

LAKEFRONT PLAYERS HOST BAUDELAIRE BACKSTAGE

That's how the headline would read if the Tribune got wind of this. This was probably our last poetry presentation. It's just as well you can't stay for an interview with the arts critic. He's already fingering words like passé.

You need a docent if you want to see Chicago. You always liked big cities by dark. I own a copy of Les Fleurs du Mal in French, ripe with urban musk. Our smileless cast party is breaking up. Come, I'm drunk enough to show you The Loop, monsieur.

Lake breezes flutter the curtain of Diesel fumes, not a smell you would know. The phallic towers of the powerful probe the high smoke, challenging low-flying angels. You can see the aura of millions of souls for miles offshore--part light, part heat and motion. A searchlight's bias swath sweeps your crimped mouth. Your grimace deepened tonight. You saw how your poems played the house. Out of sync with immortality. Killing the audience is what we try to do but not that way. At least they died politely.

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 and obligatory beauty. The trumpet upstairs is tonguing out blues-- a color, a condition. You almost, but don't quite, fit here either, Mr. B.

The metal traffic never stops; the motorized moving from somewhere to elsewhere scores the night, never out of reach of hands that open, caress, point, make a fist. Glass clinks, machines gritch, whine and mostly close hard on your money. Heated grease sounds like rain, neon viscera surround the collage-- red circles of beef, squares of frozen fish, potato pyramids. The man sleeping in the cardboard box is waiting to eat from Chicago's garbage.

You nod at parallels to 19th century Paris. But 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?"

(cont.)