

In a big city, on the boulevards, early. The raising of jealousies and marquees, sprinkled slabs of sidewalk, echo of steps, the spotted bark of trees. My twentieth century was beginning and they walked, men and women; it is now close to its end and they walk, not exactly the same but pattering the same way with shoes and high-heeled slippers. The impenetrable order of a division into the male and female sex, into old and young, without decrease, always here, instead of those who once lived. And I, breathing the air, enchanted because I am one of them, identifying my flesh with their flesh, but at the same time aware of beings who might not have perished. I, replacing them, bearing a different name yet their own because the five senses are ours in common, I am walking here, now, before I am replaced in my turn. We are untouched by death and time, children, myself with Eve, in a kindergarden, in a sandbox, in a bed, embracing each other, making love, saying the words of eternal avowals and eternal delights. The space wide open, glittering machines up above, the rumble of the *métro* below. And our dresses under heaven, tinfoil crowns, tights, imitation animal hair, the scales of lizard-birds. To absorb with your eyes the inside of a flower shop, to hear the voices of people, to feel on your tongue the taste of just-drunk coffee. Passing by the windows of apartments, I invent stories, similar to my own, a lifted elbow, the combing of hair before a mirror. I multiplied myself and came to inhabit every one of them separately, thus my impermanence has no power over me.

INSCRIPT

"And he sets off! and he watches the river of vitality flowing, so majestic and so brilliant. He admires the eternal beauty and astonishing harmony of life in the capitals, harmony so providentially maintained in the

turmoil of human freedom. He contemplates the landscapes of big cities, landscapes caressed by mists or struck by the sun. He delights in beautiful carriages, proud horses, the spic-and-span cleanliness of grooms, the dexterity of footmen, the beauty of undulating women, in pretty children happy to be alive and well dressed; to put it briefly, in universal life. If a fashion, the cut of dresses changes slightly, if knotted ribbons or buckles are dethroned by a cockade, if the bonnet grows larger and the chignon descends to the nape of the neck, if the waistline goes up and the skirt is simplified, do not doubt that *his eagle's eye* even at a great distance will take notice. A regiment is passing, perhaps on its way to the end of the world, throwing into the air its enticing flourish, light as hope: and already Mr. G. saw, examined, analyzed the arms, the gait, and the physiognomy of that unit. Shoulder-belts, sparklings, music, resolute looks, heavy and ponderous moustaches, all that penetrates him pell-mell; and in a few minutes a poem which results from it will be composed. And already his soul lives with the life of that regiment which is marching as one animal, a proud image of joy in obedience!

"But evening comes. It is the bizarre and ambiguous hour when the curtains of the sky are drawn, when the cities light up. The gas makes a spot on the crimson of the sunset. Honest or dishonest, reasonable or crazy, people say to themselves: 'At last the day is over!' Wise men and rascals think of pleasure and everybody runs to a chosen place to drink the cup of oblivion. Mr. G. will remain to the last wherever the light still glows, poetry resounds, life teems, music vibrates; wherever a passion can pose for his eye, wherever the natural man and the man of convention show themselves in a strange beauty, wherever the sun witnesses the hurried pleasures of a *depraved animal*."

—CHARLES BAUDELAIRE,
"Constantin Guys, Painter of Modern Life"