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## Desire as a Framework for Adaptation: Examining Aku No Hana as an Unconventional Adaptation of Les Fleurs Du Mal

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DESIRE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ADAPTATION: EXAMINING *AKU NO HANA*  
AS AN UNCONVENTIONAL ADAPTATION OF *LES FLEURS DU MAL*

by

Zoe Dalley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2024

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## ABSTRACT

Desire as a Framework for Adaptation: Examining *Aku No Hana* as an Unconventional

Adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*

by

Zoe Dalley, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2024

Major Professor: Dr. Adena Rivera-Dundas

Department: English

In this project, I began by arguing that the 2009 to 2014 manga series *Aku No Hana* by author and artist Shūzō Oshimi should be considered an unconventional adaptation of the 19th century collection of poems *Les Fleurs Du Mal* by French poet Charles Baudelaire. I then turned my analysis to the practice of adaptation more broadly, using desire, a central theme to both of my chosen primary texts, as my lens through which I examined some of the central complexities and paradoxes inherent to adaptation, such as the simultaneous expectation of textual faith and a new authorial vision. I then argued that adaptation should be considered an expression of desire, and that through an analysis of how desire functions within *Aku No Hana* and *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, additional insights about the practice of desire would also be revealed. Rather than outright stating my conclusions about the relationship between the texts, desire and adaptation, this project instead adopted an unconventional form, deviating from a more traditional literary analysis. This form drew from two concepts central to my discussion of these texts and their relationship with desire (Desire Paths and Baudelaire's descriptions of the Flâneur),

and presented as an intentional wandering through not only *Aku No Hana* and *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, but also discussions of theory, the surrounding context of the two texts, and explorations of works relevant to discussions of adaptation. At the end of this wandering, I concluded that by considering adaptation as an expression of desire, we are able to depend less on textual faith when adapting art and instead more fully consider the desires of all relevant parties (authors, adapters, audiences, etc.) in order to produce an adaptation that is more successful and fulfilling for those involved. Additionally, I argued that *Aku No Hana* exemplifies this practice of moving away from textual faith and instead towards a more successful adaptation through its unconventional adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*.

(61 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Desire as a Framework for Adaptation: Examining *Aku No Hana* as an Unconventional

Adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*

Zoe Dalley

This project is an analysis of two primary texts: the manga series *Aku No Hana* by Shūzō Oshimi and the collection of poems *Les Fleurs Du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire. The research surrounding this project consisted of reading and analyzing the relevant scholarship and theory, as well as the incorporation of unconventional sources such as YouTube videos and personal blogs, which came at no additional expense to the university. The culmination of this research is the exploration of a new approach to adaptation, using the two primary texts and the overarching theme of desire that appears in them as a guide. I conclude that there is value in moving away from complete faith to the original text when creating an adaptation, highlighting *Aku No Hana* as an example of what a successful adaptation might look like when decentering textual faith in this way.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give special thanks to Adena for her guidance, as well as all of the USU faculty who supported me in creating this unconventional project. Because of all of your encouragement, I have an end product that I am really proud of.

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## Introduction and Desire Paths

The description of the subreddit r/DesirePath reads that the subreddit is “dedicated to the paths that humans prefer, rather than the paths that humans create.” True to this explanation, r/DesirePath is full of images of worn, trampled down footpaths, cutting through grass fields or around obstructions, often near but slightly diverting from paved routes. While these avenues of dirt go by many names (cow paths, elephant trails, and similar variations of animal-led discrepancies) no name is quite so evocative and human as the name “Desire Path” or sometimes “Desire Line,” which suggests that these slices through the landscape represent a physical manifestation of “wanting.” This manifestation of desire in unexpected places is at the center of my interest in the two subjects of this piece: Shūzō Oshimi’s *Aku No Hana*, published from 2009 to 2014, and Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, published in 1857. These two texts both center on themes of desire, and *Aku No Hana* in particular reveals unexpected insights about the process of adaptation, through Oshimi’s unique adaptational choices.

*Aku No Hana* is a manga<sup>1</sup> series that deals explicitly with desire, in particular the burgeoning desires that follow as adolescents begin to come of age. The story of *Aku No Hana* follows a collection of middle school students as they struggle through the challenges of puberty, with increasingly bizarre circumstances taking place. The series explores themes of deviancy, social isolation, and the well-known struggles of a changing body and atmosphere when growing up. *Aku No Hana* is written and illustrated by manga artist Shūzō Oshimi, a creator best known for his work in psychological horror and thrillers, with the series being one of his most popular examples of his mastery in this field. In addition to a variety of other influences, *Aku No Hana* takes direct inspiration

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<sup>1</sup> Manga is a style of Japanese media similar to comics or graphic novels.

from *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, a collection of poems by Charles Baudelaire. Because of this direct influence, *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is a helpful guide in understanding what *Aku No Hana* has to say about how we experience desire.

*Les Fleurs Du Mal* was written by Charles Baudelaire, a 19th century French poet who is now considered a notable figure in French literature, particularly as an influence on the modernist and symbolist artistic movements. Despite his legacy, Baudelaire did not produce a large quantity of poems, almost all of his work being contained to a single collection, *Les Fleurs Du Mal* or *The Flowers of Evil*. This collection of poetry tackles various themes, but most interesting to me is what the work has to say about ideas of desire: What does it mean to experience desire as a human being? What does it mean to have desires that we may feel disgusted by, that we may see as a reflection of evil? How are desires sometimes an expression or explanation for what we may consider to be sin or decadence? How might an acceptance of those desires be a move towards an idealized future, or perhaps a regression away from it? Using *Les Fleurs Du Mal* as a guiding text, these are some of the questions that I will explore in *Aku No Hana*.

While *Aku No Hana* shares its name with *Les Fleurs Du Mal* when translated into English,<sup>2</sup> suggesting the former is based on the latter, it's fairly far away from what an average reader might expect from an adaptation. While many adaptation theorists concede that changes are necessary when moving from one medium to another, discussions surrounding adaptation have traditionally been rooted in discussions of fidelity.<sup>3</sup> Scholars like George Bluestone, known for pioneering the study of how

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<sup>2</sup> Both *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and *Aku No Hana* roughly translate to "The Flowers of Evil" or "Evil Flowers" in English, though the two titles do not translate into one another exactly.

<sup>3</sup> See "From Defining to Categorizing: A History of Film Adaptation Theory" by Laurent Mellet for further reading.

literature and cinema interact, claimed that while adapting a novel to a film creates a new product in the film, the film should still act as a “paraphrase of the novel,” suggesting that at least the most central facets of the plot should be depicted faithfully (62). *Aku No Hana* however moves away from this expected fidelity by taking great liberties with the content of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, creating whole characters and narratives, as well as shifting the setting to a middle school. This considerable difference in content raises the question, is *Aku No Hana* an adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, or a completely separate piece of art that happens to share the same name? A primary indication that *Aku No Hana* is speaking directly back to *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is the collection of Baudelaire poetry’s existence within the meta of *Aku No Hana*, made clear when the main character identifies it as his favorite book. Baudelaire himself even makes the occasional visual appearance, with a realistic rendering of the author included during particularly poignant moments in the manga.

Through this direct signaling, it is clear that *Aku No Hana* is in an intertextual conversation with *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and, as I will demonstrate in this piece, is working to in part recreate some of the core philosophies present in the source material, as a more direct adaptation might. It is because of this recreation of substance that I assert *Aku No Hana* is an adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and, notably, a particularly unconventional adaptation because of the unique changes that Oshimi makes to the source material. Where *Les Fleurs Du Mal* has no overarching, chronologically progressing plot, *Aku No Hana* relies heavily on narrative to communicate Baudelaire’s ideas in a new medium. While examples do exist that are in some ways similar to the unconventional adaptational choices that Oshimi made in the creation of *Aku No Hana* (the Broadway musical *Cats*

being an adaptation of a collection of poems by T.S. Elliot, and many modern Shakespeare adaptations aging down the cast and changing the setting to a school), there is one especially poignant factor that sets *Aku No Hana* apart from these other adaptations. While *Aku No Hana* does spend considerable time recreating the ideas and themes of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, it also spends an equal amount of time complicating those same ideas, even going so far as to push back against them. Like a desire path diverting from the imposed infrastructure, *Aku No Hana* follows its own path and takes a new direction when interacting with Baudelaire's assertions about desire. This simultaneous recreation of and deviation from Baudelaire's work is at the heart of what makes the examination of *Aku No Hana* worthwhile. What do we gain from such extreme fluidity when adapting a piece of art?

Many available sources cite Robert Macfarlane, author and Cambridge professor, when discussing Desire Paths, pulling from one of his many tweets sharing whimsical and romantic terms for specific items or phenomena, often relating to nature. In his tweet, Macfarlane describes Desire Lines as “paths & tracks made over time by the wishes & feet of walkers, especially those paths that run contrary to design or planning. Free-will ways” (Macfarlane). The immediacy of these “wishes” that drive various walkers is clear in the photos that compose r/DesirePath, as cut corners and direct routes are traveled again and again, eventually wearing down the vegetation, altering the landscape. Desire here can be read in a variety of ways: desire paths are an expression of free will, rebellious, a commentary on the existing infrastructure, but also destructive, careless, and potentially selfish. The competing tensions of free will and rebellion, yet also carelessness and selfishness, are the same tensions inherent to the art of adaptation.

Through the examination of *Aku No Hana* as an unconventional adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, I argue that adaptation is an expression of desire, and that ideas of desire are a helpful framework to consider in relation to adaptation as a practice because a deeper understanding of desire helps to reveal a deeper understanding of some of the more complex or contradictory facets of adaptation. *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and *Aku No Hana* are ideal candidates for this exploration not only because the unconventional nature of Oshimi's adaptational choices makes the work an interesting example of how an author's desires may interact with or conflict with the desires of the author whose work they are adapting, but also because desire acts as a primary theme in both *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and *Aku No Hana*. Thus, I assert that the exploration of these two texts reveal particularly important insights about the nature of desire and that those insights act to bolster and enrich my assertion that adaptation is an act of desire.

### Literature Review

Currently, not much English language academic scholarship exists on *Aku No Hana*. Instead, much of the discussion takes place on forums, discussion boards, and personal blogs<sup>4</sup>. Scholarship that does exist on the text is often on the brief side, taking cursory looks at specific symbolic or surrounding cultural elements.<sup>5</sup> More broadly, much of the scholarship in the west that focuses on manga takes a folklore-based approach by examining manga's impact on western culture, centering on concepts such as the rising

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<sup>4</sup> See the following for examples of such discussion: Hana Ga Saita Yo, a personal blog of manga and anime analysis (<https://hanagasaitayo.wordpress.com/2019/02/15/analysis-aku-no-hana/>); posts such as the following on the Aku no Hana Reddit board ([https://www.reddit.com/r/akunohana/comments/hkoisc/aku\\_no\\_hana\\_was\\_a\\_sweet\\_punch\\_to\\_the\\_gut\\_so\\_me/?rdt=53576](https://www.reddit.com/r/akunohana/comments/hkoisc/aku_no_hana_was_a_sweet_punch_to_the_gut_so_me/?rdt=53576)); and the comments on Aku no Hana's listing on anime and manga website My Anime List ([https://myanimelist.net/manga/24705/Aku\\_no\\_Hana](https://myanimelist.net/manga/24705/Aku_no_Hana)).

<sup>5</sup> See Daichi Hirota's "Presence of Baudelaire in Today's Japanese Manga."

popularity of certain genres or the formation of fandoms surrounding a particular work.<sup>6</sup> Other works might instead examine the logistics of manga creation and distribution.<sup>7</sup>

Not much academic scholarship exists in the English language<sup>8</sup> that takes the approach that I am in this piece, which is to examine a single work of manga as a literary text. This is certainly not to say that manga has never been examined through the lens of literary analysis, with some scholars broadly focusing on particular genres.<sup>9</sup> Even broader examinations of the manga medium in general have also been undertaken by scholars interested in studying the visual language of manga.<sup>10</sup> Less sparse than the academic content centering around manga in the English language is the academic exploration of graphic novels which, because of manga's similarity to graphic novels, can act as a helpful foundation for the analysis of manga's visual elements.<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons why more scholarship exists on comics and graphic novels is that they are frequently written in English and rely more heavily on western visual language. Something that I hope to accomplish with this project is the increased consideration of works like manga within western academic conversations of literature.

Unsurprisingly then, as an older and more traditional literary text, there is significantly more existing scholarship on Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, with scholars continuing to analyze the text into the modern age. Throughout the past few

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<sup>6</sup> See Yi-Shan Tsai's "The Characteristics of Manga Fan Communities – Preliminary Observations of 16 Teenage Manga Readers in the UK" and Alfred Archer's "Fans, Crimes and Misdemeanors: Fandom and the Ethics of Love."

<sup>7</sup> See Akbar Dahlan's "The Publishing and Distribution System of Japanese Manga and Doujinshi"

<sup>8</sup> Scholarship in Japanese may be more plentiful, but as an English speaking scholar, my knowledge is limited in this area.

<sup>9</sup> See Adam C Davis' "Horror Manga: An Evolutionary Literary Perspective."

<sup>10</sup> See Neil Cohn and Sean Ehly's "The Vocabulary of Manga: Visual Morphology in Dialects of Japanese Visual Language"

<sup>11</sup> See Tatiana Melnichuk and Olga Melnichuk's "Verbal and Visual Semantic Strategies in the Multimodal Narrative of a Graphic Novel."

decades, a variety of fresh analytical approaches have been brought to Baudelaire's collection of poetry, such as the examination of the depictions of sex and fetish in the work,<sup>12</sup> the analysis of the poems through a feminist lens,<sup>13</sup> the function of gender and othering in the poems, and reflections on the utility of depicting both the holy or beautiful and the evil or ugly together in a single text.<sup>14</sup> Many scholars have also released criticisms of Baudelaire and his work, such as Henry James's thorough destruction of Baudelaire in *The New England Review*, where he argues that Baudelaire's interest in "evil" could only remain superficial, since he viewed evil as something only outside of himself as a source for intellectual inspiration.<sup>15</sup> This project enters the conversation somewhere in between the celebratory and the critical modern responses to Baudelaire's work, taking a novel approach by using *Les Fleurs Du Mal* as a guiding text as I examine *Aku No Hana* as a literary work, noting when the manga is either in agreement or critical of Baudelaire, and using those observations as a stepping stone for my own critical analysis.

## Methodology

In my aim to consider *Aku No Hana* as an unconventional adaptation of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, I have drawn heavily from Linda Hutcheon's descriptions of adaptation in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*.<sup>16</sup> Here, Hutcheon proposes that adaptation should be

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<sup>12</sup> See Elissa Marder's "Inhuman Beauty: Baudelaire's Bad Sex."

<sup>13</sup> See Rosemary Lloyd's "Hypocrite Brother, Hypocrite Sister: Exchanging Genders in *Les Fleurs Du Mal*."

<sup>14</sup> See Scott M. Power's "Writing Against Theodicy: Reflections on the Co-Existence of God and Evil in Baudelaire's Poetry and Critical Essays."

<sup>15</sup> Review titled "Charles Baudelaire."

<sup>16</sup> For further examples of scholars furthering conversations in adaptation studies, see *Adaptation: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Adaptations as Imitations: Films from Novels* by James. J Griffith, and *The Pedagogy of Adaptation* by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw and James M. Welsh.



understood as a lateral process rather than a vertical process. Meaning, rather than viewing adaptation as a “next step” or a progression in a single vision or product, adaptation spreads a text out, allowing for additional themes, voices, or sometimes a radically different end product, while still falling under the umbrella of “adaptation.” In addition to adaptation studies, considering that both of my primary texts were originally written in languages other than English, translation studies have also become a factor in my exploration of *Aku No Hana* and *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. In their book *Translation, Adaptation and Digital Media*, John Milton and Silvia Cobelo compile information about the two worlds of translation studies and adaptation studies, which they claim “despite having much in common, seldom make contact, with few scholars playing roles in both academic communities” (1). They go on to describe that those scholars that have attempted to bridge the two worlds often categorize translation as a parent or predecessor to adaptation, with adaptational practices becoming more widespread with both the development of copyright laws and the popularity of film, spawning many film adaptations of literary works. I also see these two fields as working parallel to each other, with the movement from one language to another that occurs within translation bearing clear resemblance to adaptation and its movement from one medium to another, and through considering the two together in this piece, I intend to “make contact” between the two fields through my examination of *Aku No Hana*. While the two fields are distinct in a number of ways, in particular because of the different audience expectations for translations versus adaptations which I explore further in later sections, the simultaneous expectation of preservation and change permeates both practices. Fittingly, many of the questions that arise for me as I consider which translations to use in this project mirror

many of the questions about adaptation that I explore. How beholden is a translator or adaptor to the source material? Is a translation or adaptation more or less successful when it deviates from that source material to create an end product? Can unconventional sources for translation or adaptation be considered as valuable as those that have been officially sourced?

At the intersection between translation and adaptation is where the traditional structure of an academic essay can no longer contain the scope of this project. As it becomes necessary to examine unconventional sources, such as fan translations, message boards and YouTube videos to fully understand the impact of and reception to the various translations and adaptations of *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and *Aku No Hana*, my methods for explicating the material, too, become unconventional. Because conversations surrounding *Aku No Hana* in particular largely do not exist in an academic space and because the manga has not previously been considered a “literary text,” I do not have a large well of academic work to draw from. That being said, this by no means implies that meaningful, thoughtful analytical work isn’t being done examining *Aku No Hana* and other manga, but because of the lines that academia sometimes draws by excluding certain kinds of texts, work that examines manga is often more at home in these more popular and less academic spaces, such as YouTube video essays or personal blog posts. Additionally, in my aim to examine how desire is a useful frame with which to understand adaptation, I am interested in all of the parties who may bring their desires to the practice, which includes not just the desires of the original creators and the adaptor, but the desires of fans, readers, viewers, and audiences as well. The most direct way to examine how the people feel about a particular work is to engage with the content they create themselves

discussing or commenting on that work, and the best place to find that content is in communal spaces like forums and comment sections where fans discuss these ideas with each other.

I also plan to deviate from the traditional form because, when considering Hutcheon's description of adaptation as a lateral process, it then becomes difficult to try and move vertically through *Les Fleurs Du Mal* into *Aku No Hana*, with one neatly leading into the other, without exploring the surrounding context of these two works, as well as other works of adaptation that serve to illuminate parts of the practice that are relevant to my exploration of the texts. Rather than rely on the structure of a traditional comparative literature essay, I will instead follow in the footsteps of the Flâneur as described by Charles Baudelaire in order to more freely explore unconventional sources as well as a variety of contextual details and relevant sources surrounding *Aku No Hana*.

Baudelaire is, in part, most famous for his descriptions of the Flâneur, a figure who drifts aimlessly, yet for a purpose, with a spirit of open-mindedness, yet fueled by an inward restlessness (Beaumont). This flânerie, a wandering with no destination and an open mind for the purpose of pleasure and self discovery, is how I have chosen to navigate my exploration of these two texts. In addition to directly comparing *Les Fleurs Du Mal* with *Aku No Hana*, examining the changes in both content and medium, as well as the differing ways that the texts interpret ideas of desire, I will also at times wander away from this endeavor, following my own threads of desire into other useful examples of adaptation, conversation of theory, and investigations of the context surrounding both primary texts. By following the example of Baudelaire's Flâneur here in this piece, I aim to create a Desire Path of my own through these sometimes fragmented sections,

displaying through form itself the ways in which desire can manifest within the creation and analysis of art. Although one might not initially see the aimless wandering of the Flâneur as compatible with the efficiency of desire paths, in this case, the wandering itself is the most efficient and useful departure from the paved, traditional format of a literary analysis.

### **“La Chevelure” and The First Chapter of *Aku No Hana***

Charles Baudelaire’s “La Chevelure” is a poem that begins to outline *Les Fleurs Du Mal*’s philosophy of desire, asserting that a desire that is completely encompassing is necessary in order to unearth something within the speaker of the poem. “La Chevelure,” translated as “Her Hair,” “Head of Hair” or “Fleece,” is a poem that Charles Baudelaire dedicated to his mistress and muse Jeanne Duval. “La Chevelure” is clearly invested in ideas of affection and desire, as Baudelaire gushes for lines about the beauty of his lover’s hair. However, more specifically, Baudelaire depicts here a desire for that which is other or unknown, describing Duval’s hair as evocative of Africa and Asia, “An absent world ... far away” that Baudelaire wishes to journey to because of the way his desire for his lover moves him. Baudelaire seems to suggest in his poem here that the “exotic” and, considering the time period and Duval’s race as a Haitian woman, potentially socially “deviant” nature of his relationship with Duval is partially what makes his desire for her so intoxicating. In addition to depicting a desire made especially sweet by its “othered” or “deviant” nature, which modern readers would most likely recognize as an uncomfortable and inappropriate fetishization, “La Chevelure” seems also to depict a desire that is all encompassing, one that you must be engulfed by, “half-drunken” with “leisure” and

“idleness” in order to unearth the “Deep-draughted wines of memory” that lay beneath the ocean’s surface. “La Chevelure” is not only about desire, but the desire of that which is other; the desire for something that holds knowledge that you don’t possess, and the need to be entirely encompassed by this desire, to languish in it, and the newfound understanding that this act will bring. It asserts that the total encompassing of this desire will unearth something that has been imprisoned, an attitude that permeates through much of the overarching collection in *Les Fleurs Du Mal*.

This is the collection of poems, along with their ideas of desire, that middle school student Kasuga, the main character of *Aku No Hana*, has latched onto as his favorite book. We first see him reading his copy underneath his desk during class and, despite receiving a low score on the previous test, calling his friend Yamada a “dumbass” for not understanding literature. This moment is emblematic of Kasuga’s relationship to *Les Fleurs Du Mal* in the earlier chapters of the manga. While he clings to his copy of the poetry and references it often, both in his inner dialogue and in conversation with others, his connection to the work is based less in its artistic value or themes and more in the literature's ability to elevate Kasuga’s self perception, in particular above the people around him. As he rides his bike through the town, he thinks to himself with dismay: “People who understand the works of Baudelaire ... Just how many are there in this town!?” despite never displaying a meaningful understanding of the work himself (vol. 1 35).

While mostly using *Les Fleurs Du Mal* as a device to inflate his intellectual ego, as an unsure and insecure middle school student might do, Kasuga does seem to grasp that Baudelaire’s work deals in some way with desire, which Kasuga has begun

experiencing himself for the first time. The object of his affection is Saeki, a smart, pretty, and popular girl that Kasuga describes as his “muse” and “femme fatale,” seemingly invoking a figure similar to the one described in “La Chevelure” (vol.1 17). Despite his crush, it appears that up until this point, Saeki has not paid Kasuga much notice. As he runs back to school after class to retrieve his copy of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, he laments: “Saeki-San... She probably doesn’t notice that I’m reading such a book” (vol.1 18).

Alone in the school, Kasuga’s feelings of desire are amplified into the “deviant” when he decides to steal Saeki’s gym clothes. While the naked action could be described as “perverted” or “deviant” itself, the framing of this moment isn’t of a character who makes an active decision to turn himself over to deviancy. Instead, Kasuga stutters, hesitates, and doubts himself before finally scuttering away with the bundle of clothes in a panic after hearing a distant thud in the otherwise empty school. Arriving home and splaying the clothes out on his bed, Kasuga mutters to himself “It’s the Flowers of Evil, seriously...” suggesting that his actions are somewhat reflective of the collection of poems that he so actively aligns himself with; that this display of naked desire aligns with the theming of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, at least as Kasuga understands it (vol.1 28). However, Kasuga deeply regrets his decision, resisting the all encompassing acceptance of deviant desire that Baudelaire advocates for in poems such as “La Chevelure.” When Saeki arrives at school the next morning, crying due to her missing clothes, the rest of the class speculating about what sort of pervert must have stolen them, Kasuga is depicted as hovering over a dark, gaping hole as he sits in the classroom, listening to the chatter. On the following page, Kasuga rides his bike away from the school, thinking to himself “I

wanna run someplace far away,” communicating his impulse to escape both from what he has done and the label of “pervert” that might follow (vol.1 34). While Kasuga clings to *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, he flees from anything that might connect him to the work beneath a surface level.

Contrarily, Kasuga’s classmate Nakamura establishes herself in this first chapter as a character who is deeply unbothered by the perceptions of others. When receiving her own grade on the recent test (a zero, as she left all the sections blank), she unabashedly calls her teacher a “shit worm” in response (vol.1 11). While a typical trouble maker might be depicted with a mischievous grin after such an encounter, looking around for peer approval, Nakamura instead returns to her desk with a blank, slightly flushed expression, eyes unfocused as if already thinking about something else. Nakamura, with her bright red hair, a color closely associated with desire,<sup>17</sup> immediately represents a more honest, naked relationship with desire than Kasuga, embracing what is pleasurable (colorful language) and rejecting what is not (taking a test) without care for outward perception. Through this expression of desire for that which might be considered deviant or socially unacceptable, as well as through her distinctive hair color, Nakamura immediately embodies the exact type of desire that Baudelaire outlines in “La Chevelure.”

As Kasuga bikes furiously away from the school and a tearful Saeki after class, he happens to run into Nakamura, who he previously had not spoken to. “This is bad! I’m not sure why, but this is bad!” Kasuga thinks to himself, as though he can sense that

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<sup>17</sup> For an example of the color red’s association with desire and sexuality in a psychological context, see the study “Sexy red: Perceived sexual receptivity mediates the red-attraction relation in men viewing women” by Adam D. Pazda et al.

Nakamura represents the same attitude towards desire that he is actively running from (vol.1 37). His fears prove to be well founded, as Nakamura reveals, her face breaking into a wide smile for the first time, that she witnessed him stealing Saeki's gym clothes, and that he would have to start obeying her commands to keep her from sharing his secret to the rest of the school. Rather than facing this new confrontation, Kasuga abandons his bike and runs away from Nakamura in fear. While the writing of Baudelaire in poems like "La Chevelure" often seem to advocate for this desire for that which is exotic or fresh or unknown, Kasuga's intense negative reaction to Nakamura and desire to get away from her, despite her representing the very philosophy that he claims to admire in *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, represents his inability to at this point engage with this philosophy beneath the surface level.

### **Translation in *Aku No Hana***

In the Reddit board r/manga, user CanadianTurtle shared a post titled "The official English release of 'The Flowers of Evil' or 'Aku No Hana' was botched. And this isn't the only example," including a side by side comparison of the same page from both the official English release and the popular fan translation of *Aku No Hana*. The page depicts a scene where Nakamura insults Saeki and insists that Saeki will never be able to understand her. The official English translation has interpreted these lines of dialogue to read: "But you're sored up worse than a fly inside... Damn if you ever get it, not you even if I die." Under this translation, CanadianTurtle has included the text "people were paid to translate this," suggesting that it is absurd that professional translators created something of this quality. What the Reddit user had labeled "the superior fan-translation"



interprets the dialogue a bit differently: “But you’ve got less substance to you than a fucking fly. Someone like you could never understand, even up until your dying breath.” The comments on this particular post, which has 1.9 thousand upvotes, demonstrate that a sizable amount of the fan community shares CanadianTurtle’s opinion.<sup>18</sup> Many commenters mock the official translation, with users like BobCrosswise exclaiming “I can’t even figure out what they thought they were saying, much less what they actually meant to say,” the consensus being that this version is too difficult to parse to truly understand the intended meaning. According to Japanese user E\_Hoba, the official translation is more literal, with the original Japanese dialogue more closely referencing a fly that is rotten inside. However, fans celebrate the less faithful translation, with commenters like ThePaulBunyanTrophy explaining that, while the idea of a “rotten fly” might make more sense to a Japanese reader, the phrasing is much less common for an English speaking audience, and because it literally rings false (flies do not rot or have sores inside them), it is more difficult to interpret the intended meaning.

While commenters almost unanimously agree that the fan translation is preferable, they do seem to take issue with the the inclusion of “fucking fly” in particular, with some commenters criticizing the fan translation in its entirety of being “edgy” or “trying too hard to sound badass.” This affinity for the word “fuck” in all its forms permeates through the entirety of the fan translation, in particular when Nakamura is speaking. While translators might note a more literal translation of a pejorative term in the margins (like Nakamura’s insult to her teacher in the first chapter, which the translator interprets as “fuckface” but then notes: “She literally calls him a Shit Worm but feel free

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<sup>18</sup> For context, while the Reddit Board r/manga where this post was made does have over three million members, with top posts receiving up to 37 thousand upvotes, the dedicated Aku No Hana board has less than a thousand members, making the positive reception on this post notable.

to insert your swear word of choice here”)<sup>19</sup> they frequently choose to populate the actual speech bubbles with “fuck” whenever possible (vol.1 11). While a common English swear word undoubtedly seems to read more smoothly than more literal translations like Shit Worm, fans bemoan this choice, citing it as their only criticism of the fan translation. Where liberal interpretation of literal meaning for the sake of English readability was previously praised by fans, it is in this case instead interpreted as a sign of immaturity.

This inconsistency in the fan consensus raises some questions about the unspoken rules beneath translation. When translating a piece of art, where does textual faith outweigh a need for smooth reading and understandability in the language that you are translating into? These tensions can also be understood through the framework of desire: the desires of the audience to have a translation that is accessible to them and feels natural in their native language at times conflict with the creator and/or translator’s desires to preserve the intention and impact of the original phrasing. However, the audience criticisms of the fan translation serve to complicate this binary, since even as the audience desires are being fulfilled (the replacement of pejorative terms that feel unnatural in English with more common English swear words, making the text more accessible and smooth for English readers), they might still react poorly if they interpret any translational choices as being done for the wrong reasons. One question that is then raised: how is a translator supposed to interact with these desires from audiences? How beholden are they to these desires? Ignore them completely, and you might be left with a completely literal translation of a work that is so difficult for readers to interact with that

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<sup>19</sup> These types of translator notes, which often take place in the margins of the work or in the white space between manga panels and serve as a way for the translator to speak directly to the audience, make frequent appearances in fan translated manga. Like in the above example, they are often a space for the fan translator to clarify or justify a particular translational choice, though they can sometimes also be a space for the translator to insert their opinion on the content of the manga itself.

they aren't able to connect with the substance or core of the work at all. But, because of the contradictory nature of some fan desires (moving away from textual faith in the specified section is good, but doing so to replace some insults with more common English swear words is bad), a translator could never truly account for the desires in their totality. And besides, it might be helpful to note here that I as a reader don't think that the repeated use of "fuck" takes anything away from the work, as an overly "edgy" type of language effectively communicates the middle-school mindset and relationship with Baudelaire's work that the early chapters of *Aku No Hana* center around. With that in mind, it becomes evident that if a translator were to always give in to the loudest desires from fans, important substance of the original work could be lost. In those cases, the desire of the creator might be overpowered by the desires of fans, turning the work into what fans demand it to be, rather than what it actually is.

When considering that the move of translation from one language to another is similar to the move that adapters must make from one medium to another, the sometimes contradictory demands that translators need to navigate can also be applied to the realm of adaptation, with additional complexities to consider. Where translators are expected to create a new version of the same source product, adapters are often expected to create a new product, enjoyable and understandable separate from the source material, while still preserving some core of the original text. Perhaps most central to my discussion here, the practice of adaptation also introduces a new authorial voice into the process, a creator with their own vision for the work that could potentially clash with the vision of the original creator. While the translator certainly has their own voice as well, with sensibilities that may impact the end product, this is notably distinct from the

environment of adaptation, where the adaptor is considered the creator of this new product, even as it is an extension of the source material. This introduction of a new authorial voice as well as this complex adaptational relationship where both the original creator and the new creator have potentially deviating expectations for the end product are central to why desire is such a useful frame for understanding the art of adaptation.

### **Affect Theory Foundation**

There are a number of different ways to describe the concept of affect: as an in-betweenness, the capacities to both act and be acted upon, and as forces and intensities of relation and passage that move from body to body. The complexity of the subject is clear through the difficulty that theorists have in defining it. The following passage, excerpted from the introduction of “The Affect Theory Reader,” curves and winds in search of a comprehensive definition, carving out a desire path of prose:

“Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces--visceral forces

beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting

beyond emotion--that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering

accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the word’s apparent intractability” (Gregg and Seigworth 1).

Most interesting to me in the above definition is the assertion that first, affect exists both outside of conscious knowing and beyond emotion, suggesting that it is therefore difficult to understand through traditional, strictly logical means, and second, the specification of the movement that affect encourages. Throughout the following collection of essays, the various authors provide examples of what we might consider “affect” under Gregg and Seigworth’s definition: shame, cruel optimism, threat, etc. Scholarship also exists that examines desire through the lens of affect<sup>20</sup>, and I assert here that the consideration of desire as an affect is consistent with the above definition, especially when considering the drive towards movement that Gregg and Seigworth outline. When Kasuga steals Saeki’s gym clothes, the action isn’t simply the extension of an emotion (we as readers aren’t really sure what he is feeling at the time), and through his immediate remorse, we can surmise that it wasn’t the result of a conscious decision. Instead, Kasuga is acted upon by his desire, which inspires him to movement, stealing the gym clothes in an act that, to him, feels outside of his control.

The introduction, along with explaining the historical precedence for the study of affect, invoking figures such as Sigmund Freud and Baruch Spinoza, also highlights the increased interest in the field, made evident by the “growing number of essays and books (such as this one), as well as conference themes, special journal issues, symposia, and so forth” (5). This continued and increasing interest in affect suggests that Baudelaire and Nakamura’s insistence that all of humanity is harboring some sort of inward urge that the normal strategies of conscious thought are unable to parse, as to this day, the forces of

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<sup>20</sup> For an example, see “Erotic Affect: the Sticky Bodies of Shelley’s Lyrics to Jane Williams” by Merrilee Roberts.

academia (and myself included, through my examination of the text) are still striving to strip away the layers and examine these forces beneath.

Gregg and Seigworth also make sure to point out that, despite this collective effort to understand affect, it is a project that will never be completed: “There is never a single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be” (3). This is due to the very nature of affect, being that it exists outside of the realm of what conscious thought can understand, as well as being so thoroughly placed within ideas of movement, rather than static categorization. Through the understanding that affectual desire is so slippery and difficult to pin down, this same perspective then extends to the art of adaptation, making the various contradictions that we have so far explored more digestible. Because affect is beyond the realm of conscious thought and so can’t always be understood through just logic alone, and is also a project that is never fully complete, when we extend this understanding to adaptation, the same concepts apply. When we use the lens of affectual desire and get comfortable with the idea that sometimes there are forces acting outside of conscious understanding, the things that seem logically inconsistent about adaptation are easier to parse because, through affect theory, we have the tools to examine them. Understanding adaptation through this lens of affect, these urges, these conduits to movement that don’t always play well with our conscious reasoning, makes these contradictions a bit easier to explore through the acceptance that there are forces at work outside the realm of reasonable understanding.

### **Adaptations that are Faithful yet Unsuccessful**

One approach to the practice of adaptation is to “play it safe” so to speak, creating an end product that resembles the source material as closely as possible, with the movie adaptations of both the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* books being notable and popular examples. However, despite the desire to do justice to the source material, these textually faithful adaptations that work closely within the boundaries of the works they are drawing from sometimes receive criticisms that they are missing something essential about those foundational works, despite their close adherence to them. Junji Ito, beloved horror manga artist and author of collections such as *Uzumaki* and *Tomie*, announced that his work would be adapted into an anime<sup>21</sup> series in 2018, with many fans eagerly awaiting the opportunity to see Ito’s work in a new way, with the addition of color, motion, sound design, and other features of anime that can’t be achieved in manga. Unfortunately for many fans, like YouTube creator John Walsh (known on the platform as Super Eyepatch Wolf), the adaptation did not live up to their hopes. In his video “The Junji Ito Collection is Disappointing Garbage,” Walsh describes the animated take on Ito’s work as having “the stench of mediocrity,” largely identifying the lack of consideration of what it takes to move art into a new medium as the source of this failure. The YouTuber describes the features of the work that were lost due to the move from manga into anime (the stark blacks and whites of Ito’s original art, the detail in each individual image, and the suspense created when readers are asked to physically turn each page during a tense moment) but additionally explains the anime’s failure at delivering on

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<sup>21</sup> Anime is a Japanese style of animation. While anime can consist of original content or take inspiration from different sources, it is often created by adapting an existing manga series.

any of the potential gains that the medium of anime may have allowed for (the animation itself being minimal and/or choppy, the color muddy and lifeless, and no attempt to replace the anticipation building technique of the page turn with effective editing techniques). While the desire to faithfully adapt the original work is evident in the anime, with Walsh describing the adaptation as being created with a “near slavish devotion” to each of Ito’s stories, even this presents itself as a negative in the final product, with each shot of the anime borrowing staging, shot composition and posing directly from the static panels of the manga, leading to a flat and boring presentation of the source material in what should have been an adaptation full of dynamic possibility. The conclusion of Walsh’s analysis is that the anime version of Junji Ito’s work is at best an inferior version of the original, stating: “Anything it even slightly succeeds at is done infinitely better in the manga.” It seems that the majority of fans agree, with the show receiving a mediocre 6.7 out of 10 score on IMDB. Perhaps due to this disappointing reception, despite Ito’s vast body of work, the anime was never renewed for a second season. Through Walsh’s analysis of this particular work, it becomes clear that a thorough understanding of the medium being utilized is necessary for a successful adaptation. Additionally, creators must possess either the ability to faithfully capture what is special about the original work or a new creative vision that they are hoping to achieve. Otherwise, the adaptation is likely to fall flat.

In addition to The Junji Ito collection coming under fire for being a poor adaptation, the quality of the show itself has also been heavily criticized by Walsh and other fans, who in particular take note of the poor animation quality. While it is not uncommon for anime in particular to have more limited movement in comparison to



other forms of animation, with the genre being well known for using clever tricks to imply more movement than is actually taking place, as Walsh states in his review, the animation in The Junji Ito collection at its worst “feels not only limited, but completely rudimentary.” Characters are sometimes completely static for long periods of time, the movement that does exist is often stiff and unnatural, and at times the series is plagued by outright errors, like the entire bottom of a character being cropped off in a particular shot, that remain in the final product. With the poor and seemingly cheap animation quality in mind, Walsh then goes on to speculate, as many other viewers have, that this lack of quality was due to the prioritization of profit. With Junji Ito’s sizable fansbase, it is possible that someone overseeing the project’s creation decided to strip the show’s creation of the resources it would need to be a higher quality product, with the intent of extorting maximum profit with minimal amounts of effort from the fans who would support the work regardless. These speculated circumstances would point to the desires of the creators (at least the ones with the power to make these types of decisions) being more aligned with monetary motivations than creative ones. This misalignment of desires is why, despite the fervent textual faith that may be considered respectful of the source material in other circumstances, the series is instead considered by fans like Walsh to be “lifeless and without purpose” and being created “without respecting any of the heart or craft” of the original text. The Junji Ito Collection in this way serves as an example of how problems can arise when the stated desires of an adaptor (creating a good adaptation) and the potential underlying desires (making money off of fans) are not aligned.

### **“La Destruction” and Kasuga and Nakamura Being Deviant**

In the poem “La Destruction,” Baudelaire describes an artist who has been led “into the midst / Of the plains of Ennui” by a “Demon” who “takes the form of a most seductive woman” and enters his body, filling him with “an eternal, sinful desire.” This simultaneous listlessness and burning desire are then satiated by the destruction of which the poem is named, the Demon thrusting before the artist “Dirty filthy garments and open, gaping wounds, / And all the bloody instruments of Destruction!” The punctuation suggests an excitement here, as if the artist is relieved to find the presence of something so shocking in his “endless” boredom from which he might be inspired to create art. However, while the Demon may have freed the artist from his state of Ennui, Baudelaire also acknowledges that the Demon itself led him there in the first place, suggesting a never ending cycle from which the artist is unable to escape. The artist described is throughout the poem depicted as helpless, passively filled, seduced, led, and thrust at by outside forces. The state of listlessness, only reprieved by gruesome depictions of destruction, thus feels inevitable within the context of the poem.

This poem is particularly valuable to study for the way that it expands Baudelaire’s depictions of desire beyond what exists in “La Chevelure.” With the inclusion of “La Destruction” it becomes clear that desire, in Baudelaire’s philosophy, isn’t just encapsulated as the desire for something exotic and other. Here it is also for something explicitly ugly and destructive. Of course, it doesn’t have to be, as “La Chevelure” demonstrates, but the difference between these two poems is the focus on artistry here, the speaker of “Destruction” is explicitly an artist within the context of the poem. This distinction suggests that a desire that is strong enough to move artists to

create, the thing that artists yearn for in order to spark their motivation towards creation, rests in the darkness of the world.

Another notable factor of the desire depicted in “La Destruction” is its explicitly sexual nature, as expressed by the form of the seductive woman. The demon that leads the speaker of the poem towards destruction must first transform into this seductive figure before it is able to do so, suggesting that a sexual allure is a necessary component of this path towards destruction. These sexual undertones also become more prominent in the manga as Nakamura’s contract with Kasuga takes shape. Kasuga’s relationship with Saeki also grows closer throughout this section, even leading up to a date between the two, which unfortunately for Kasuga, Nakamura finds out about. Nakamura insists that they meet up beforehand, and at this meeting, she orders him to put on Saeki’s gym clothes underneath his own, and wear them while he goes on his date with her. The sexual tension in this moment is palpable: Nakamura grins with flushed excitement as she suggests the idea, and before Kasuga can respond, rejecting the proposition in horror, the manga freezes on his face for a single panel, cheeks similarly flushed, the focus of the image resting on his mouth, with sweat beading down the sides of his face. From this and similar moments throughout Kasuga’s date with Saeki, readers can deduce that, despite his horror at the current situation, there is also something alluring about it to him. The same affect of desire that subconsciously moved him to steal the gym clothes in the first place is also reacting positively in this moment. However, just like in Baudelaire’s “La Destruction,” this “sinful desire” is placed right up against destruction, or in this case, the potential for destruction, as the possibility of Saeki finding out about Kasuga’s secret looms over the scene, threatening the destruction of their burgeoning relationship. Like

the speaker of “La Destruction,” Kasuga is portrayed as a passive force, with both desire and destruction being thrust upon him by Nakamura, his own Demon.

While this moment connects well with the Baudelaire poetry in that it presents these parallels of desire and destruction, it doesn’t quite communicate the great relief of boredom or Ennui that is depicted in “La Destruction.” Perhaps this is because the promised destruction never occurs, as Saeki never finds out about her gym clothes lying underneath Kasuga’s outfit. Even as Nakamura tries to reveal the truth by dumping a bucket of water on Kasuga to turn his outer layer transparent, he is able to run away before Saeki sees anything revealing.

This moment of relief is however not far off for Kasuga as his contract with Nakamura continues to escalate. At Nakamura’s insistence, she and Kasuga sneak into their classroom at night. Kasuga had recently related to her that he couldn’t take it all anymore, that it was too difficult for him to go out with Saeki when he had such a perverted secret that he was keeping from her. And so, in order to relieve this tension, she tells him to write down the truth on the classroom chalkboard for his classmates to see when they come to school the next morning. Kasuga refuses, too scared of his classmates knowing the truth about him. Frustrated by this refusal, Nakamura launches into a rage, insisting that despite her expectations for him, Kasuga is “just like everyone else” in normal society, people who are all “just spewing out pretty words” despite the deviant desires they have under the surface (vol.2 171-172). Here, it becomes especially evident that this belief that every person holds deviant desires but chooses to hide them or abandon them, and the disdain that Nakamura has towards others for doing so, is what has motivated Nakamura’s actions up to this point. When she states that she wants to

“peel off” Kasuga’s skin, she’s communicating her need to connect with another person who is true to themselves regarding their own desires, rather than putting up this facade (vol.1 198).

As Nakamura screams at him, Kasuga flashes back to an earlier chapter where he wondered if there was anyone else in his town that truly understood the works of Baudelaire, realizing in this moment that Nakamura is this person, as she embodies the frustration with normalcy and embracing of desire that Baudelaire communicates in *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. Nakamura then attempts to leave the classroom, stating that she wants to end their contract and cease all communication. His perceptions of Nakamura now changed, Kasuga furiously begins to obey her commands, scrawling confessions onto the chalkboard. Nakamura then demands more and more from him, as Kasuga overturns desks, scatters books, and covers the classroom in black ink. As the classroom unravels into complete destruction, both Nakamura and Kasuga’s faces are flushed with joy. As the chapter comes to a close, the pair lay on the floor in the center of the classroom, their panting breath and stillness communicating that sense of relief that Baudelaire depicts in “La Destruction,” the affectual urges that had been paining them both now released through their acts of desire. Kasuga and Nakamura’s constant blushing and panting also reinvoked the sexuality that was foundational to earlier chapters, suggesting that the release of this moment also serves as a sexual release, despite the nature of the activity not being sexual itself. Surrounding Kasuga and Nakamura is a flower painted in black ink, the same flower that appears on Kasuga's copy of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, further punctuating that at this moment, the manga and the collection of poetry are aligned in their understandings of desire.

### **Translation in *Les Fleurs Du Mal***

Maneuvering around a translation-based controversy such as the one experienced by the official release of *Aku No Hana*, fleursdumal.org, a website dedicated to Charles Baudelaire and his poetry, includes multiple translations of every poem in *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. For each individual poem, the original French version is first displayed at the top of the web page, followed by two or more English translations of the poem from various translators. While this choice does allow simultaneous access to multiple translations, one can't help but feel that whatever translation is placed first after the original is privileged in some way. How many readers chose to scroll down to the first translation, read through it, and then move on to another poem? This was certainly my experience when I first encountered fleursdumal.org, picking through poems while reading *Aku No Hana* in another tab. By reading only the first translation of each poem during my first experience with Charles Baudelaire's poetry, and then revisiting the website and comparing these translations to the versions lower on the page, I noted some general patterns when it came to what was chosen to present first. The first translation of every poem almost never attempts any sort of rhyme scheme, even when one is present in the original poem. In many of the poems, like the translations of "La Muse Malade," the language is formal, but not entirely old fashioned. You might encounter an "alas," but any "thee"s or "hath"s are reserved for later translations. Similarly, any hyper casual translations like that of Will Schmitz, which translates "what ails you" as "what's the matter with you," is demoted to later positions in the line up. Named figures, like Phoebus and Pan, are often preserved in the first translation, regardless of their relevance to a modern English speaking audience, where in later translations they are sometimes abandoned entirely. While not as blatant as

in the fan discussion of the *Aku No Hana* translations, these patterns of what translations are celebrated by receiving the top spot demonstrate a collection of translational values, where certain freedoms are celebrated, yet many restrictions seem obligatory to maintain.

When examined through the lens of desire, fleursdumal.org is a representation of what translational practices might look like when a translator or translation compiler attempts to suppress their own desires in favor of a more economical approach: including a variety of translation in order to not betray which translations the creator of the website prefers. However, as I've demonstrated with the consistency in which types of translations appear in the privileged first spot in each webpage, these desires cannot be fully repressed without some remnant of them bubbling to the top. The underlying urges of the creator act upon the body of fleursdumal.org, but do so without announcing themselves as existing desires. Just as Nakamura suggests in the first half of *Aku No Hana*, everyone carries with them these hidden desires, begging the questions, what might the practices of translation and adaptation look like if these desires were laid bare, rather than materializing as a sets of unspoken rules as they have in both the translation of *Aku No Hana* and *Les Fleurs Du Mal*?

### **The Shining: Competing Desire**

As our examination of The Junji Ito collection demonstrated, complete faith to the original text when creating an adaptation is not always desirable, since without intent, it can lead to a mediocre end product. In order to more fully utilize the medium that the adapter is moving into, changes will need to be made in order to make the selected content come across more effectively in that new medium. However at times, these

changes can go far beyond the omission of some content in order to better suit the medium, and this level of deviation from the source material sometimes comes at the expense of creating a final product that the original artist approves of. While Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* is often regarded as a foundational masterpiece of the horror genre, with modern horror directors like Jordan Peele continuing to cite the film as inspirational to their own films, original *Shining* author Stephen King detested the adaptation of his work from the moment he saw it. King continues to criticize Kubrick's take on his work to this day, noting in particular the many deviations from King's original source material, from changes to the plot to depictions of the characters (Brose). King was so dissatisfied with the film that he went on to co-create a television series adapting *The Shining* in order to have more control over how the book would be translated to the screen and, while some fans prefer the more faithful adaptation, most fans and other viewers alike still favor Kubrick's version, evident by its enduring legacy in pop culture.

This squabble between artists can be characterized as a tension between two competing desires: King's desire to see his work faithfully adapted into a new medium, and Kubrick's desire to communicate something original through the framework of the source material, inserting something of his own creative vision. This situation communicates the destructive nature of the pursuit of desire that both *Les Fleurs Du Mal* and *Aku No Hana* explore, and thus, the sometimes necessary destructive element of effective adaptation. In order to create something new and more true to Kubrick's desires for what *The Shining* film should be, he had to destroy King's expectations for a film that would more faithfully communicate his original story. On the one hand, this destruction was necessary in order to fulfill Kubrick's desire and vision for the movie, which not only



produced results that he himself prefers, but also an end result with an enduring legacy, huge cult following, and greater success than the more faithful adaptation (Ciment). However, this destruction also comes with concrete consequences, in this case, the continuous ire of King. In this way, adapters who are interested in pursuing their own artistic vision through substantial changes to the source material must weigh these potential consequences against their drive to see their desired version of the end product come to fruition.

### **“Bénédiction” and The Shift at the Summer Festival**

In his poem “Bénédiction,” Baudelaire paints the picture of a figure known as the Poet, who is constantly surrounded by misfortune. His mother curses him as a “misshapen monster” at his birth, those around him either “watch him with fear” or attempt to “test on him their inhumanity” through cruel acts. Despite his miserable existence, the Poet retains a carefree and tranquil disposition. As the poem draws to a close, the Poet speaks to God and thanks him for the suffering that he has inflicted, describing suffering as “the sole nobility / Which earth and hell shall never mar,” declaring that pain and taxation are necessary components towards the creation of a “mystic crown” that the Poet will receive in return, which will be “made of nothing but pure light.” Baudelaire suggests here that the Poet (or creator/artist of other forms) is in some way destined to be surrounded by misfortune, because that is the only way to lead to meaningful art (the Poet’s mystic crown), and so the beautiful and pure lies within the miseries of the world.

As Kasuga and Nakamura's actions become increasingly deviant, the manga seems to suggest a complete agreement with this philosophy presented in "Bénédiction." As a culmination to their plans, the two teenagers plot to cover themselves in lighter fluid and set themselves ablaze at the upcoming summer festival. As they ride on Kasuga's bike to the festival, this idea of beauty and the grotesque being intertwined is espoused by Nakamura as she comments that the sky is beautiful because it "looks like a dripping flow of garbage stained, raw gutter trash... so pretty" (vol.6 179). If the manga's purpose was to exclusively recreate and agree with Baudelaire's philosophy of desire, in which every person contains some horror within themselves and the only way to experience or create beauty is to accept miseries and seek out the grotesque, then it would be the most fitting for the manga to end at the summer festival as Kasuga and Nakamura set themselves on fire. However, their plans are instead thwarted at the last second, with the manga leading into its second half, where the consequences of their actions are thoroughly explored.

### **A Poem versus a Panel**

"Poetry," exclaims my highschool literature teacher, "is about concision. It is as much about what to leave out as what to leave in. It's about saying as much as possible with as few words as possible, picking out exactly what words will be the most effective." This description has always stuck with me as an insightful observation of the functionality exclusive and essential to the medium of poetry. While a writer in any form may endeavor to be concise, poetry in particular demands it, leading poets to draft version after version of their poems to strive towards this ideal. F. W. Leaky, a scholar

invested in the biographical details surrounding the publication of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, characterizes Charles Baudelaire as one such poet: “Baudelaire was an inveterate reviser, not only of the incidental detail of his poems but also on occasion of their main content” (578). While Baudelaire’s writing process certainly demonstrates grueling amounts of work, as writers understand extensive revisions to be, it also demonstrates a certain restraint in allowing that work to go unseen by most readers, the final product containing only the fully revised, concise communication of the original ideas (some poems from *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, such as “La Musique,” ending up less than 100 words long).

The medium of the manga, or more broadly the graphic novel, contrasts with this poetic restraint. While some big budget manga productions may see teams of people contributing to a single work, the majority of manga is similar to poetry in that the art is the result of a singular creator, like *Aku No Hana* author and artist Shūzō Oshimi. However, the visual element of manga means that, unlike the largely invisible labor of Baudelaire changing the title of a poem time after time, the labor of the manga artist is immediately visible to the reader on the page, even when considering the additional unseen elements such as drafts, sketches and revisions. While manga art need not always be extensively detailed and time consuming, it certainly can be, with respected manga artists like Junji Ito being known to spend up to nine hours on a single illustration, with hundreds of small details visually reflecting the hours of work (Urasawa). Oshimi, while sometimes opting for more simplistic representations of things like backgrounds and character movement when appropriate, is also well respected for his detailed artistic skill, known in particular for his ability to render expressive human faces (“The Manga That Breaks People”). When viewing a specific full page illustration of Nakamura from *Aku*

*No Hana*, clothes creasing and strands of hair curling as she stands in the rain, individual raindrops punctuating her sharp expression, the detail of the image makes the labor of that particular moment evident to the reader as soon as they turn the previous page (vo.4 138). In this way, rather than restraint, manga is often a medium of abundance, proudly displaying the toil of its production. Therefore, the medium of manga may be more well suited for the depiction of the pursuit of an all encompassing desire in its embrace of this excess.

My aim here is not to assert that some mediums are more valuable than others, since both restraint and abundance can be valuable qualities in a work of art. However, I do aim to observe that the manga, in its abundance granted by the nature of the medium, often reads to me as generous in its adaptational deviations, rather than destructive. Because the manga is adding so much content to the original brief poems, even as this content is substantially different from the source material, the level of destruction does not feel anywhere comparable to that of Kubrick's *The Shining*. Through this utilization of an abundant medium, Oshimi effectively communicates through adaptation what he will come to communicate through the second half of *Aku No Hana*: that there are other ways to pursue desire that need not rely so heavily on destruction.

### **“Au Lecteur” and the Manga Falling Action: Disagreeing with Les Fleurs Du Mal**

The first poem in *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is addressed to the audience, made clear by the title “Au Lecteur” which translates to “To the Reader.” In this poem, Baudelaire makes it clear that his ideas about desire, sin, and the grotesque are meant to apply to everyone, as here he creates a parallel between himself and the reader by using “we”

throughout the poem. Baudelaire asserts that “we descend a step further toward Hell” every day as we engage in horrific sin with only faint repentance. It is within this poem that the binary of existence that Baudelaire seeks to set up, which I will call the Baudelaire Binary, is the most evident. He claims that the only alternative to this sinful existence of desire is “Ennui” or “boredom,” which he states is “more ugly, more wicked, more filthy” than the grotesque existence that he had outlined, suggesting the sin and boredom are humanities only two options. Baudelaire ends the poem with a final assertion of similarity between himself and the reader, addressing the reader as his “fellow” and “brother.” As Baudelaire is addressing all readers here, and thus every person that could possibly read his collection, it becomes clear that his address is not to a singular reader, but to all of humanity, asserting that desire as he describes exists within everyone. Since the philosophy of desire that Baudelaire constructs is meant to apply to everyone, we can extrapolate that whenever else in the collection Baudelaire refers to himself or to a specific figure like that of the Poet, he is implicating the reader as well, suggesting that whatever lies in himself or his constructed character also exists in his audience.

After Kasuga’s failed suicide attempt at the summer festival, the manga skips forward in time, now following a highschool aged Kasuga. We see him attempting to create a new life for himself in a new town with a new group of friends. However, this Kasuga appears listless, unsure, and somewhat isolated from this new crowd. Dejected after a failed attempt to bond with some classmates at karaoke, Kasuga demands that some encountered street thugs instruct him “how to live without shame,” suggesting that he is unsure how to move forward after what he has done (vol.7 99). It is clear that

Kasuga, despite his resolve to “change completely” and once again fit in with normal society, is unable to truly engage or connect with the people around him, weighed down by the memories of what he and Nakamura did, in particular their public attempt to light themselves ablaze at the festival (vol.7 72).

However, he still continues to try and create new bonds, and so Kasuga begins a relationship with Aya, a girl at his school that enjoys reading and wants to be an author, but keeps these parts of herself from her friends and boyfriend because she believes that they wouldn't understand, or that it would ostracize her from them in some way. Aya's feelings here, that she possesses desires that wouldn't be understood by the general public, immediately liken her to Nakamura's character. Additional connections include her appearance (short and light hair, like Nakamura's) as well as her and Kasuga beginning to bond over *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, the collection of poetry that Nakamura embodies. Because of these connections, it initially seems Aya will occupy a similar role in Kasuga's life that Nakamura did, and that in coming together, they will go down the same path of deviant destruction in order to move away from the boredom of normalcy that they both inhabit. The manga teeters on this possibility as Aya, in a disposition that closely resembles Nakamura, calls her boyfriend “empty” and storms out of a party. Kasuga follows her out under the streetlights, where Aya admits that she also feels “empty,” and that she puts up a front around her friends in order to be accepted. In a particularly striking panel, Kasuga hallucinates the glare of the streetlights morphing into Nakamura's signature glasses on Aya's face (vol.8 623-624). If still engrossed by Baudelaire's binary of desire, where one can either keep up this facade and face boredom and lack of purpose, or pursue grotesque and evil desire, Kasuga would in this moment

perhaps suggest some extreme acts of desire to Aya here, similar to what he and Nakamura engaged in, in order to help her strip away this facade. Instead, Kasuga encourages Aya to continue her writing and share it with him, Aya's writing now acting as a small and nondestructive deviancy that she can pursue, and the act of sharing it with Kasuga representing the lowering of her facade and the revealing of her innermost desires. The manga here resists the binary that Baudelaire asserts by carving out a new path that neither denies the existence of desire nor asserts that desire must be destructive or grotesque, one that instead embraces the small deviancies of life without fear of ostracization, and without turning to the most extreme versions of those desires.

Despite this new approach, the consequences of Kasuga's past actions still linger around him, coloring his new romantic relationship with Aya. His home life is still strained, and this aspect of his life becomes further accentuated when his grandfather becomes ill, and he is faced with the decision to either stay in his new home or travel back to his hometown. Reflective of this new philosophy outside of the Baudelaire Binary, where desires can be faced without destruction, Kasuga decides to face the "scars" left by his past actions and return to his hometown (vol.9 254). The following difficulties that Kasuga encounters when confronted with his past actions serve to further criticize the ideology posed by *Les Fleurs Du Mal* that the manga embraced in the first half. Kasuga sees firsthand how his actions impacted his family members and former friends, making the abstract into the tangible and demonstrating the harm that this type of careless pursuit of desire can cause. But, along with serving as a reminder of the destruction his past actions have caused, this visit back to his hometown also serves as a time for Kasuga to try out this new philosophy that exists outside of the Baudelaire

Binary. Kasuga is able to take responsibility for his actions without putting up a fake facade, staying true to himself and his new pursuits of desire (his relationship with Aya and their shared passion for literature and writing). It is especially important that the manga includes these moments where Kasuga must face the realities of his deviant desire, as a central component of this new philosophy is its lack of clear cut or neat solutions, which do exist in both extremes of the Baudelaire Binary. Deviancy and destruction still exist, even in this new way of living. The part of Kasuga that once wished to burn himself alive rather than spend the rest of his life in a boring town still exists in some way, and so the embracing of his new desires also means the acceptance of the old ones.

This acceptance of deviant or destructive desires, while also creating a new path forward that does not rely on destruction as a necessary component of creation, can also help us rethink the necessity of destruction within adaptation. Just like the existence of an alternative path when pursuing desire, similarly pursuing adaptational desires through a unique artistic vision does not always require destruction, as Oshimi demonstrates with *Aku No Hana* itself. Similar to Kasuga's need to face his own destructive past, this alternative approach to adaptation still requires a conscious consideration of when destruction might still take place. Even though this alternative mode of desire and adaptation can exist where destruction isn't a central factor, the existence of deviant desires, and adaptational choices that will be upsetting to some, still do exist. Just as the manga acknowledges that there are some loose ends and rough patches in Kasuga's story, part of accepting this path outside of the Baudelaire Binary, both in relation to desire and the practice of adaptation, is that it sometimes lacks certainty or closure within it.



### **Aku No Hana Anime Adaptation**

Hiroshi Nagahama, the director of the 2013 anime adaptation of *Aku No Hana*, certainly demonstrated a unique artistic vision when he made the controversial decision to exclusively use rotoscoping, a technique where live action footage is traced over frame by frame, making it the first anime to use the animation style so extensively. The result of this adaptational choice is a product that looks wildly different from the source material; characters that were once visually appealing now appearing uncanny. When interviewed, Nagahama expressed awareness of how audience members might react, accepting that an initial backlash may occur. However, he thought that a more faithful art style would render an adaptation “pointless,” as fans could then just choose to read the manga instead. Both Nagahama and Oshimi expressed hopes that this alternative animation style would lead to an adaptation with added value and a more emotionally resonant experience than a standard adaptation could produce, demonstrating Oshimi’s willingness to let new artists experiment when using his own work as inspiration (kuromitsu).

Despite both creators’ hopes for the adaptation, the uncanny nature of the animation earned vitriol from fans of the manga and new viewers alike. Online anime fans described the show as “hideous,” a “let down” or “travesty,” and the director Nagahama as a “pretentious prick” unlike “good directors” who “try to capture the essence of what makes the source material great,” going so far as to suggest that Oshimi must have been duped into agreeing to the anime’s production, despite some sources suggesting otherwise (“Thoughts on Aku No Hana’s Art Style”). Ten years later, some viewers seem more willing to give the anime a fair shake, but even positive reviews often find it necessary to address or advocate for the uncommon art style, frequently referring

to it as the “elephant in the room” (“*Aku No Hana* Discussion”). The result of this negative reception due to the director’s unpopular choices was that the anime was never extended into a second season, the first season having only covered half of the manga. While negative reviews that cite a lack of meaningful character development may have been countered with the inclusion of this second season, the discontinuation of the anime means that this more complete adaptation will never come to be.

While I do find the animation of the *Aku No Hana* anime a bit unsettling, I find that the arcs of the characters being cut short is the greatest failing of the work. Because of this discontinuation of the greater story, the anime fails both to be a successful adaptation of the manga, as well as a successful adaptation or extension of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. The addition of characters and a linear narrative in which they have room to change and grow through is *Aku No Hana*’s greatest tool in its conversation with *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. If the reader of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, like Henry James, ever gets the sense that Baudelaire’s relationship with his thematic material is too shallow and impersonal, something that is being explored “outside and not inside” the self, *Aku No Hana* is then able to fittingly extend the collection of poetry into this realm of the “inside” by creating characters who embody and/or directly interact with the ideologies of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. In *Aku No Hana*, the pursuit of deviant desires is not an abstraction, but instead the central arc of the main character. By observing Kasuga as he grapples with when to listen to his own desires and when to abandon everything else to pursue them, readers witness not only the grounded consequences of this ideology for Kasuga himself, but also for those around him. The Flowers of Evil become tangible through this use of narrative and

character development, and thus, so does an adaptational strategy that more thoughtfully considers the desires of all parties.

### **End of the Manga**

In order to continue his pursuit of new desires in a way that also confronts the darker parts of himself, effectively keeping a foot in both ends of the Baudelaire Binary, Kasuga decides that he has to fully confront his past and reveal his true self to Aya. Kasuga exclaims that he can't read Aya's finished draft of her novel until they go to confront Nakamura, suggesting that the pursuit of these new desires would be hollow, incomplete, or wrong in some way without the acceptance of those old desires. When Kasuga finally finds Nakamura, her vibrant red hair (representing desire) is now black, and she is without her glasses which in previous chapters served to represent her facade of normalcy. With these small visual changes, we can deduce that Nakamura has also made some changes in the ways she approaches desire, perhaps having carved a new path of her own. As Kasuga tries to engage with her in conversations about the past, she largely dismisses them, claiming that she's glad Kasuga has "chosen the path everyone walks" through his more normal relationship with Aya (vol.11 349). However, Kasuga rejects this characterization of his current life, throwing Nakamura to the ground and declaring that, despite everything, he is "happy that [she hasn't] disappeared," suggesting that while he is choosing to pursue a more normal relationship with Aya, he is still willing to face and accept the deviant desires that Nakamura represents, and will preserve the flame of that desire through he and Aya's shared passions for literature (vol.11 369-369).

With this new approach to desire established, the manga continues to follow Kasuga as he and Aya enter college. As Kasuga studies *Les Fleurs Du Mal* in one of his classes (his professor mentioning “La Chevelure” in particular), he remarks to his friend that it has taken on an entirely new meaning than when he read it in middle school, though exactly how he feels about the work now is a bit ambiguous. We see him gain confidence at a new part time job, his relationship with Aya increases in intimacy, and in general, he and the other characters seem on track to achieve normal, happy lives. However, this conclusion does feel a bit bittersweet after all the time we have spent watching these characters in one way or another struggling to get away from the mundanity of this type of ending. While the story culminates in a sense of peace, there is also a feeling of unease, and so the reader also gets the sense that anything that could follow these peaceful moments is simply too boring to continue reading about, invoking the same ideology of poems like “Bénédiction.” The manga must come to an end because only the cycle of boredom and destruction was worth conveying through art, and now that the characters have accepted a mundane peace, they are no longer worth observing. So while the latter half of *Aku No Hana* is largely critical of the ideology of *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, in these final moments, the reader is still left with the scratching, nagging feeling that there may have been some truth in Kasuga's adolescent understanding of the collection of poetry.

### **Oshimi's Adaptational Strategy**

When interviewed about Charles Baudelaire and his influence on *Aku No Hana*, Shūzō Oshimi explains to the interviewer that, like Kasuga, he was exposed to *Les Fleurs*

*Du Mal* while he was in middle school. Thinking back to his own adolescent experience with the text, as well as engaging with other media that explored Baudelaire and his poetry like 1970's French film "Don't Deliver Us from Evil," inspired Oshimi to revisit *Les Fleurs Du Mal* in his own work. However, Oshimi intentionally did not reread *Les Fleurs Du Mal* when he began work on *Aku No Hana*, stating in the same interview that he didn't want his new, adult reactions to the text to change his perceptions and inhibit his ability to express authentically the way he reacted to the text as a young man before he really understood it. He only felt comfortable revisiting the text once he had finished the first half of the manga, where time then moves ahead and follows an older version of the cast, mirroring the experience of an older Kasuga who also revisits and creates new relationships with the collection of poetry (Hirota). This type of approach to adaptation works contrary to many popular perceptions that artists have an obligation to deeply understand the source material before adapting it, but what Oshimi is able to achieve is an adaptation that more honestly considers factors like reader reactions when ruminating on how to communicate a piece of art authentically in a new way. Rather than destroying something of the source material to make way for a new vision, Oshimi has instead communicated his authentic, real world adolescent relationship to the text simultaneously respecting the source material while also creating something new.

With this new information in mind, it becomes clear that Oshimi has effectively achieved everything through his adaptation that he has outlined as the best strategy to approach desire and live as a person in the world within *Aku No Hana*. He has embraced his own desires, including going so far as to completely put aside the original works in order to more fully capture the adolescent mindset that he wanted to explore in relation to

*Les Fleurs Du Mal*, but he manages to do so in a way that still honors and respects the original work, even when disagreeing with it. He works to recreate something of the original, but doesn't shy away from utilizing the medium he is working in to do so more effectively, even when this leads to big changes.

This realization, that Oshimi has utilized his strategy of desire within his own adaptational work, provides new context for the ending of *Aku No Hana*. While in some way, it is bittersweet: this idea that after working so hard to find a life that exists outside of the safe, boring normalcy, that the characters instead end up with a normal sort of happiness, the existence of the manga and the success of Oshimi's philosophy of desire that he creates when applied to the art of adaptation suggests that there is something worthwhile that can be created here. By adopting this sort of strategy, we can be left with the creation of something beautiful and special, rather than Baudelaire's assertion that this type of beautiful creation can only come from miserable suffering.

### **Conclusion**

And so, we reach the end of our *flânerie*, and in line with this practice of wandering aimlessly, this exploration of desire in relation to adaptation does not come with many definitive conclusions. Instead, I've explored here the winding path of my own desire, following the various lines of intrigue that *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, *Aku No Hana*, and their surrounding contexts have inspired me to pursue. Through the consideration of translation and adaptation as related fields of study, we've teased out the contradictory expectations and underlying desires of both fields. Further exploration into the nature of desire has revealed how desire is a useful framework for considering adaptation, since through the consideration of affect and the forces beyond our conscious understanding,

the complexities and contradictions involved in the process of adaptation become easier to parse through the lens of desire than of conscious logic. Additionally, I've worked to make the case that all of the contributing desires involved in the process of adaptation (fan, original creator, adaptor) should be considered together, like Hutcheon's horizontal line of adaptations, since all of these desires contribute to not only the end product of the adaptation itself, but also how it is received and how it interacts with the original text. By being more open about these desires in adaptations, as we might strive to be more open with ourselves about the various desires we harbor, and thinking more intentionally about how desire factors into adaptation, perhaps adapters will feel less beholden to the idea of textual faith, leading to more unconventional adaptations that do work as exciting and thought provoking as *Aku No Hana*. By acknowledging and accepting our desires as artists, translators, adapters and audiences, while also being intentional about when we pursue desires that might be destructive or harmful rather than considering destruction a necessity, we can create and engage with adaptations that continuously build, rather than flatten, replicate, or tarnish. Like Oshimi's philosophy of desire suggests, in order to truly engage in art and adaptation, one must be willing to look beyond the Baudelaire Binary and easy answers, even when this is uncomfortable.

Even with his assertions of how desire should be pursued, Oshimi acknowledges that, similar to the broader study of affect, it would be disingenuous to assert that he had crafted a definitive answer to the questions that he poses in *Aku No Hana*. As a way to signal to readers that the ending that he had crafted wasn't complete, the final chapter of the manga reverts back in time and begins again from Nakamura's perspective, suggesting that even the new ideology that we've gained through the course of the story

is incomplete. The winding desire path begins anew from where it once began, urging the wandering Flâneurs to take another turn, gaining further perspective on desire, adaptation, and the various affects that move us under the surface of conscious understanding.



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