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Charles Baudelaire

ISSUE 82, WINTER 1981

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Stupidity, delusion, selfishness and lust  
torment our bodies and possess our minds,  
and we sustain our affable remorse  
the way a beggar nourishes his lice.

Our sins are stubborn, our contrition lame;  
we want our scruples to be worth our while—  
how cheerfully we crawl back to the mire:  
a few cheap tears will wash our stains away!

Satan Trismegistus subtly rocks  
our ravished spirits on his wicked bed  
until the precious metal of our will  
is leached out by this cunning alchemist:

the Devil's hand directs our every move—  
the things we loathed become the things we love;  
day by day we drop through stinking shades  
quite undeterred on our descent to Hell.

Like a poor profligate who sucks and bites  
the withered breast of some well-seasoned trull,  
we snatch in passing at clandestine joys  
and squeeze the oldest orange hardest yet.

Wriggling in our brains like a million worms,  
a demon demon holds its revels there,  
and when we breathe, the Lethe in our lungs  
trickles sighing on its secret course.

If rape and arson, poison and the knife  
have not yet stitched their ludicrous designs  
onto the banal buckram of our fates,  
it is because our souls lack enterprise!

But here among the scorpions and the lice,  
the jackals, apes and vultures, snakes and wolves,  
monsters that howl and growl and squeal and crawl,  
in all the squalid zoo of vices, one

is even uglier and fouler than the rest,  
although the least flamboyant of the lot;

this beast would gladly undermine the earth  
and swallow all creation in a yawn;

I speak of Boredom which with ready tears  
dreams of hangings as it puffs its pipe.  
Reader, you know this squeamish monster well,  
—hypocrite reader,—my alias,—my twin!

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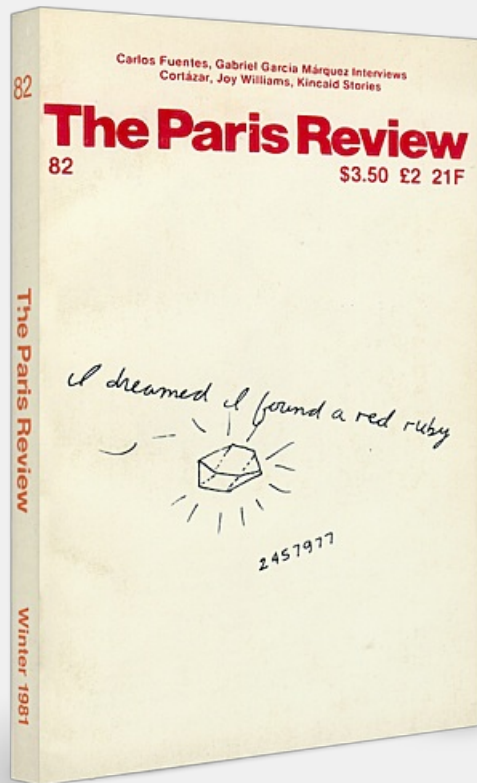
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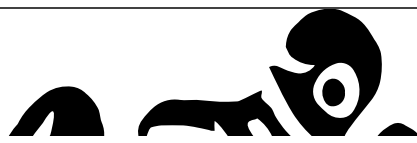
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have only more to add, that by reason of my absence some faults have escaped the press, besides those which myself may be chargeable with in the translation; the Reader will show his judgment in distinguishing, and his good nature in pardoning them; vale. The Reader (Der Vorleser) is a novel by German law professor and judge Bernhard Schlink, published in Germany in 1995 and in the United States in 1997. The story is a parable, dealing with the difficulties post-war German generations have had comprehending the Holocaust; Ruth Franklin writes that it was aimed specifically at the generation Bertolt Brecht called the Nachgeborenen, those who came after. Like other novels in the genre of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, the struggle to come to terms with the — Charles Baudelaire. To the Reader. Folly, error, sin, avarice Occupy our minds and labor our bodies, And we feed our pleasant remorse As beggars nourish their vermin. Our sins are