

SHOWING CHICAGO TO BAUDELAIRE

You were always attracted to city nights, monsieur.  
I own a copy of Les Fleurs du Mal in French,  
ripe with urban musk, erotic alliteration, the patina  
of impacted space. This should have been a good venue  
for your verse. Too bad so few people came  
to the reading. This venture leaves me broke, Mr. B.  
Leash your strophes, hang your demons backstage;  
you can walk the Loop with me and Jack Daniels.

Lake breezes flutter the curtain of Diesel fumes,  
not a smell you would know. The phallic towers  
of the powerful probe the high haze, challenging  
low-flying angels. You can see the aura of millions  
of lives for miles offshore-- part light, part heat  
and motion. The old termagant's broadened  
since dragging her ragged petticoats through black mud,  
Indian twilight and the evil stink of skunk cabbage.

Michigan Avenue fires millions of rounds  
of electric white ammo from oblique angles.  
You can't escape the shrapnel of light, incendiary  
shards of it, imparting no illumination,  
no warmth you can hold, sucking out what you hoarded.  
Infecting you with a virus that keeps you  
coming back for another pelting, another piercing.  
--Do you wear a wry smile, Mr. B?

Now we're in the outback, still in sight  
of magnificence--magnanimity--maggots.  
The lower level is pocked with puddled reflections,  
shimmering shades of lust and logic, business  
as usual, obligatory beauty. The trumpet  
in that storefront retreat is tonguing out blues--  
a color, a condition. Some of the mop-and-dust people  
rehydrate inside, jockeying their barstools, betting  
on hot-lipped riffs to move them higher.

Giant tools are at rest, teeth slightly bared.  
The metal traffic never stops; the motorized moving  
from somewhere to elsewhere scores the dark,  
never out of reach of hands that open, caress,  
point, make a fist. Simmering grease sounds like rain,  
glass clinks; small machines gritch, whine,  
and mostly close hard on your cash. Neon viscera  
surround the collage-- geometrics of red beef,  
opaline fish, potato pyramids, miles of newsprint,  
wood, fabric, fabrication, fable. The man dozing  
in the cardboard box waits to eat from upscale garbage.  
The city honors and trashes, adores and ignores.