BAUDELAIRE AND CATHERINE CROWE

In the opening chapter of Les Paradis Artificiels, after likening moments of clear-seeing, of ecstasy to "une véritable grâce—un miroir magique où l'homme est invité à se voir en beau, c'est à dire tel qu'il devrait et pourrait être," Baudelaire continues: "De même une certaine école spiritualiste, qui a ses représentants en Angleterre et en Amérique, considère les phénomènes surnaturels, tels que les apparitions de fantômes, les revenants, etc., comme des manifestations de la volonté divine, attentive à réveiller dans l'esprit de l'homme le souvenir des réalités invisibles." It is, perhaps, doubtful whether Baudelaire had read any of the American representatives of this spiritualism. But with the work of one English exponent he was, on his own confession, familiar. In the passage from the Salon de 1859, which we shall discuss later, he mentions Mrs Crowe by name and quotes some lines from her most important book.

Catherine Stevens was born about 1800—some notices give a precise date, 1803—at Borough Green in Kent. In 1822 she married Lieutenant-Colonel Crowe and spent the greater part of her after-life in Edinburgh. It was there no doubt that she came in contact with the Scottish phrenologist, George Combe (1788–1858), the disciple of Spurzheim, author of the System of Phrenology (translated into French by J. Fossati, 1836) and The Constitution of Man (1828). She confesses, in her Spiritualism and the Age we live in, that she was a disciple of "that excellent and wise man, who saw further into truth, I believe, than most men that have

1 Edmonds and Dexter, Spiritualism, New York, 1853; Capron, Modern Spiritualism, Boston, 1855; Hare, Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations, New York, 1856, etc. We may recall that the 'Rochester Knockings' which inaugurated the epoch of modern spiritualism were first heard at Hydesville, U.S.A., towards the close of 1848. Victor Hennquin's Savoone le genre humain, which seems to have prompted the spiritualistic craze in France, was published in 1853. Among other English books of the period on topics akin to those of Mrs Crowe, some of which Baudelaire might conceivably have read, we may mention: Colebourn, Isis Reveals, 1836; Esdaile, Mesmerism in India, 1842; Eliotson, The Zoid, 1842–49; Braid, Satanic Agency and Mesmerism, 1842, Neurypnology, 1843, Magic, Witchcraft, Animal Magnetism, etc., 1852; Lee, Report on the Phenomena of Clairvoyance, 1843; Towneend, Facts in Mesmerism, 1844; Atwood, Early Magnetism, 1846, A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery, 1850; Davis (The Poughkeepsie Seer), Nature's Divine Revelations, 1847; Gregory, Letters on Animal Magnetism, 1851. Of French works on these subjects apart from the books of Meem, de Puységur and Deleuze, we may cite: Bertrand, Du Magnétisme Animal en France, 1828; Gastier, Introduction au Magnétisme, 1840, Histoire du Somnambulisme, 1842; the books of du Potet, particularly La Magie Dévoile, 1832; the works of Brière de Boismont, particularly Hallucinations ou Histoire Raisonnée des Apparitions, etc., 1845; Ricard, Traité Théorique et Physique du Magnétisme, 1841. The work of Eliphas Lévi dates only from 1855. Among other instances in Baudelaire's work the specific reference to Brière de Boismont in Fêtes, xiv, is indicative of his interest in these topics.
lived upon this earth.' Mrs Crowe wrote two tragedies, \textit{Aristodemus} (1838) and \textit{The Cruel Kindness} (1833), which do not appear to have been successful, several novels, \textit{Susan Hopley} (1841), \textit{Lilly Dawson} (1847), \textit{The Adventures of a Beauty, Light and Darkness} (a volume of \textit{contes fantastiques}, 1852), \textit{Linny Lockwood} (1854), and a number of tales contributed to periodicals. Her novels, in the opinion of Richard Garnett, were by no means devoid of merit. 'They are a curious and not unpleasing mixture of imagination and matter of fact. The ingenuity of the plot and the romantic nature of the incidents contrast forcibly with the prosaic character of the personages and the impassioned homeliness of the diction. Curiosity and sympathy are deeply excited and much skill is shown in maintaining the interest to the last.' It is to be suspected that, in the ascription to her by the writers of some biographical notices of a 'morbid and despondent turn of mind,' there lurks merely a personal prejudice against some of her activities. But of the other characteristic attributed to her, the literary vanity which induced her to lend countenance to the attribution to her of the authorship of \textit{The Vestiges of Creation} (1844), some evidence is to be found in the posturing sciolism and the apocalyptic airs visible in her work. After a 'violent but brief' attack of insanity she wrote little, but several of her works continued to be reprinted. She died in 1876.

It appears likely, although her attraction to George Combe already betrays her turn of mind, that she was really drawn to the study of the supernatural by Kerner, whose \textit{Seherin von Prevorst} (1829) she translated in 1845. This work seems, to judge by her frequent references to it, to have exercised a powerful influence upon her. The title of her most important work was probably suggested by a book of Kerner's published in 1836\(^1\). This work, upon which rests her chief claim to remembrance, \textit{The Night Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-Seers} (1st ed., 1848; 2nd, same year; 3rd, 1852), is declared by Garnett to be 'one of the best collections of supernatural stories in our language, the energy of the authoress's own belief lending animation to her narrative'—a judgment with which, as we shall see, Baudelaire was inclined to agree. The avowed aim of this work is the exploration of 'all that class of phenomena which appears to throw some light on our psychical nature, and on the probable state of the soul after death.' Mrs Crowe makes no great claim to originality, frankly indicating her indebtedness to her predecessors, more

\(^1\) 'The term "Night Side of Nature" I borrowed from the Germans, who derive it from the astronomers, the latter denominating that side of a planet which is turned from the sun, its \textit{night side}.'
particularly to German authorities like Kerner, Stilling, Werner, Eschenmayer, Ennemoser, Passavant, Schubert, Von Mayer and Von Reichenbach. Among the French sources of her stories and instances may be cited Saint Martin, Cagliostro, Cazotte, de Puységur, Balzac (Louis Lambert) and du Potet. The 'science' to which she has recourse for her explanations is naturally that of her day, electricity, magnetism, ether, somnambulism, hypnotism, and their kin.

Before entering on her theme she attempts to dispose of what she regards as the two enemies of her faith, scepticism of the eighteenth-century type and the tyrannical dogmatism of orthodox establishments. It is not difficult to find similar attitudes in Baudelaire. 'Because in the seventeenth century credulity outran reason and discretion, the eighteenth, by a natural reaction, flung itself into an opposite extreme.' She attacks the materialism of the eighteenth century, inveighing against its use of purely a priori arguments: 'It has become a custom to look at all the phenomena regarding man in a purely physiological point of view; for although it is admitted that he has a mind, and although there is such a science as metaphysics, the existence of what we call mind is never considered but as connected with the body.' She evinces a Baudelairean detestation of the mystery-hating Voltairean mind: 'It is easy to laugh at what we do not understand.' Ridicule has delayed the births of many truths, but never stifled one: 'The pharisaical scepticism which denies without investigation is quite as perilous, and much more contemptible, than (sic) the blind credulity which accepts all that it is taught without enquiry; it is indeed but another form of ignorance assuming to be knowledge.' The lively hope that this attitude has given place to a humbler toleration is her avowed motive for undertaking her task: 'It was ever the tendency of the last age to reject and deny everything that they did not understand; I hope it is the growing tendency of the present one to examine what we do not understand.'

Her scorn of orthodox religion is even greater. It has debased both the word and the thing spiritualism, to which it is obvious Mrs Crowe ascribes

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1 For Baudelaire's attitude to church and priests, see Lettres (Mercure de France), pp. 368, 369, 370, 380, 461, 487, Art Romantique (Lévy ed.), p. 420; for his attitude to Voltaire and libres penseurs, see Lettres (M.F.), pp. 376, 417, 482, 535; Art Romantique, p. 360; Curiosités Esthétiques, pp. 427, 434–5; Petits Poèmes en Prose, Les Dons des Fées, La Solitude; Journaux Intimes (Crès ed.), pp. 51, 62, 61, 64, 65, 66; Carnet de Belgique, p. 32; Œuvres Posthumes, p. 387, etc.

2 Cf. Baudelaire, Curiosités Esthétiques, ed. Lévy, p. 434: 'Les derniers travaux de quelques médecins, qui ont enfin entrevu la nécessité d'expliquer une foule de faits historiques et miraculeux autrement que par les moyens commodes de l'école voltaireenne, l'accuse de voir partout que l'habileté dans l'imposture, n'ont pas encore débrouillé tous les arcanes psychiques.'
a similarly theosophical meaning to that given to it by Baudelaire. Priestcraft of all denominations has overshadowed and obscured by various sectarian heresies the pure teaching of Jesus Christ as she presumes it to have been understood by the early Church. ‘Under dogmatic theology, religion seems to have withered away to the mere husk of spiritualism.’ In the spiritual world, however, there does not prevail the dogmatic theology ‘which makes so much of the misery of this,’ but rather the ‘pure worship of God, and the inexorable moral law.’ How akin her own attitude was to the priestcraft she denounces she might have realised, had she recalled Spinoza’s reply to a correspondent: ‘If you are disposed to put faith in these (ghosts), what reason have you for denying the miracles of the Holy Virgin and all the Saints, which have been recorded by so many famous philosophers, theologians and historians, that I could produce a hundred of these against barely one of those?’

It is this attempt to find the truth outside the bounds of orthodox dogma that leads Mrs Crowe to justify superstition in terms similar to those of Baudelaire following Joseph de Maistre. There exists a fundamental truth in all religions, since God has not circumscribed His revelation: ‘There can be no doubt that the heathen forms of worship and systems of religion were but the external symbols of some deep meanings and not the idle fables that they have been too frequently considered; and it is absurd to suppose that the theology which satisfied so many great minds, had no better foundation than a child’s fairy tale.’ Faith is the one great requisite: ‘He who cannot believe cannot will, and the scepticism of the intellect disables the magician.’ Such mysteries as she reports were ‘believed in because they existed; and they existed because they were believed in,’ a vicious circle which ought to have reminded the credulous lady of Cicero’s aut videt aut vidisse putat. ‘The word of God,’ she fervently continues, ‘is creative, and man is the child of God, made in His image; who never outgrows his childhood, and is most often a child when he thinks himself the wisest...and being a child his faculties are feeble in proportion; but, though limited in amount, they are divine in kind, and are latent in all of us; still shooting up here and there, to amaze and perplex the wise, and make merry the foolish, who have nearly all alike forgotten their origin and disowned their birthright.’

‘We are encompassed on all sides by wonders, and we can scarcely set foot upon the ground without trampling upon some marvellous production that our whole life and all our faculties would not suffice to comprehend...’

1 See *Art Romantique*, pp. 239, 320; *Journaux Intimes*, pp. 50, 52; *Carnet de Belgique*, p. 19.
the world is a miracle and life a dream of which we know neither the beginning nor the end. Mrs Crowe's contribution to the unravelling of this mystery is a series of chapters upon dreams, presentiments, trances, wraiths, doppelgängers, apparitions, troubled spirits, haunted houses, spectral lights, poltergeists, palingenesia, corpse-candles, second sight, stigmata, signatures, divining, amulets and kindred phenomena, crammed with quotations from her various authorities and bolstered up by many tales of hearsay from her own store. The chapters are very loosely constructed, the instances not rigorously classed or criticised, the repetitions frequent, and the whole is written in a deplorable style, packed with solemnisms and even faults of spelling. Her narrative runs on interminably with a careless inconsequence betraying the worst aspects of feminine laxity and vagueness, a plausible fondness for arguments ad ignorantiam, an unbounded naïveté rendered more amusing by an occasional simper and a Victorian sense of propriety best seen, perhaps, in the passage in which she sets aside possible pleasantry at the expense of ghosts appearing in coats and waistcoats: 'Now as a spirit, provided there be no special law to the contrary...must be where its thoughts and wishes are, just as we should be at the place we intently think of or desire, if our solid bodies did not impede us, so must our spirit appear as it is, or as it conceives of itself; morally it can only conceive of itself as it is, good or bad, light or dark; but it may conceive of itself clothed as well as unclothed...If it appears at all, in a recognisable form, it must come naked or clothed; the former, to say the least of it, would be much more frightful and shocking; and if it be clothed, I do not see what right we have to expect it shall be in a fancy costume, conformable to our ideas, which are no ideas at all, of the other world.'

In spite of these faults, it is possible to find in Mrs Crowe's work a body of ideas which either corresponded to, or were capable of prompting, certain notions held by Baudelaire or at least employed by him. Since Baudelaire's 'mysticism' derives from similar theosophical origins rather than from strictly orthodox sources, it is worth while to examine the possible points of contact with Mrs Crowe. And since Baudelaire's concern is less with specific details than with such general occult notions as were capable of nourishing his adopted attitudes and corroborating his experience, we shall confine ourselves to the broad outlines.

Mrs Crowe begins by accepting a tripartite division of man's ego—

1 Cf. Fleurs du Mal, Le Couvercle, Le Gouffre, etc.
2 For Baudelaire's remarks on some of these phenomena, see Journaux Intimes, pp. 14, 21, 24, 76, 98; Curiosités Esthétiques, pp. 434–5; Paradis Artificiels, ch. v.
spirit, soul, and body—since, according to St Paul, we possess both a natural body and a spiritual body. The spirit that dwells within us is the spirit of God, incorporated in us for a period for certain ends of His own, to be there wrought out. Further into the philosophical controversies involved she refuses to go, merely mentioning Hegel by the way. In this spirit so imparted dwells the conscience which "keeps watch over the body, saying, "Thus shalt thou do."' When the soul is degraded and debased, the voice of conscience is scarcely heard and the soul can no longer perform its function of discerning the true, the beautiful, the good. On the other hand, 'since we are placed by the spirit in immediate relation with God,' some faint gleams of the Divine attributes 'may, at times, shoot up through the clay in which the spirit has its temporary abode,' and, 'through the connexion which exists betwixt us and the spiritual world,' we may occasionally and under certain conditions become cognisant of and enter into more immediate relation with it. It is by the hypothesis of this universal sense, latent within us, that she seeks to explain 'those perceptions which are not comprised within the functions of our bodily organs.'

To 'facilitate this conception' she expounds a theory of reverberation that recalls Poe's *Eureka*: 'Action, once begun, never ceases—an impulse given is transmitted on for ever, a sound breathed reverberates in eternity, and thus the past is always present, although, for the purpose of fitting us for this mortal life, our ordinary senses are so constituted as to be unperceptive of these phenomena.' Similarly later, presenting Ennemoser's explanation of dreams, she states 'the great and universal law of polarity, which extends not only beyond the limits of this earth, but beyond the limits of this system, which must necessarily be in connexion with all others; so that there is thus an eternal and never-ceasing interaction of which, from the multiplicity and contrariety of the influences, we are insensible, just as we are insensible of the pressure of the atmosphere, from its impinging on us equally on all sides.' It is by means of the 'ether or force,' which she postulates as the instrument of this polarity, that 'a never-ceasing motion and intercommunication is sustained betwixt all created things and their Creator, who sustains them and creates them ever anew, by the constant exertion of His divine will, of which this is the messenger and the agent, as it is betwixt our will and our bodies; and without this sustaining will, so exerted, the whole

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1 'The connexion of the soul and the body is probably a much more intimate one than that of the latter with the spirit; though the soul, as well as the spirit, is immortal and survives when the body dies.'
world would fall away, dissolve and die, for it is the life of the universe. That all inanimate objects emit an influence, greater or less, extending beyond their own peripheries, is established by their effects on various susceptible individuals, as well as on somnambules; and thus there exists a universal polarity and rapport, which is, however, stronger betwixt certain organisms; and every being stands in a varying relation of positive and negative to every other."

Passing in review the various theories of dream-states given by her German authorities, she gives her preference to Ennemoser: "Dreaming also arises from the secret activity of the spirit in the innermost sensitive organs of the brain, busyng the fancy with subjective images, the objective consciousness of day-life giving place to the creative dominion of the poetical genius, to which night becomes day, and universal nature its theatre of action; and thus the supersensuous or transcendent nature of the spirit becomes more manifest in dreaming than in the waking state." Or in her own words: "the more it (the spirit) is disentangled from the obstructions of the body, the more clear will be its perceptions...in the profound natural sleep of the sensuous organs we may be in a state of clear-seeing." Being then "released from the trammels—the dark chamber of the flesh," the soul enjoys a temporary equality (with disembodied spirits); in sleep "it is free to see and know, and to communicate with spirit." Among the instances which she cites to be explained by this theory are cases of artistic composition, which recall the statement made by Coleridge of the origin of Kubla Khan.

This question of dreams leads her to that of the Fall, which she interprets, as did Baudelaire, in a more esoteric sense than orthodox theology. "It has been the opinion of many philosophers, that, in the original state of man, as he came forth from the hands of his Creator, that knowledge which is now acquired by pains and labour was intuitive...his soul was a mirror of the universe, in which everything was reflected, and, probably, is so still, but that the spirit is no longer in a condition to perceive it." Man has lost the faculty of spiritual seeing, at least in his waking hours. But, though a dweller in the earth and fallen, some traces of his divine descent and of his unbroken connexion with a higher order of being still remain to comfort and encourage him. In sleep the spirit may enjoy somewhat of its original privilege, and "the soul, which is designed as the

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1 She proceeds to give an instance from her own experience of that sense of previous existence expressed by Baudelaire in La Vie Antérieure.

2 For Baudelaire on sleep and dreams, see Lettres (M.F.), pp. 86, 374; Art Romantique, pp. 429-4; Paradis Artificiels, ch. iii, and dedication; Petits Poèmes en Prose, L'Invitation au Voyage, and Nadar's account in Baudelaire Intime.
mirror of a superior spiritual order, still receives in dreams some rays from above, and enjoys a foretaste of its future condition.

Such a conception naturally involves a philosophy of correspondences which Mrs Crowe does not fail to state explicitly: 'The whole of nature is one large book of symbols, which, because we have lost the key to it, we cannot decipher.' Oberlin, the good pastor of Ban de la Roche, 'who fancied he had acquired the art of interpreting these symbols,' asserted that everything earthly had its counterpart, or antitype, in the other world, not only organized but unorganized matter. If so, do we sometimes see these antitypes? If we believe, Mrs Crowe continues, that this symbolical language of dreams 'prevailed in the early ages of the world, before the external and intellectual life had predominated over the instinctive and emotional,' we must conclude it to be 'the natural language of man, who must, therefore, have been gifted with a conformable faculty of comprehending these hieroglyphics.' There can be no doubt, she thinks, that some occasional gleams of this original endowment may still be found. The passage which she quotes from Schubert will easily be seen to foreshadow the theory of poetry which Baudelaire enunciated with the help of Poe. 'This symbolical language, which the Deity appears to have used (witness Peter's dream, Acts xi and others) in all His revelations to man, is in the highest degree what poetry is in a lower, and the language of dreams in the lowest, namely, the original natural language of man, and we may fairly ask whether this language, which here plays an inferior part, be not possibly the proper language of a higher sphere, whilst we who vainly think ourselves awake, are in reality buried in a deep, deep sleep, in which, like dreamers who imperfectly hear the voices of those around them, we occasionally apprehend, though obscurely, a few words of this Divine tongue.' 'How slow and ineffective,' echoes Mrs Crowe, 'is human speech, compared to this spiritual picture language, where a whole history is understood at a glance and scenes, that seem to occupy days and weeks, are acted out in ten minutes.' We shall have more to say of this important theme later.\footnote{See Baudelaire, Fleurs du Mal, Elévation, Correspondances, Tout Entière, L'Irrémédiable, etc.; Petits Poèmes en Prose, L'Invitation au Voyage; Paradis Artificiels, ch. iv; Lettres (M.F.), p. 83.}

Mrs Crowe adds her authority to that of Swedenborg for the belief Baudelaire occasionally expresses\footnote{Curiosités Esthétiques (ed. Lévy), p. 211; Petits Poèmes en Prose, Chambre Double; Lettres (M.F.), p. 286.} in a rising and descending hierarchy of existences: 'There is a continued series from the lowest to the highest; and what right have we to conclude that we are the last link of the chain?'
Baudelaire and Catherine Crowe

Why may there not be a gamut of beings? The number of instances recorded of events foreseen, ‘corroborated by the universal agreement of all somnambulists of a higher order,’ induces her to adopt ‘with a considerable section of the German psychologists’ the more ‘spiritual’ theory of the doctrine of guardian spirits. We may recall that Baudelaire adopts the same belief, or at least employs it as a poetical convention (particularly in Fleurs du Mal, Le Rebelle and Petits Poèmes en Prose, Assommons les Pauvres).

Like Baudelaire Mrs Crowe finds an explanation of certain impulses in this unseen prompting, whether angelic or diabolic. ‘They (German physicians) look upon possession as a demono-magnetic state, in which the patient is in rapport with mischievous or evil spirits, as in the Agatho (or good) magnetic state, which is the opposite pole, he is in rapport with good ones.’ Nobody, she affirms in words suggestive of Baudelaire1, ‘can honestly look back upon his past life without feeling perplexed by the question, of how far he was, or was not able, at the moment, to resist certain impulsions, which caused him to commit wrong or imprudent actions.’ She acknowledges that such spiritual prompting may be destructive of freewill. If these communications were the rule and not the exception, ‘the whole economy of this earthly life would be overturned, and its affairs must necessarily be conducted in a totally different manner than that which prevails at present. What the effects of such an arrangement of nature would be, had it pleased God to make it, He alone knows; but certain it is that man’s freedom, as a moral agent, would be in a great degree abrogated, were the barriers that impede our intercourse with the spiritual world removed.’ But she attempts no solution of this dilemma, any more than the Baudelaire who flaunted a more than Manichean sense of damnation and a diabolical explanation of perversity contemporaneously with the most stoical assertion of moral dandysme. So she reverts to her belief in the possibility of ‘there existing conditions which, by diminishing the obstructions, render this communication practicable within certain limits,’ a possibility confirmed in her mind by ‘authentic instances of presentiments and warnings that with difficulty admit of any other explanation.’ Among these instances she cites the story of Dante’s missing cantos and his son Pietro’s dream: ‘If it be true that the dead do sometimes return to solve our perplexities, here was not an unworthy occasion for the exercise of such a power. We can imagine the spirit of the great poet still clinging to the memory of his august work, immortal as himself—the record of those high thoughts which can never die,’ and

1 More particularly in the letter to Flaubert, June 26th, 1860.
the case of a certain visitor of Wordsworth’s who, having been saved from
poisoning himself by a presentiment, quoted the following lines from
Laodamia as significant of his experience:

The invisible world with thee has sympathised;
Be thy affections raised and solemnised.

As we have already hinted, Mrs Crowe explains apparitions by the
existence of a spiritual body, ‘the astral spirit of the mystics, the nerve
spirit of the clear-seers’; in this body, which we are to retain throughout
eternity, ‘consists our fundamental life.’ ‘While persons are in trance,
or deep sleep, or comatose, this ethereal body can be detached and
appear elsewhere…this ethereal body must be indestructible and survive
the death of the material one…it may…not only become visible to us
under given circumstances, but may also produce effects bearing some
similarity to those it was formerly capable of…It is to be observed that
this idea of a spiritual body is one that pervaded all Christendom in the
earlier and purer ages of Christianity.’ This nerve-spirit ‘which seems to
be an embodiment of, or, rather, a body constructed out of the nervous
fluid or ether—in short, the spiritual body of St Paul—is the bond of
union betwixt the body and the soul or spirit; and has a plastic force to
raise up an aerial form. Being the highest organic power, it cannot by
any other, physical or chemical, be destroyed; and when the body is cast
off, it follows the soul; and as, during life, it is the means by which the
soul acts upon the body, and is thus enabled to communicate with the
external world, so, when the spirit is disembodied, it is through this nerve-
spirit, that it can make itself visible, and even exercise mechanical
powers.’ Whether he believed it or not, Baudelaire, in poems like
Le Revenant, employs this belief in apparitions.

Similarly Mrs Crowe’s remarks upon the persistence of form or essence
after death, even in plants, are similar to the conceptions underlying
poems like La Charogne and Le Flacon: ‘Gaffarillus, in a book entitled
Curiosités Inouies, published in 1650, observes that, since in many
instances the plants used for these purposes (talismans and signatures)
were reduced to ashes, and no longer retained their form, their efficacy
which depended on their figure should inevitably be destroyed; but this,
he says, is not the case, since, by an admirable potency existing in nature,
the form, though invisible, is still retained in the ashes.’ From this we
are to deduce ‘that when a body dies its figure still resides in its ashes,’
that, in the words of Oetinger, ‘the earthly husk remains in the retort,
while the volatile essence ascends like a spirit, perfect in form, but void
of substance.’ Mrs Crowe gives an amusing instance of the parallelism of this process: ‘a man whereby the essence of things may retain the form of the substance: ‘As the form of plants can be preserved after the substance is destroyed, so can that of man be either preserved or reproduced from the elements of his body. In the reign of Louis XIV, three alchemists having distilled some earth taken from the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris, were forced to desist by seeing the forms of men appearing in their vials.’

But there is a second hypothesis invented to explain apparitions which she does not entirely discountenance: ‘that there is no outstanding shape at all, but that the will of the spirit, acting on the constructive imagination of the seer, enables him to conceive the form, as the spirit itself conceives of it.’ This term ‘constructive imagination’ she frequently employs in this context, and it was upon it and her explanation of it that Baudelaire seized. It is unlikely that he was reading the book for the first time at that date. It is much more likely that his thought was a more or less unconscious reminiscence of Mrs Crowe’s words. Baudelaire opens the fourth chapter of his Salon de 1859 (Le Gouvernement de l’Imagination) thus: ‘Hier soir, après vous avoir envoyé les dernières pages de ma lettre, où j’avais écrit, mais non sans une certaine timidité: Comme l’imagination a créée le monde, elle le gouverne, je feuilletais la Face Nocturne de la Nature et je tombai sur ces lignes, que je cite uniquement parce qu’elles sont la paraphrase justificative de la ligne qui m’inquiétait.’ The passage Baudelaire quotes occurs in the ninth chapter, entitled Apparitions, p. 199. It follows upon the narration of the famous case of Lord Littleton which Dr Johnson (who had it from Lord Westcote) said was the most extraordinary thing that had happened in his day. The authoress thinks it desirable to ascertain whether such wraiths are seen before death occurs or after it, since ‘the argument advanced by those who believe that the dead are never seen, is that it is the strong will and desire of the expiring person which enable him so to act on the nervous system of his distant friend, that the imagination of the latter projects the form, and sees it as if objectively.’ Then, in explanation, comes Baudelaire’s passage: ‘By imagination, I do not simply mean to convey the common notion implied by that much abused word, which is only fancy (Baudelaire translates fantaisie), but the constructive imagination, which is a much higher function and which, inasmuch as man is made in the likeness of God, bears a distant relation to that sublime power by

\[1\] See also Fleurs du Mal, Un Fantôme, L’Irremédiable, Une Martyre, and Journaux Intimes, p. 3.
which the Creator projects, creates and upholds the universe.\footnote{Cf. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 13: 'The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.' Coleridge makes the same distinction between Imagination and Fancy. Are we to conclude that Baudelaire had not read Coleridge's account?}

"Je ne suis pas du tout honteux," avows Baudelaire, "mais au contraire très heureux de m’être rencontré avec cette excellente Mme Crowe, de qui j’ai toujours admiré et envié la faculté de croire, aussi développé en elle que chez les autres la déflance." In spite of Baudelaire's air of complete detachment and the notable discrepancy between his caution and her credulity, it is difficult to believe that, considering the fund of ideas held by them in common, this quotation is merely the result of a fortuitous encounter. Baudelaire's whole conception of the rôle of the imagination and the nature and origin of pure poetry is bound up with notions similar to those we have illustrated from *The Night Side of Nature*, and which he had no doubt ample time and opportunity to absorb between 1848, the date of Mrs Crowe's book, and 1859. It is true, of course, that the roots of these ideas are to be found much earlier than 1848, but it must be remembered also that the influence of Poe is barely, if at all, in the main anterior to this date of 1848.

Mrs Crowe's belief in the purely moral connotations of heaven and hell\footnote{In Mrs Crowe's opinion the purifying besson that rid the Protestant church of the idea of purgatory took 'too discursive a sweep.' In order to explain the appearances of wandering spirits that cling to the earth where their affections are, she has need of a middle state, Hades, a more populated region mid-way between Tartarus and Elysium. She endorses the words of Saint-Martin: 'Je ne crois pas aux revenants, mais je crois aux restants.' Death-bed repentance she considers a 'pernicious error,' and repudiates the notion that 'a few parting prayers can purify a soul sullied by years of wickedness.' In this middle state on which all souls enter, a state in which there are 'many mansions,' souls who have died in a negative condition, neither thoroughly black nor thoroughly white, may receive more light and make a 'progressive advance.'} manages, as does Baudelaire's, to live peaceably with her faith in materialisation. It is, she says, 'a vulgar notion to affirm that Heaven and Hell are places; they are states; and it is in ourselves that we must look for both.' God does not punish us, we punish ourselves: 'we have built up a heaven or a hell to our own liking, and we carry it about with us. The fire that for ever burns without consuming is the fiery evil in which we have chosen our part; and the heaven in which we shall dwell will be the heavenly peace which will dwell in us. We are our own judges and our own chastisers.' The true nature of the soul, whether good or evil, whether of darkness or of light, may be hidden in life; with death it is surely and fatally revealed. 'This earthly body we inhabit is more or less a mask, by means of which we conceal from each other those thoughts which, if constantly exposed, would unfit us for living in community; but
when we die, this mask falls away and the truth shows nakedly. There is no more disguise; we appear as we are, spirits of light or spirits of darkness. The instant the soul is freed from the body, it sees its whole earthly career in a single sign; 'it knows that it is good or evil, and pronounces its own sentence.' The moral law which thus operated, if in secret, in life and which has thus been clearly manifested in death persists in the spiritual world. 'There is one thing of which we may rest perfectly assured, namely, that let the fault of an impure, or vicious, or merely sensuous life, lie where it will—whether it be the wicked spirit within, or the ill-organised body without, or a tertium quid of both combined—still, the soul that has been a party to this earthly career must be soiled and deteriorated by this familiarity with evil; and there seems much reason to believe that the dissolution of the connexion between the soul and the body produces far less change in the former than has commonly been supposed.' I have indicated the development of these ideas at some length, because they lead to or support the formulation of a belief in Pythagorean transmigration such as Baudelaire once or twice proclaimed. Speaking of such appearances of animal forms as occur in Kerner's Seeress of Preuërst, Mrs Crowe declares: 'Spirits of darkness...cannot appear as spirits of light. On one occasion, when Frederica Hauffe asked a spirit if he could appear in what form he pleased, he answered, No; that if he had lived as a brute, he should appear as a brute; "as our dispositions are, so we appear to you."' And elsewhere, of a certain German case quoted by her: 'The apparitions of the dog and the lambs also...are by no means isolated cases. These appearances seem to be symbolical; the father had been evil, and had led the son to do evil and he appeared in the degraded form of a dog; and the innocence of the children, who had been, probably, in some way wronged, was symbolised by their appearing as lambs.' In her championship of such seemingly recondite notions, she has no difficulty in getting inside the orthodox guard: 'These symbolical transfigurations cannot appear very extravagant to those who accept the belief of many theologians, that the serpent of the Garden of Eden was an evil spirit incarnated in that degraded form.'

The aspects of Mrs Crowe's work which we have indicated up to the present have concerned manifestations after death. But her remarks upon the spiritual activities of the living are equally, if not more interesting from the point of view of Baudelaire. In the first place she puts the usual stress of her kind upon a certain dangerous conception of the nature of will. Will is regarded by such theosophical writers as a force, an entity

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1 See particularly Journaux Intimes, p. 25.
that appears to have an absolute, an almost magical existence, the substantial fluid of Raphael's *Théorie de la Volonté* in Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*. Spirit, says Mrs Crowe, can work magically, that is, 'by the mere act of will, for by the mere act of will all things were created, and by its consistent exertion all things are sustained—why should we be astonished that we, who partake of the divine nature, and were created after God's own image, should also, within certain limits, partake of this magical power?... What are the limits of these powers possessed by us whilst in the flesh, how far they may be developed, and whether, at the extreme verge of what we can effect, we begin to be aided by God or by spirits of other spheres of existence bordering on ours we know not.' Although he does not state such a position explicitly and was apparently unconscious of the implications of his own attitudes, Baudelaire's references to will have some esoteric connotation which reveals the subtle effects of this type of reading. When these references, more particularly in the letters, are closely examined it is seen that in the earlier part of his life, at least, Baudelaire suffers from a reliance upon the direct and unconditioned expression of will, a misconception of its absolute nature, by virtue of which will is almost personified into a force without close dependence upon the everyday details of moral life. It is only in the last years that he begins to realise that will is but the sum of certain moral habits and directions which imply a stricter supervision of activities, the importance of which he had deliberately misconstrued or neglected.

Mrs Crowe's remarks upon temporary ekstasis, the freedom of the spirit under certain bodily conditions, coincide with Baudelaire's experiences as given in such instances as *Chambre Double*. 'In certain conditions of the body, the spirit, in a manner unknown to us, resumes a portion of its freedom, and is enabled to exercise more or less of its inherent properties. It is somewhat released from those inexorable conditions of time and space, which bound and limit its powers whilst in close connexion with matter, and it communes with other spirits who are also liberated.' One of her passages in this context reveals the relationship, visible in Balzac and Baudelaire, of this conception of ecstasy to the magnetism of the day rather than to the writings and experience of the mystics proper: 'Dr Ennemoser says, that as in natural somnambulism

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1 See particularly a dispute with Poulet-Malassis on this topic, *Lettres (M.F.),* p. 244. Compare also several passages of Poe who seems to have drawn the idea from Robert Fludd: 'When man was made in the Divine likeness he was able to effect all things by his mere beck or will, but his magical power now sleeps in him because of the Fall' (*Moysticall Philosophy*).

2 Cf. also *Paradis Artificiels, ch. 1; Petite Poèmes en Prose, Le Gâteau and Fleurs du Mal, Rêve Parisien,* etc.
there is a partial internal vigilance, so does the seer fall, whilst awake, into a dream-state. He suddenly becomes stiff: his eyes are open and his senses are, whilst the vision lasts, imperceptive of all external objects.' The German psychologists whom Mrs Crowe follows believe, 'as did Socrates and Plato, and others of the ancients, that in certain conditions of the body, which conditions may arise naturally, or be produced artificially, the links which unite it with the spirit may be more or less loosened; and that the latter may thus be temporarily disjoined from the former, and so enjoy a foretaste of its future destiny. In the lowest or first degree of this disunion, we are awake, though scarcely conscious, whilst the imagination is vivified to an extraordinary amount, and our fancy supplies images almost as lively as the realities. This, probably, is the temporary condition of inspired poets and eminent discoverers.'

We have already mentioned Mrs Crowe's contribution to, or presentation of, the theory of correspondences, and the kinship of her comparison of the operations of artistic genius to spiritual revelation with the conception of the artist held by Poe and Baudelaire. In connexion with the spiritual ecstasy which we have discussed, Mrs Crowe affirms more explicitly this idea of genius: 'All genius is a degree of ecstasy or clear-seeing.' It is only necessary, she adds, to read Mozart's account of his own moments of inspiration 'to comprehend, not only the similarity but the positive identity of the ecstatic state with the state of genius in activity.' The words of Mozart which she quotes run thus: 'When all goes well with me, when I am in a carriage or walking, or when I cannot sleep at night, the thoughts come streaming in upon me most fluently. Whence or how is more than I can tell. What comes I hum to myself, as it proceeds...then follows the counterpoint and the clang of the different instruments, and if I am not disturbed, my soul is fixed, and the thing grows greater and broader and clearer; and I have it all in my head, even when the piece is a long one, and I see it like a beautiful picture, not hearing the different parts in succession as they must be played, but the whole at once. That is the delight! The composing and the making is like a beautiful and vivid dream, but this hearing of it is best of all.' What is this, she asks, but clear-seeing, backwards and forwards, the past and the future? She passes on from this to express an idea developed also by Baudelaire in Le Vin du Chiffonnier: 'These coruscations belong not to genius exclusively; they are latent in all men. In the highly gifted, this

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1 Compare, along with the references given in connexion with the idea of correspondences: Curiosités Esthétiques, pp. 10, 93, 243, 265, 266, 270, 289; Art Romantique, pp. 167, 173, 211, 215, 219, 222–4, 315.
divine spark becomes a flame to light the world withal; but, even in the coarsest and least developed organisations, it may and does momentarily break forth. The germ of the highest spiritual life is in the rudest, according to its degree, as well as in the highest form of man we have yet seen; he is but a more imperfect type of the race, in whom this spiritual germ has not unfolded itself.\(^1\)

Mrs Crowe’s contribution to Baudelaire’s *Paradis Artificialis* is obvious. This central sense of ecstasy is a condition ‘which may be produced by various causes, as excess of excitement, great elevation of the spirit, as we see in the ecstacies\(^2\) and the martyrs, or over-irritation, producing consequent exhaustion; and also artificially, by certain narcotics and other influences.’ The Dervishes, by an intense contemplation, ‘produce a state of ecstasy, in which they pretend to be transported to other spheres.’ The magicians and soothsayers of the northern countries, she reports, ‘by narcotics and other means, produce a cataleptic state of the body resembling death, when their prophetic faculty is to be exercised;...it is past a doubt that a state of clear-seeing is thus produced.’ She describes the Laplanders, the African magicians and the Schaamans of Siberia who, by taking narcotics and turning round until they fall down in a state of insensibility, become ‘clear-seers, and besides vaticinating, describe scenes, places and persons they have never beheld,’ and Druidical priestesses ‘who gave forth oracles and prophecies, much after the manner of the Pythonesses of the Grecian Temples, and, no doubt, drawing their inspiration from the same sources, namely, from the influences of magnetism, and from narcotics.’ The excitement of the brain, she declares, giving an instance that had lately come to her hearing, ‘caused by intoxication, has occasionally produced a very remarkable exaltation of certain faculties. It is by means of either intoxicating draughts or vapours that the soothsayers...place themselves in a condition to vaticinate: and we have every reason to believe that drugs, producing similar effects, were resorted to by the thaumaturgists of old and by the witches of later days.’ Relating the experience of a doctor who, in 1545, anointed a patient with an unguent found in the house of a sorcerer, she states: ‘The patient slept for thirty-six hours consecutively,'

\(^1\) See also *Paradis Artificialis*, ch. i; *Du Vin et du Haschisch*, ch. ii.

\(^2\) Mrs Crowe expresses some reserves in her identification of mysticism and clairvoyance: ‘I am far from using the term *mystics* in the opprobrious, or at least contemptuous tone in which it has of late years been uttered in this country, for although abounding in errors, as regarded the concrete, and although their want of an inductive methodology led them constantly astray in the region of the real, they were sublime teachers in that of the ideal; and they seem to have been endowed with a wonderful insight into this veiled department of our nature.'
and when, with difficulty, she was awakened, she complained that he had torn her from the most ravishing delights; delights which seem to have rivalled the heaven of the Mahometan. According to the Llorente, the women who were dedicated to the service of the Mother of the Gods, heard continually the sounds of flutes and tambourines, beheld the joyous dances of the fauns and satyrs, and tasted of intoxicating pleasures, doubtless from a similar cause.'

But like Baudelaire in that, for him, unctuous peroration of the fifth chapter of Paradies Artificiels, she feels the need to utter a warning. In her conclusion, after a long paragraph on the Kabbalah, she throws her stress upon virtue: ‘If a man therefore sets his desires on what is godly, in proportion as his efforts are not selfish, but purely a seeking of holiness, he will be endowed by the free grace of God with supernatural faculties, and it is the highest aim of existence, that man should regain his connexion with his inward, original source and exalt the material and earthly into the spiritual.’ She ends by carefully repudiating the cultivation of artificial paradises: ‘I am very far from meaning to imply, that it is our duty, or in any way desirable, that we should seek to bring ourselves into this state of holy ecstasy; which seems to involve some derangement of the normal relations betwixt the soul and body; but it is at least unwise in us to laugh at or deny it or its proximate conditions, where they really exist. It appears perfectly clear, that, as by giving ourselves wholly to our external and sensuous life, we dim and obscure the spirit of God that is in us, so by annihilating, as far as in us lies, the necessities of the body, we may so far subdue the flesh as to loosen the bonds of the spirit, and enable it to manifest some of its inherent endowments. Ascetics and saints have frequently done this voluntarily, and disease, or a peculiar constitution, sometimes does it for us involuntarily. It is far from desirable that we should seek to produce such a state by either means, but it is extremely desirable that we should avail ourselves of the instruction to be gained by the simple knowledge that such phenomena have existed and been observed in all ages; and that thereby our connexion with the spiritual world may become a demonstrated fact to all who choose to open their eyes to it.’

Eleven years later Mrs Crowe attempted what she no doubt regarded, although Richard Garnett considered it to have ‘slight reference to the nominal subject,’ as a more philosophical defence of the outlook suggested by the various phenomena she had marshalled in The Night Side of Nature. In Spiritualism and the Age we live in (1859), she attempts to reconcile a somewhat doubtful orthodoxy with the promptings of her spiritualistic
faith. She begins by parrying the possible suggestion that Scripture offers enough indication for our attitude towards the spiritual world: ‘We have no reason to think that on any subject whatever God’s revelations have, or will ever cease (sic) as long as the human race inhabits the earth, or that revelations supplementary to the Scriptures, and tending to their true interpretation, in regard to which men are still at issue, may not be vouchsafed.’ Without enquiring very closely into the meaning of materialism, she denies the power of mere flesh to accomplish the act of thought, urges our ignorance of causes, and defends heterodoxy on the plea that ‘not to think freely is to abjure God’s chiepest gift.’ Truth, she argues with a disarming naïveté, is of God and its discovery consequently harmless. Although at times inclined to an idea of progress, she here asserts boldly that we have not advanced one step in spiritual knowledge. Organised religion is rather a stumbling-block than a help: ‘Religion is, in fact, rather an engine of government and a reinforcement to the police than a saving health to men’s souls.’

Orthodoxy she deserts with an airy belief in her powers of discrimination: ‘Whatever appears to us credible, we cannot help believing to a certain extent; and what appears to us incredible, we cannot help disbelieving or doubting.’ Religion being a geographical accident exercising little moral influence on mankind in general, she must look to ‘more knowledge’ for really helpful truth. Truth there must be somewhere, truth that will both help us to ‘overcome the great moral evils that beset us’ and indicate our origin and destiny, ‘whereby we shall be forced, not only verbally to admit, but scientifically to know that we are the offspring of the Divine.’ It is obvious that such truth has not, so she thinks, been found in Scripture, ‘since religious differences, if less bitter, are as rife as ever.’ Instead of appealing to the churches, we must let God himself tell it to us ‘after his own manner.’ It is only the interest of the church that is responsible for our presumption that God’s revelations have ceased. Authority she thus repudiates: ‘Every man is a temple to himself...the salvation of his soul is an affair between him and God alone.’

She proceeds in the sequel to assert the continued existence of miracles by which we are daily surrounded and to discuss their nature in general. She defines a miracle as being an effect without a discernible cause. Examining spirit-rapping and table-turning, more particularly with regard to the exploits of the American Mrs Hayden, she explains these phenomena in the manner of her day by a possible ‘electricity’ latent in the body, and proceeds, with a genuinely British concern, to urge that this force ‘be applied to pulling trains and understood by England before
other countries take it out of our hands.' Undisturbed by any thought that, unless something more serious than table-rapping and kindred phenomena is in question, her specious argument for the safeguarding of God's truth is ludicrously disproportionate to its subject, she goes on to urge that the manifestations of spirits—she refuses to think them wicked—are God's device for reclaiming a sceptical generation: 'If we do not choose to give ear, we may either suffer a great evil or escape a great good.' She inclines to think it will be the latter. An instance chosen among the phenomena witnessed by herself will indicate the extent of her faith, that faith which, as we have seen, even Baudelaire could not completely imitate: 'I have also held a guitar in my hand which was made to produce sound; chords were struck; and being desired by the invisible Intelligence to sing, I was regularly accompanied through several songs.'

Undeterred she plunges into the theology of the Fall imposed upon her by her conception of our spiritual nature. 'If we are spirits, we must be suffering some degradation, because our intelligence, which is limited by the periphery of these bodies, is far short of what spirit incarnated must enjoy.' This limitation is the source and origin of all evil. The story of Eve and the apple she regards as not only foolish but blasphemous: 'the belief that mankind have ever since been suffering untold evils in consequence of this peccadillo of Eve's, is too childish for any rational creature to entertain.' The whole story is an allegory with Eve—and here her notion is to be compared with the general theory of Paradis Artificialis—as the type of 'an unholy desire for things unattainable in this life,' and Adam as that of 'honest and persevering industry, that is content to work for what he wishes to enjoy.' For this presumption men have been punished, but now, 'the period having arrived when not only the memory but the desire for spiritual communication is wholly extinguished, we may look for a gradual restoration or reinstatement.'

In conclusion she turns to the scientists. Table-rapping is akin to gravitation. If Sir Isaac Newton be among those departed who 'overlook our doings here,' 'I really think he must be amazed at our obtuseness and incapacity for observation.' In spite of the apparent resolution of men of science not to believe in the operations of spirits, we have the right to ask them to investigate: 'If it should be, as I believe, namely, that God is offering us an open door to the recovery of our birthright, what weight of

1 Cf. Baudelaire, Paradis Artificialis, ch. v: 'Ces infortunés...qui ont refusé la rédemption par le travail, demandent à la noire magie les moyens de s'élever, d'un seul coup, à l'existence surnaturelle.'
responsibility must be theirs who not only refuse to enter themselves, but forbid the souls committed to their charge to do likewise? What indeed! If her soul now keeps its company with Sir Isaac, may we not imagine it casting a smile of triumphant approval on the words and works of Sir Oliver?

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