



## Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)

By *Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)*

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Read by:	D. S. Harvey	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
Length:	1 hour 24 minutes	Catalog:	DB-1237
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*The Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)* is a collection of poems by Charles Baudelaire influential on several levels. Fellow artists were impressed and unsettled when it was published in 1857; one described the effect as “immense, prodigious, unexpected, mingled with admiration and some indefinable anxious fear”. Admirers included Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert, who wrote “you are as unyielding as marble and as penetrating as English mist”. The general public, however, was scandalized by the themes of sex and death and frank treatment of subjects such as lesbianism, which led to a prosecution of Baudelaire, his publisher and printer for offenses against publish morals. The conviction resulted in a fine and the removal of six poems.

A second edition was released in 1861 that deleted the offending poems and added 35 poems, including a new section, Parisian Scenes, which described the effects of modernization symbolized by the identical streets and buildings taking shape during the renovation of Paris and a resulting alienation and estrangement as well as a sense of loss. On a stylistic level, the collection introduced a kind of highly ordered prose poetry and the use of a cynical and ironic voice that broke with Romantic traditions by acknowledging moral complexity, urban corruption, loss of innocence, and indulging in sensual and aesthetic pleasures. The work captures the fleeting sense of life and beauty in the emerging urban industrial world for which Baudelaire coined the term modernity and has had a lasting influence that continues to be an inspiration to this day.

**Charles Baudelaire** (April 9, 1821 – August 31, 1867) was a French poet, art critic, essayist, and noted translator of Edgar Allen Poe. He was born in Paris and educated at a boarding school in Lyon. His father died when Charles was six; his mother’s remarriage was a trauma that is thought to explain the dissolute habits that began as a student in Paris. After earning a law degree he embarked upon a literary career against the wishes of his family. He largely squandered a substantial inheritance received at age 21, which led to his family putting his property in trust. He made a name in artistic circles for his bold and visionary opinions as a critic and essayist. A free-spender, a dandy, and with a mistress of mixed-race, his lifestyle estranged him from his family. In spite of poor health, emotional distress, and burdensome debts, he produced *Histoires Extraordinaires*, an excellent translation of Poe’s stories, in 1852, and *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857. A long term user of laudanum, he produced *Artificial Paradises* in 1860, a book about the experiences of opium and hashish. He reconciled and lived with his mother for a time in the late 1850’s, but never overcame his chronic poverty and illness. He suffered a massive stroke in 1866 and spent the last two years of his life institutionalized in a state of semi-paralysis and aphasia. He was a major influence on French Symbolist poets Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Verlaine. Marcel Proust considered him the greatest poet of the nineteenth century.