

THE CAT

Charles Baudelaire

I

Within my brain prowls endlessly,
As if about his furnished flat,
A fine, strong, gentle, genial cat.
He mews almost inaudibly,

His tone is so discreet and calm;
But, low or loud, his voice will keep
Its constant timbre, rich and deep.
There lies his secret and his charm.

That voice, which purls and filters down
The darkest chasms that are mine,
Thrills like a long mellifluous line
And like a love-draught clears each frown.

It lulls the cruelest sufferings
And offers every ecstasy;
It needs no words to say to me
The most informative of things.

No gnawing violin-bow can bring
My heart, that perfect instrument,
A song of richer ravishment
Upon its most reverberant string

Than does your voice, mysterious
Seraphic cat, my cat bizarre,
Whose facets, like an angel's, are
As subtle as harmonious!

II

His gold and amber fur can pour
A scent so sweet, one evening I
Was thoroughly enswathed thereby,
Because I stroked him once, no more.

He is the genius of the place;

His role to judge, inspire, survey
All things within his regal sway;
Is he of elf- or god-like race?

When, toward this cat whom I revere,
My eyes as though a magnet drew
Them captive thither turn anew,
And into my own self I peer,

I am quite wonderstruck to see
Those pallid pupils' fires alight,
Those living opals, lanterns bright,
Hypnotically fixed on me.

—*Translated by Philip Higson*

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