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## IN OTHER WORDS

# Extracts from *Selected Letters...*, by Charles Baudelaire

Selected by Femi Oyebo

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867) was an important French poet whose *Flowers of Evil*, published in 1857, brought urban themes such as prostitution into the realm of poetry as suitable subjects for poetic treatment. These extracts are from *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude* (translated and edited by Rosemary Lloyd), University of Chicago Press, 1986. ©1986, The University of Chicago Press.

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*Extract from 'To Narcisse Ancelle, 30 June 1845'*

I am killing myself without any sense of *sorrow*. I feel none of the agitation that men call *sorrow*. My debts have never been a cause of *sorrow*. It's perfectly simple to rise above such matters. I'm killing myself because I can no longer go on living, because the weariness of falling asleep and the weariness of waking up have become unbearable to me. I'm killing myself because I believe I'm of no use to others – and because I'm a *danger to myself*. I'm *killing* myself because I believe I'm immortal and because I *hope*. At the time of writing these lines I am so lucid that I'm still copying out a few notes for M. Théodore de Banville and have the necessary strength to busy myself with my manuscripts.

I give and bestow all I possess to Mlle Lemer, including my little stock of furniture and my portrait – because she's the only creature who offers me solace. Can anyone blame me for wanting to repay her for the rare pleasures I've enjoyed in this horrendous world?

I do not know my brother very well – he has neither lived *in me* nor *with me* – he has no need of me.

My mother, who has so frequently and always unwittingly poisoned my life, has no need of money either. – She has her *husband*; she has a *human being*, some one who provides her with affection and *friendship*.

I have no one but Jeanne Lemer. It's only in her that I've found rest and I *will* not, *can* not bear the thought that people want to strip her of what I'm giving her, on the pretext that my mind is wandering. You've heard me talking to you these last few days. Was I mad?

*Extract from 'To Caroline Aupick, 31 December 1863'*

All I'm going to do or all I hope to do this year (1864) I should and could have done in the year just passed. But I'm attacked by a frightful illness, which has never played such havoc with me as in this year – I mean my reveries, my depression, my discouragement, my indecision. Truly, I consider the man who succeeds in healing himself of a vice as infinitely braver than a soldier or a man who defends his honor in a duel. But how to heal myself? How transform despair into hope, weakness into willpower? Is this illness imaginary or real? Has it become real after being imaginary? Could it be the result of a physical weakness, or an incurable melancholy resulting from so many stormy years, years spent without consolation, in solitude and wretchedness? I've no idea, but what I do know is that I feel utterly disgusted with everything and particularly with all kinds of pleasure (that's no bad thing) and that the only feeling that convinces me I'm still alive is a *vague* desire for celebrity, vengeance, and fortune.