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# THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE DAY

## DAYTIME, MANIFESTATION OF THE SACRED

The day is one of the fundamental experiences of our natural existence. The obvious cycle of the sun, the alternation of sleep and being awake provide a link between the life of the body and the great regularity that assigns their successive moments to light and to darkness. Only a simplified abstraction allows us to consider time lived as an homogeneous flow. Our existence, in its proper substance and in its larger environment, is dominated by the rhythm of days and nights. Our very experience of the reality of objects is subject to it: the universe of things depends on the light of day that reveals it. It shrivels and becomes uncertain when night falls, with terror and dreams taking its place. The evidence that appears with the clarity of day is not of the same order as apparitions that arise from the depth of darkness.

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It is not surprising, therefore, that this natural given is one of the first things that appears to human amazement, to cultural formation, to religious interpretation. Man is the living being who knows that the succession of his days will have an end; he refers to himself as *ephemeral*. He questions himself about the place he will enter when his eyes will no longer open on the succession of days and nights, according to the law that governs the earth and its well-known landscapes. He also asks himself about the manner in which days, the seasons and the ages began. This is what cosmogonies examine. In many a sacred text, it is the first work of the divinity. "And there was day and there was night".

There is probably no culture, no religion that is not marked by a particular system for measuring time. The year, the season, the lunar cycle, the day and its segments offer reference points, more or less precisely measured, that serve to anchor sacralization: festivals, rituals, prayers, etc. Studying the day separately is certainly to abstract it from the larger context in which a particular day finds its meaning in its contrast to other days in the calendar. It is above all to abstract it from a system in which the *holiday* is opposed to the *working day*, or the ordinary day. Western culture is accustomed to the opposition between the week of six days and a Sunday. But treatises of piety recall that the hours of the ordinary day refer to specially commemorated events of sacred history, at fixed or moveable dates throughout the course of the year. The ordinary day can thus be considered a mirror of the entire year. The morning bells hail, in the rising sun, a symbol of Christmas.

In the Christian West, the contrast between the religious day and the profane day is ancient. It is not linked absolutely to the contrast between clerical life and lay life, even though the cleric, whether secular or regular, is more particularly responsible for the celebrations prescribed for specific hours.<sup>1</sup> It is sufficient to mention Petrarch's *De Vita solitaria*, which begins with a long comparison between the day of the *occupatus* and that of the

<sup>1</sup> See the excellent article "Journée chrétienne" by Emile Bertaud and André Rayez in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, t. VIII, 2, Paris, Beauchesne 1974, col. 1443-1469. The role of Ambrose in determining the ritual was important. Ambrose's hymns should not be overlooked, even though, in the following pages, attention will be directed exclusively to Prudentius.

*solitarius*. The *occupatus* is a city-dweller who seeks pleasure and riches by every means possible. In the course of his hours he commits all the capital sins. The *solitarius*, in the peaceful countryside, serenely occupies his day with prayer, poetry and frugal leisure activities. This is a revealing document. Not only does it manifest a coded literary form, equally applicable to autobiographical communication (the description of the *status vitae*, the kind of life one leads); but it also helps us understand that the religious “daily order”, punctuated by the “canonical hours”, had taken on paradigmatic value in medieval culture. This paradigm survived for a long time in European literature. Even though historians have generally neglected to look for mutations in “religious feeling”, this is an area where the contrast between the profane and the sacred appears with striking clarity.

In the nineteenth century, and even down to our own times, there is no lack of texts showing a persistent echo, and sometimes even an avowed nostalgia, for the ancient religious rhythm of the day. Such nostalgia is all the more intense in that it is confronted with the indifferent and disorganized temporality of contemporary civilization. No doubt it would be useful to distinguish, in what is felt and expressed in an often confused manner, the regret for a type of existence regulated by great natural rhythms and the memory of the sacred aspect that religions have given to these rhythms. In Baudelaire, poet of the city, it is most assuredly not the old order of agrarian life that is regretted. Lost sacredness alone is recalled.

## BAUDELAIRE AND PRUDENTIUS

For Baudelaire, as for so many of his contemporaries, the ancient religious organization of the daily period, and the ritual that marked it, remained sufficiently alive to provide recourse in helpless or confused situations. Even while revolutionizing literary standards, Baudelaire demonstrated his total familiarity with the Latin of the breviary (for example in *Franciscae meae laudes*<sup>2</sup>), and with both pagan and Christian authors of the later Latin

<sup>2</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols. (afterward cited as *O.C.*), ed. Claude Pichois. Paris, Pléiade 1975-76, t. 1, p. 61.

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period. (What books did he still have from the library of his father who had been a priest?) It is because he remained profoundly imbued with religious tradition that he was able, on so many occasions, to turn things around so satanically and proclaim his sympathies for renegades and blasphemers.

With regard to the order of the day, a first element gives pause at once. There are, in his personal diary, notes regarding *hygiene*, in which Baudelaire attempts to define a rule for living and an effective means of defense to respond to the threat of disorganization he felt in his body and in his mind. The prescriptions he tried to impose on himself are the very ones that governed monastic existence. They established morning and evening rituals. Baudelaire, who in a poem of “*Spleen et Idéal*” called himself a “bad monk” and a “lazy monk”,<sup>3</sup> prescribed as remedies for himself work and prayer, *Ora et labora*. He did add to this (forced by his dandyism to do so) his toilet: “A summary of wisdom. Toilet, prayer, work.”<sup>4</sup> Obviously the work of which Baudelaire is speaking is but distantly analogous to the “work of the hands” to which recluses dedicated themselves according to the ancient rules (*Rule of the Master*, *Rule of St. Benedict*, etc.), in order to focus their minds and to remove themselves from the lures of the Tempter. Baudelaire has more trivial reasons for setting himself to the task: to pay his debts and to ensure a proper existence for Jeanne.

To counter his atrocious nights and difficult awakenings, he believed that aid would come if he framed each working day with an act of prayer. This would be, from now on, “the eternal rules of his life”!

“To say my prayer each morning to God, source of all strength and all justice...”<sup>5</sup>

In another entry, the evening prayer assumes the same function that the liturgy had often conferred on it, its purpose being to

<sup>3</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *O.C.*, p. 671.

<sup>5</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 673. The entry adds, “Work all day”...“say another prayer each evening...”.

ensure protection against nocturnal anguish and terrifying dreams, the repeated experience of which had exhausted Baudelaire. His diary entry expresses hope:

“The man who says his evening prayer is like a captain who posts sentinels. He can sleep.”<sup>6</sup>

Baudelaire takes up the metaphor of being besieged and the image of defensive combat against the devil that had, in the Middle Ages and particularly in the Cistercian tradition, led to an almost military assembling of the monastic community at each of the canonical hours. The image of *sentinel* is exactly the same as the one we find in the hymn *Te lucis* from Sunday’s compline:

“*Te lucis ante terminum  
Rerum Creator, poscimus,  
Ut pro tua clementia  
Sis praesul et custodia.*

*Procul recedant somnia  
Et noctium phantasmata  
Hostemque nostrum comprime,  
Ne polluantur corpora.”*

The pathetic resolutions that Baudelaire noted in his diary, and which he was to be unable to follow, show how much the memory of the “Christian day” remained alive in the poet’s mind and how powerfully attractive a rule imposed on daily activities could seem to a man who felt his time was dissipated in *acedia* and perpetual procrastination.

The “*Tableaux parisiens*” in the *Fleurs du Mal* are the part of the work that bears most clearly the mark of the aesthetics of modernity (such as Baudelaire formulated it in his great essay on Constantin Guys, “*Le peintre de la vie moderne*”). Except in the introductory poem “*Paysage*”, Baudelaire devoted no text to the sequence of an entire day. But he often evoked the crucial moments of the day: morning in “*Le Cygne*”, in “*Les Sept Vieillards*” and especially in “*Crépuscule du Matin*”; noon in “*Le*

<sup>6</sup> O.C., I, p. 672.

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*soleil*"; evening in "*Crépuscule du soir*";<sup>7</sup> night in "*Le Jeu*" and in "*Rêve parisien*". And in other sections of the *Fleurs*, poems such as "*Aube spirituelle*", "*Harmonie du soir*" or "*La fin de la journée*" indicate just as plainly, through their very titles, the intention of giving poetic expression to one of those moments in which, in the growing light of dawn or the dimming light of dusk, there is a dangerous passage to be confronted. Sufficient attention has not been paid to the fact that in these admirable poems—the expression of a new "lyric awareness" in light of the modern city—reminiscences of the religious day formed the almost constant counterpoint, or rather the harmonic bass, upon which were developed images of a present that was radically and brutally new.

Nowhere did Baudelaire mention Prudentius, the Fourth century Christian Latin poet. His *Psychomachia*, a broad allegory of the inner conflict between passions, virtues and vices, served as example throughout the centuries, down to Baudelaire. Naturally the French poet had every reason to have forgotten the source of a method he so often used. In his use of personification, he could have just as easily thought of other precedents, beginning with Virgil, from whom Prudentius himself could have taken the example.

It is useful to consider the *Book of Hours (Cathemerinon)*. This collection, in which the meter is often related to that of Horace, was intended for scholars rather than the community of the faithful, say historians. The first six of its twelve poems cover the course of the day. Their scheme cannot be superimposed exactly on the structure of the traditional canonical hours. The first two consecrate the morning hours: I. "Hymn at the cock's crowing", II. "Morning hymn". The following two hymns are meant to be sung before and after the meal. The last two are: V. "For the Hour when the Lamp is Lit", VI. "Hymn before Sleep". Although Prudentius was not an ecclesiastical author, some of his verses were used in the breviary.

In the morning poems by Prudentius, a certitude is proclaimed: God and Christ will be triumphant. They are announced by a complete network of symbols that are organized around images of

<sup>7</sup> To which can be added, in *Le Spleen de Paris*, a "*Crépuscule du soir*" in prose.

light and the crowing cock dissipating the darkness and mist. These symbols are accompanied by almost stereotyped images of activities during the first period of the day. However, upon reading “*Le crépuscule du matin*”, we are surprised by the similarity in the images Baudelaire seems to have taken from Prudentius, limiting himself to modifying their sense by different elements of context, syntax and setting:

1. *La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes,*
2. *Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes.*

Baudelaire uses the imperfect, which colors his entire poem, giving it the appearance of the narration of a past moment, making all the more impressive the abrupt entry, in verses 9-11, of a fragile present, of a sharply-perceived atmosphere behind which we can detect no classical or religious antecedent. A radically new sacred dimension is announced:

9. *Comme un visage en pleurs que les brises essuient,*
10. *L’air est plein du frisson des choses qui s’enfuient,*
11. *Et l’homme est las d’écrire et la femme d’aimer.*<sup>8</sup>

The morning poems of Prudentius evolve in an atemporal present, sustained by the reminiscence of Scripture passages for which daybreak is the symbolic equivalent. Two verses from Hymn II, however, take on the appearance of a *tableau* of the awakened city. And it is there that we hear echoes of what for Baudelaire will become “*la diane*”:

36. *Haec hora cunctis utilis,*
37. *qua quisque, quod studet, gerat:*
38. *miles, togatus, navita,*
39. *hunc triste raptat classicum,*
40. *mercator hinc ac rusticus*
41. *avara suspirant lucra...\**

“Now is the hour useful to all, when each one fulfills the duties of his state: soldier or civilian, sailor, worker, farmer or merchant.

<sup>8</sup> O.C., I, p. 103.

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“One is led on by the glory of the bar; another by the sinister trumpet; the trader and the peasant thirst after avid gains.”<sup>9</sup>

Prudentius lists these activities and professions, not in order to provide a description of general animation, but in order to contrast the vain agitation of the profane with Christian simplicity and purity. “But as for us, we are ignorant of profit and usury and all the art of eloquence; our strength is not in the art of war. We recognize only you, oh Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Of the elements enumerated by the Latin poet, Baudelaire (assuming that he remembered it) retained only the sound of the trumpet. He isolated it in order to accentuate its expressive power and associated it with its urban location, “*la cour des casernes*” (a barracks’ courtyard). Baudelaire had been, from his childhood, linked to the career of General Aupick and had often heard the sounds of morning reveille. And it would be correct to observe that what had endured was the military ritual and daily order and not the text of Prudentius. The points of comparison in these two poems may be perfectly fortuitous. But the fact that there is a possible comparison is enough for me to ask what has remained the same and what has changed. And one of the things that have changed is that the poet no longer prides himself in some other force than that of arms, as did the Christian poet of the *Cathemerinon*. He was rather to acknowledge his own weakness; he is “tired of writing”. When he hears the morning reveille, this perception is only a brute fact, one sensory event among others. The poet limits himself to receiving this signal, certainly without joy, of a “discipline” that does not concern him. He is not protected by any universal promise of salvation. He does not prepare himself to spend the day in accordance with some law that, by opposing itself to the laws of this world, would ensure him of eternity as his reward. Something—this military signal of the day that begins—has persisted from the ancient poetic-religious image. And through this can be found the illustration and the confirmation of the famous Baudelairian definition of modernity. “Modernity is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent half of art, the other half of

<sup>9</sup> Prudentius, *Cathemerinon liber (Book of Hours)*, text edited and translated by M. Lavarenne, Paris, Belles-Lettres, 1943, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



which is the eternal and the unchanging.”<sup>11</sup> We can see this even better when reading earlier in “*Le Crépuscule du matin*”:

3. *C'était l'heure où l'essaim des rêves malfaisants*
4. *Tord sur leurs oreillers les bruns adolescents;*
5. *Où, comme un oeil sanglant qui palpite et qui bouge,*
6. *La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge;*
7. *Où l'âme, sous le poids du corps revêche et lourd,*
8. *Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour.*<sup>12</sup>

The first Hymn of Prudentius—*Ad Galli cantum*—also evoked night-time dreams, but it was in order to celebrate their disappearance; whereas, in the verses of an exasperated dualism that we just read, Baudelaire describes their perverse persistence:

37. *Ferunt vagantes daemona,*
38. *laetos tenebris noctium,*
39. *gallo canente exterritos*
40. *sparsim timere et cedere.*
85. *Sat convolutis artubus*
86. *sensum profunda oblivio*
87. *pressit, gravavit, obruit*
88. *vanis vagantem somniis.*

“It is said that the demons who roam, made glad by the darkness of night, at the cock’s crowing are seized with fright, disperse and flee. ... For a long time, while our limbs were still curled, a profound oblivion oppressed, weighted down and overwhelmed our spirit, wandering at the will of vain dream.”<sup>13</sup>

The image of a swarm (*essaim*) and of twisted (*tordus*) limbs are already clearly inscribed in the Latin text. Evil is linked to contortion. In the evening prayer (Hymn VI), in which Prudentius repulses what Baudelaire was to call “evil dreams” (*les rêves malfaisants*), the demon is a master of tricks (*praestigiator*); he appears as a twisted serpent (*tortuosus serpens*). “Far, oh quite far from us, you roving monsters of those dreams! Get away, o de-

<sup>11</sup> *O.C.*, II, p. 695.

<sup>12</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

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mon magician, with your stubborn ruse! Demon, o *Twisted serpent*, who stirs peaceful hearts, begone..."<sup>14</sup> When Baudelairean night fell on the capital, in "*Le Crépuscule du soir*", no religious protection repelled the demons. They wander about, as Prudentius had feared, and they invade the area:

11. *Cependant des démons malsains dans l'atmosphère*
12. *S'éveillent lourdement comme des gens d'affaire,*
13. *Et cognent en volant les volets et l'auvent.*<sup>15</sup>

In the early morning they still have not abandoned their favorite prey—"les bruns adolescents". Baudelaire's early morning dawn is thus the very opposite of the triumphant theophany sung in the two first hymns of Prudentius. "*L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte*"<sup>16</sup>, in its moving beauty, announces only the arrival of work—that "useful hour" which, according to Prudentius, is life oblivious to salvation. "*Hora utilis*". Baudelaire, through an allegorical figure, returns in fact to the image of *tools*:

28. *Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux,*
29. *Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.*<sup>17</sup>

In "*Aube spirituelle*" (poem XLVI of the *Fleurs du Mal*), Baudelaire certainly recalls the motif of the dawn theophany, but here it is in order to replace, heretically, the manifestation of God with the appearance of a clear "memory", of the solar "phantom" of the beloved woman, "*chère Déesse, Être lucide et pur*".<sup>18</sup>

When Baudelaire evoked "lanterns" or "the combats between the lamp and day", the "realistic" reference seems unmistakable at first glance. And yet! The reader of the *Cathemerinon* knows that the lamp has a capital place in this religious poetry.

The lamp is the fire that is lit to illuminate the home. It was thus one of the earliest objects to surround human existence when

<sup>14</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 37, verses 137-145.

<sup>15</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 46.

men established their first elementary refuges. Hymn V of Prudentius, *Ad incensum lucernai*, is perfect testimony to the fact that a sacred value had been attributed to it, that it was in itself the source of a sacred enlightenment. The fire we light in the evening takes over for the light of day; it symbolizes Christ present even in the night. The lamp is compared to the pillar of light that guided the Hebrews out of Egypt; within the house, through the transparent glass, it represents the whole of heaven. "What a worthy thing to be offered to you, oh Father, by your flock at the beginning of the night that makes the dew to fall: light, the most precious of the gifts you give us. Light, through which we can perceive all your other benefits!" (verses 149-153).<sup>19</sup> Lit by pious hands a lamp is the continuation of day. In the simple dualism of Prudentius, it is once again the proof of a Good that forces Evil to recede. Knowingly or unknowingly, Baudelaire retains this ancient symbol but in order to turn it upside down. In "*Le crépuscule du soir*", what "lights up the streets" is "Prostitution" (verse 15).<sup>20</sup> In "*Le crépuscule du matin*" the lamp is no longer the substitute for the light of day but its adversary, in a painterly comparison in which the "red" of the lamp is not simply a contrasting color but a disturbing *value*. And if, in the comparison that follows this image, the soul ("*l'ame*") should be taken as the counterpart to the lamp, it is the body then ("*le corps revêché et lourd*") which becomes, momentarily, the analogy of "day"—an analogy reinforced by the effect of the rhyme. The morning resurrection of the body is marked by disgrace and unhappiness. And the soul, in the combat that is hers, can see no promise of victory. The sacred of earlier ages seems to have been perpetuated in the sense of evil and of sin that haunts the poet. More evident, therefore, are the images of defeat, pain and death:

12. *Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.*
13. *Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,*
14. *Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide;*
15. *Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,*
16. *Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur leurs doigts.*
17. *C'était l'heure où parmi le froid et la lésine*

<sup>19</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 95.

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18. *S'aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine.*
19. *Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux*
20. *Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux;*
21. *Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,*
22. *Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices*
23. *Poussaient leurs derniers râles en hoquets inégaux.*
24. *Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.*<sup>21</sup>

In many respects this admirable “tableau” is incomparable. Nevertheless, some of its components accept being, once again, compared to verses from Prudentius; these seem to belong to another world in which are dominant abstraction, simplification, scriptural references, the joy of prayer and supplication. In the external darkness of night, Prudentius sees the realm of sin expand. This realm is inhabited by types or by entities, designated by the generic singular: *fur*, the thief; *fraus*, fraud; *adulter*, the adulterer; *libido*, debauchery; *nugator*, the libertine. Baudelaire, no matter how tempted he might be by types and by allegory, turns his thought toward singularity, toward the living beings who make up the population of certain neighborhoods of Paris. But we must note that, even while seeking to be sensitive to living diversity, the poet evokes generic ensembles, in the plural, half-way between an archetypal figure and what would have been the irreplaceable reality of a unique existence. His plurals define categories: “women of pleasure”, “poor women”, “women in childbirth”, the “dying”, the “debauched”. His typology is richer than that of Prudentius, but it is still a typology and the common elements are evident and numerous. This does not consist simply in an enumeration of varieties of sins; Baudelaire deals with all aspects of the *Fall* and of finiteness: sin, misery, pain, death. These sinister forces occupy the morning stage of the Parisian *tableau*, whereas Prudentius proclaims the nocturnal kingdom of sin overthrown. Verses 4 and 8 of Hymn II attest to the disappearance of all the evils that were able to benefit from the protection of darkness. In verses 89-92, the image of the broken limbs of the debauched is brought up once again and contrasted with the analogy of the combat of Jacob and the angel, which leaves the victory to God:

<sup>21</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 103-104.

- 89. *Erit tamen beatior,*
- 90. *intemperans membrum cui*
- 91. *luctando claudum et tabidum*
- 92. *dies oborta invenerit.*

“Happier, however, will be the one whose intemperate limbs, at the break of day, are broken and languishing from the struggle.”<sup>22</sup>

Jacob’s defeat was the counterpart of a divine victory. The defeat inscribed in the Parisian *tableau*, on the other hand, has no counterpart. It is pure degradation. None of the calming requested and even announced by Prudentius’ evening prayer, and for which Baudelaire’s “*Le crépuscule du soir*” began by formulating a desire, has occurred. In the *Hymnus ante somnum* (Hymn VI) we read:

- 9. *Fluxit labor diei*
- 10. *redit et quietis hora*
- 11. *blandus sopor vicissim*
- 12. *fessos relaxat artus.*
  
- 13. *Mens aestuans procellis*
- 11. *curisque sauciata*
- 12. *totis bibit medullis*
- 13. *obliviale poclum.*
  
- 14. *Serpit per omne corpus*
- 15. *Lethea vis, nec ullum*
- 16. *miseris doloris aegri*
- 17. *patitur manere sensum*
  
- 18. *Lex haec data est caducis*
- 19. *Deo jubente membris,*
- 20. *ut temperet laborem*
- 21. *medicabilis voluptas.*

Prudentius develops the reassuring image of sleep that heals the fatigue and pains of the day. This image is a cliché, and Prudentius is certainly not the first to have discovered it. But he expresses it with real poetic intensity: “The labor of the day is ended, and

<sup>22</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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the hour for rest returns. In its turn peaceful sleep relaxes the tired limbs. The spirit aroused by tempests, the spirit wounded by worries now drinks at the very bottom of its being from the cup of oblivion. Now throughout the body the power of Lethea flows, chasing any feeling of unhealthy pain from the hearts of miserable men. Our mortal members, at God's command, received this law, that a salutary voluptuousness should bring remedy to their fatigue."<sup>23</sup> Baudelaire, in "*Le crépuscule du soir*", begins with the same sense of promised healing:

7. *C'est le soir qui soulage*
8. *Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage,*
9. *Le savant obstiné dont le front s'alourdit,*
10. *Et l'ouvrier courbé qui regagne son lit.*<sup>24</sup>

But sleep and night can have a healing power only for those who can say at the end of the day, "We have labored!". The Baudelairean night, as we have seen, is quickly filled with demons, prostitutes and thieves. Pain and death are dominant. The image of the dying and that of the hospital—a "modern" structure developed by nineteenth-century science and philanthropy—attest to the absence or the ineffectiveness of the ancient protective prayers:

31. *C'est l'heure où les douleurs des malades s'aggravent!*
32. *La sombre Nuit les prend à la gorge; ils finissent*
33. *Leur destinée et s'en vont vers le gouffre commun;*
34. *L'hôpital se remplit de leurs soupirs.*<sup>25</sup>

What a difference there is between the *protected night* of the Christian Latin poet and the unprotected night that reigns over the modern metropolis! Sickness and death do not recognize the frontier separating day and night. The "dying" of the morning (verse 22) are replaced by the dead of the night.

The cock's crowing, in "*Le crépuscule du matin*", is perceived as just as real as the military reveille. The Parisian "*faubourg*",

<sup>23</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 32-33.

<sup>24</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 95.

so dear to Baudelaire, still enjoyed a semi-rural quality, and live cocks could often be seen at the markets. However, it seems highly unlikely that the cock appears in Baudelaire's early morning dawn only in order to provide a new touch of musical "picturesqueness". Even more, it is a "picturesque" element only in order to renounce its link with the ancient liturgy. In fact, in all Christian liturgy, and not only in the work of Prudentius, the arrival of the day is marked by the crowing of the cock. Did Baudelaire consciously recall this? It makes no difference. The fact that his text provides evident elements of comparison is sufficient.

For Prudentius the cock's crow sharply marks a threshold. Its brilliance is, so to speak, consubstantial with light. It is the living sign of being awake. Thus Prudentius, in his first Hymn, immediately proposes an analogy with the coming of Christ, *excitator mentium* (verse 3), "waker of souls".<sup>26</sup> The morning cock is the allegory of a sacred event. At the opposite extreme, the crowing of the Parisian cock is in no way a bearer of light; it cuts through an "*air brumeux*" (mists). And "cut through" (*déchirer*) in the Baudelairian context implies aggression, pain, conflict. Nothing remains of the glorious light of a threshold victoriously crossed. Compared to a "sob broken by frothy blood", the cock's crowing is related to the "last gasp" expelled by the "dying". Far from marking a decisive breach between the kingdom of darkened evil and that of luminous good, it provides the transition, or better, the continuation of nocturnal suffering into that of the new day. The "sob" and the cry have taken the place of the song of triumph. And if "frothy blood" can for a moment make us think of sacrifice, it is a sacrifice with no true sacred power, with no promise of salvation. We are dealing more with a self-contained contingency like reveille, with the variously measured ingredients of a profane polyphonic atmosphere as perceived by a hypersensitive consciousness. In the poem's final allegory, it is a "*sombre*" Paris that awakes. The darkness of night has not been dissipated; it forms the substance of the great collective urban life at the first hour of its activity, and perhaps for the rest of the day. The power of the sacred sentinels who repelled the darkness and its demons has been lost, and the powers of dark-

<sup>26</sup> Prudentius, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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ness endure and overflow into the entire daily period. But if the day in the great Baudelairean city is at this point inhabited by mists, dreams and darkness, it is probably because the poet has not completely forgotten the ritual whose function was to fortify the human realm and to protect the faithful people from the assaults of external darkness. So much so that the dawns, whose “*tableau*” he paints, remain, through contrast and inversion, dependent on the ancient canonical hours and on their exorcising function, even though now ineffective.

“*Paysage*”, the initial and program-setting poem of the “*Tableaux parisiens*”, unfolds the cycle of the day and of the seasons under the eyes of the poet looking from the window of his attic loft. In the modern city, as it spreads out before him, church steeples and pipes, emblematic images of the old order of the religious day and more recent industrial activity, are juxtaposed in a deliberate and significant manner:

6. ...*Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde;*
7. *Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,*
8. *Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité.*

To this morning scene responds that of the evening, where images filled with sacred memories (stars, azure skies, the lamp) are hidden, veiled by the “*rivers of coals*” that rise from the capital. The comparison is fully drawn between the black smoke of modern civilization and the “*solemn hymns*” ringing from church steeples. However, in this world of conflict, in which the reality of profane labor competes with, and even eliminates, the sacred regulation of existence, the poet has not finished with his memory of the sacred. He compares himself to “*astrologers*”, that is, to the learned men of another age, who indulged in a suspicious traffic with signs from above. His announced project is that of an anchorite; his desire is to construct, for himself alone, the cell of reclusive existence:

14. *Et quand viendra l'hiver aux neiges monotones,*
15. *Je fermerai partout portières et volets*
16. *Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais.*<sup>27</sup>



The rule of this eremitical life is that of the creative dream, and the sacred that justifies it is no longer that of religion but that of art, where the poet can bring his “will” to bear; in the imaginary realm, this will is not afraid to rival the divine will, whose works are described in *Genesis*. The artist who pulls “a sun” from his “heart” renews the cosmogonic *fiat*.

#### THE FORM OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY DAY: EXAMPLES OF PERSISTENCE

No doubt it was inevitable, in studying cultural transformations in the organization of the day, to encounter this phenomenon that characterized the response of a very large number of minds to the victory of science and industry over the world (and over the image of the world): the transfer to aesthetics and to art of sacred values previously linked to religious beliefs and to the practice of obedience. And it would no doubt not be without value to show that, from the beginning of the Copernican revolution, the coming of day and the fall of night had taken on a relative and mechanical meaning, which at least diminished the great symbolic interpretations of the times of day.

We know what use modern literature has made of the “form of day”. The temporal framework (“the time of one sun”) that Aristotelian poetics made predominate in tragedy, and which the classical age in France had made obligatory, is a structural detail to which twentieth century novelists have returned with insistence. Among the most striking of these works can be mentioned *Ulysses* by James Joyce, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, *The Death of Virgil* by Hermann Broch and *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denissovitch* by Solzhenitsyn. To this should be added a considerable number of films. The important thing is not to draw up an exhaustive list but to note that the form of the day, for reasons that do not all belong to cultural memory, lends itself, and often in an unexpected fashion, to a return to the sacred.

Recognition must certainly be given, especially among poets, to the fidelity or nostalgia that attracts them to religious tradi-

<sup>27</sup> *O.C.*, I, p. 82.

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tion. W.H. Auden wrote *Horae canonicae (The Shield of Achilles)*, 1955, with more daring and less candor than did Marie Noël in France. But it is more surprising to see writers, whose works have but a distant relationship with the universe of the sacred, interested in the literary form of the day and, at the same time, renewing links (if only intellectually) with the religious order that marked the temporal rhythms of the community and imposed its *exercices* on the person who wished to fulfill the obligations of a vocation. In a 1943 *Cahier*, returning to an idea that was already an old one for him, Paul Valéry wrote:

“Why should a ‘novel’ not be the diary of one day in someone’s life?

This would be an illogical chain of events, and yet a chain of substitutions of quite different moments and phases that constitute—but for a *certain way of looking—from time to time*—one of our days—that should *first of all* be studied abstractly.”<sup>28</sup>

In a passage written in 1936, Valéry had spoken of the inventions of the Church, but in order to define them for the benefit of a discipline of mind independent of any orthodoxy:

“Honor to the Church  
its admirable inventions — (in principle) and of universal value for the  
formation of minds. A whole ‘psychological’ study to be made of its  
inventions.

It created exercises—a mental schedule.

The breviary is an admirable idea.

‘Meditation’ at determined hours.

A well-ordered day. Night is not overlooked.

Understood the value of the early morning”.<sup>29</sup>

In fact the initial design for *La Jeune Parque* had been formulated as a “psychophysiology throughout the day” (1913). And until the end of his life Valéry worked on the twenty-four prose poems of *Alphabet*, the sequence of which was meant to correspond to that of the hours of a complete day. It is a complete-

<sup>28</sup> Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, ed. by Judith Robinson, 2 vols., Paris, Pléiade 1973-74, t. II, p. 1355.

<sup>29</sup> *Cahiers*, t. I, p. 369.

ly profane day but one that culminates in an *interrogative exstasy*, where the sacred and its negation are manifested together:

“Zenith  
at the heart of the profound night.

The deep water of the world at this hour is so calm, the water of things in the Spirit so transparent like space pure time, barely troubled, so that one should be able to perceive Him who dreams all this.

But there is nothing other than what is and nothing more, nothing other than what is and that flows uniformly...’’<sup>30</sup>

As soon as we begin examining the testimony of a poet, other names come to mind: Saint-John Perse, Bonnefoy, Jaccottet — to mention only the French realm. If they also had recourse to the “form of day”, this was not, of course, in order to respond to the same concerns as Valéry. However, I believe that we can discern, in a general manner, a common thread that is linked to the form of day and that refers to the contrast of the sacred and the profane.

The hours of the day and the sacred are as closely related as matter to form. If the sacred and the profane, as anthropologists affirm, constitute a contrasting structure, what better symbolic representation can be imagined than a day (of commemoration, a feast-day) standing alone within the succession of days, or a moment appearing within the succession of the hours? It has been noted often: a sudden appearance or illumination is the first manifestation of the sacred (which immediately requires being fixed by an inscription, a statue, a rule, etc.). The daily thread of time weaves together the flow of light and darkness that is waiting to be divided into *hours* (which, in the late personifications of Antiquity, are successive feminine manifestations). Moreover, this woven cloth is also the background against which a moment of heightened truth can stand out, in its brilliance or in its anguished edge. To receive this instant of truth, to give it a voice: if such were today the task as-

<sup>30</sup> *Alphabet*, Paris, Blazot, 1976 (unpaginated). Lettre Z.

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signed to poetry, it would have the function, in a profane world,  
of being the guardian of the sacred.

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