

You nod at parallels to 19th century Paris. Tell me,  
 how did you bend the edgy shards of yourself  
 inside dodecasyllable margins and rhymes you called  
 "lanterns that light the pathway of the idea?"

Oh, you did it so well, but your light  
 came from passion, rage, not limned thoughts  
 with flickering finials. Did you impose strictures  
 on your work in misplaced desire for discipline?  
 My old professor suspected you of self-punishment  
 in tight seams and chafing collar while bowing on paper  
 to the rigid icon of acceptability, and your mother.

Does the city define the artist or defile him? Or both?  
 You were like that structure on the corner--  
 meticulous brick and polished balustrades  
 fronting a brothel. You were the brilliant rebel,  
 the doomed genius, the damned. Your poems seethed behind  
 formal facades. Your lines wept under carriage wheels,  
 chimney soot. Les fleurs du mal--a cultural gardener's words,  
 definitive of times, plantings, random reappings.  
 Or the world's indifference to all of it.

And me? Just a failed producer who knew  
 the risks, who hoped your genius would come through.  
 My jeremiad palls like your end-tied pentametrics.  
 Chuffing semis gather now to disgorge at sun-up.  
 Nothing is blossoming wicked and wild in cans and pots  
 on cracked stoops, only forgotten cold-black geraniums.

But look over there-- a night-blooming cereus opens  
 ghostly rare in a florist's window, its perfume  
 leaking out to the gutter. False dawn holds in its palms  
 the white curve of petals like a skull, predicting  
 the final metaphor, teasing me to borrow from Avon's bard  
 for amusement. Or lack of good-bye words.

A1  
 All right: Alas, poor Baudelaire.  
 No one knew him well. Tomorrow-- maybe not at all.

--G. R. Holloway