor*” (*Parisian Prowler* 4, l. 22-23). This is a different perception of nature than I had originally expected from Baudelaire, though my reading of the poem aligns with Perry’s analysis of Baudelaire’s masculine attitude towards nature. The use of the word “rival” indicates that Baudelaire considers nature to be something for him to fight and win against, and his use of the word “sorceress” suggests a feminine supernatural force, which could play by different rules than the typical man.

Also often considered a more feminine topic, the treatment of love is the final part to my analysis of de Noailles' and Baudelaire's poetry. There is a distinct difference in the treatment of love between the two poets. In much of Baudelaire's work, I get the sense that when he says "love" he then either means to describe sex or infatuation. Baudelaire finds sexuality and lust far more interesting to write about, and I have seen very little of the treatment of love in the style of de Noailles in his poems. In *A Life of Poems, Poems of a Life*, however, de Noailles numbered love poems are awarded their own section within the book. Her love poems are often short, around two stanzas and eight lines, almost always with a rhyme scheme present in some form. The subject of love in such poems progresses from a benign infatuation to a juxtaposition of sweet and bitter, morbid, lustful, and cruel – though she is still less lustful and cruel than her counterpart Baudelaire. Her poem "XVIII," only the fifth poem to be represented in the section, embodies the benign infatuation of her speaker, quoted here in its entirety:

XVIII

When music's fires unleash their poetry,  
 And when its noble gales blow to the skies  
 the crimsoned longings of hearts on the rise,  
 Knowing how humble, frail your life can be,  
 Myself, I love you gently, modestly... (de Noailles *Life of Poems* 209, l. 1-5)

The last poem of the selection, "CLXXV" puts a bitter end-stop to the poems of love:

CLXXV

–And amid all that torment deadly-bladed,  
 You alone, velvet-cheeked masked god, source of  
 Drunk passion, sweet and bitter, pure and jaded,  
 Wanton and mild... You, cruel consoler: Love! (de Noailles *Life of Poems* 263, l. 9-12)

Love and nature are two tightly intertwined themes in de Noailles' poetry. Her poem "The Offering to Nature" is in fact a love poem to nature, in keeping with Perry's assertion that de Noailles' identity as a woman and her identification with nature go hand in hand. Lines such as "I wore your suns, crown-like, on brow held high" demonstrate the close relationship with

nature as an entity, and the final stanza expresses de Noailles' offering of love to nature by declaring "Nature, I hold you, living, tight-caressed!" ("The Offering to Nature" *Life of Poems* 35, l. 9, 25). I am less connected to the writing of de Noailles than I was to Baudelaire. While reading Baudelaire's poetry I was able to connect with his scenes of the city of Paris, and the sense of boredom and struggle that is prevalent throughout his writing. The love poems of de Noailles interested me less, as I struggled to connect with her writing because of the abstractness of her verses on love. However, reading her work provided a fresh balance to the brooding of Baudelaire's verse.

A large part of my writing process for this project was a process of realizing my own disillusionment. While I did a good deal of freewriting in France, it was not until I got back and set to work writing with this project in mind that I began to acknowledge that my experience had not been what I expected it to be. Most of the poems I wrote within the first two months of returning from my trip were, as my mentor Prof. Powell phrased it, "only peripherally about France." Writing authentically about what I experienced was very difficult, and I experienced a mild touch of Baudelaire's companion *l'ennui* as I tried to process why I was having so much trouble simply writing poems about spending five weeks living in France.

It was not until I wrote the first draft of "Ambivalence" – months after I returned – that I was able to start processing all the feelings of disillusionment I had been experiencing. The worst thing I had been told about study abroad was that I would be homesick traveling both to and from France. Every magical story I had heard about living in another country and returning transformed, able to see the world with new eyes, I took to heart and I expected a similar transformation of myself. I wanted to be impacted by my study abroad experience in a way that would give me my own magical stories to tell, and new wisdom with which to traverse my life

back in America. Nobody had prepared me for feeling bored, restless, overwhelmed, and not feeling transformed at all.

Emotional struggles aside, crafting a cohesive chapbook of poetry was not as easy as it sounded in my head. One of the difficulties I ran into when trying to translate my experiences from the language I experienced it in, to my own language, was deciding when to use a French word or phrase or when to translate it to English, and risk losing the precise effect I wanted. I had this debate with myself more than once while writing. For example, in “Tramway Sketches,” I write about an old man who I watched being helped into the Metro car, as the alarm sounded warning that the doors were about to shut. On certain platforms in the Paris Metro, there is a significant gap between the car and the platform, sometimes large enough for a foot to get caught if someone steps the wrong way. On these platforms there is a pre-recorded message that plays in French, which I literally translated to, “thank you for minding the gap.” I wanted to include that phrase in my poem to show how the old man was stumbling, on his way into the metro car, and wrote the lines: “Then, broad shoulders seized hunched ones / dragged the holey shirt and shoes and exposed / toes inside. Did not mind the gap.” However, on each draft my mentor would note that I was using a common British phrase (“mind the gap”), though I had intended it to be a French translation. In this case, I learned that one of the ways phrases lose their meaning in translation is when the translated phrase has such a strong connotation that it overshadows anything else the poet may be trying to say.

To translate or not to translate also poses a question when writing a found poem, like “Out of the Corner of my Eye: Fragments Translated from French.” Found poetry is poetry composed of bits and pieces of other writing, in a collage poem of sorts. In my notebook I had written down French phrases that caught my interest, often purely for how they sounded to my

ear. These phrases and words came from anywhere; a box of powdered milk on the breakfast table, ticket stubs, writing on national monuments, graffiti, even a type-written label on a restaurant bathroom door. My original draft was these French-language fragments arranged alphabetically into a poem, with purely the effect of sound. Opposite the poem on the same page I put an English-language literal translation. I struggled with wanting to keep the integrity of the sound of the fragments, but recognized that I could not expect a poem in French fragments to be accessible to my current audience. The process of deciding how (and in what language) to present this poem helped me to appreciate the skill and comprehension that was required of the translators of both Baudelaire and de Noailles' works. It is not an easy thing to keep the integrity of a poem intact across languages.

I want to be clear; my five weeks in France was a true kaleidoscope of emotion. I can talk for hours to anyone who will listen about exploring the city of Angers, finding a hidden shop that only sells patterned socks in a back alley downtown, or going to the wrong church on Sunday because there is more than one cathedral to choose from. I can describe standing on the D-Day beaches of Normandy, inside the craters that have been untouched since WWII, watching the sheep graze on the cliffs. I can talk about the antics of living with a non-English speaking host family, where it's a ten-minute ordeal to figure out how to explain the word "cinnamon" when I don't know the French translation, or how the day before I left she taught me and all four of my friends how to make authentic crêpes. I do have memories that will last, and many magical stories to tell. This project, however, was necessary for me to truly grow from my experience. It is the most public work of art I have ever created, and it has become a safe place for me to explore not only the parts of the experience that were exciting, but also those that have greatly

challenged me. I would not say that I have been transformed. Instead I have grown and deepened as a human, and become a poet.

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