

THE CLOCK

By Charles Baudelaire

Translated from the French by Aleister Crowley

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The Chinese can tell the time by looking in the eyes of a cat.

One day a missionary, while walking in the suburbs of Nankin, found that he had forgotten his watch, and asked a little boy what the time was. The gutter-snipe of the Flowery Kingdom hesitated at first, then, recollecting himself, he replied, "I will find out for you." A minute later he reappeared, holding in his arms a fine big cat, and looking, as the saying is, in the white of its eyes, he unhesitatingly affirmed, "It is just a little before noon" This turned out to be the case.

As to me, if I bend over towards my beautiful Feline, so well named, who is at once the glory of her sex, the pride of my heart, and the incense of my spirit, whether it be night, or whether it be day, in broad daylight or thick darkness, in the abyss of her adorable eyes I always read the hour most clearly. This hour is always the same; vast, solemn, wide as space, without division into minutes or seconds; a motionless hour which is not marked on clocks, and yet is light as a sigh, swift as a glance. And if some importunate person were to come and disturb me while my gaze rests on this delicious dial, if some false and intolerant spirit, some demon of unlucky accident, were to come and say to me, "What are you looking at with such intensity? What do you seek in the eyes of this being? Do you see there the time? Ah, spendthrift and do-nothing mortal!" I should reply unhesitatingly "Yes, I see the time; it is eternity."

Now, Madam, is not that a really meritorious madrigal, and as pompous as yourself? In good sooth, I have taken so much pleasure in embroidering this pretentious piece of gallantry that I shall ask you for nothing in return.