All languages are rich in semantic and connotative possibilities, and poetry makes the most of them. The major innovators of French poetic language in the nineteenth century had access to many different levels and varieties of discourse. The concept of linguistic register, or language varieties, can help to define more precisely what kinds of language were available to them, to outline the poetic norms according to and against which they were writing, and to determine the rhetorical dimensions involved when they transgressed against those norms.

I. Levels of Language

When we read a passage like the second stanza of Baudelaire’s “L’Imprévu” we are struck by the way it juxtaposes different styles:

Célimène roucoule et dit: “Mon coeur est bon,
Et naturellement, Dieu m’a faite très-belle.”
—Son coeur! coeur racorni, fumé comme un jambon,
Recuit à la flamme éternelle!

But to determine just what brings this incongruity about and what its effects are requires a closer examination. We recognize elements from different categories and different levels of
what linguists have termed “language varieties” or “contextual language.” Flamme éternelle belongs to the language of sermons and the Bible; whereas flamme in the sense of “love” or “passion” belongs to the vocabulary of classical French poetry, a sublanguage I will be describing later on. On the other hand, recuit and jambon fumé belong to the language of cooking, a subject area (despite Sandburg’s definition) eliminated from such poetry. These culinary terms lead us to read flamme as a cooking fire as well. The phrase Flamme éternelle, belonging to the langue soutenue of sermons and dramatic and lyric poetry, is associated with written language and formal address. Très-belle is also a marker of formality, since the hyphenated form, though correct, was falling into disuse at the time (according to Littré and Larousse). On the other hand, “Et naturellement” is the kind of colloquial expression we associate with spoken discourse. It appears in what is indeed an example of reported speech; but roucouler in the sense of “sweet talk” was classified as a familiar term by contemporary dictionaries, and it is the speaker of the poem who uses it. Baudelaire makes much of these various levels and semantic fields. For instance, he plays on the root corne in racorni to recall the devil, in opposition to “Dieu m’a faite . . .” in the preceding line. Beyond these multiple resonances is the allusion to Célimène from “Le Misanthrope,” motivating both the direct quotation and, to a certain extent, the use of familiar language, since comedy was traditionally a less formal genre.

I have already called on several different categories in discussing these lines: semantic fields, levels of formality, differences between spoken and written discourse, genre considerations, and the question of intertextuality. It would be well to sort some of them out, determine their interrelations, and give an idea of the connotations they can carry.

Linguists, especially in Britain, have recently given attention to the different ways the speakers of a language can express themselves. People observe not only syntactical and semantic rules, but also rules relating to the context or situation of their utterances. Unlike geographical dialects or temporal dialects (e.g., Old French, modern French), the relevant dimensions here are those Gregory has termed “diatypes,” the
possibilities within a particular individual's speech. We would expect great variation, for example, in the utterances of a physician if she were writing an article for a medical journal, comforting a child patient, or making a grocery list. Linguists have established different systems of classifications to describe these variations, sometimes using different terms to refer to the same categories. I will follow the summarizing work of Gregory and Carroll's *Language and Situation*, which describes contextual language in three general, overlapping ways.

First, the dimension of *field* comprises the linguistic features usually correlated with an extralinguistic situation, baseball, say, or the weather. Although subject matter is the most important element here, what we call "subject matter" can be described more precisely. The general field of baseball is treated very differently when one is discussing a game in a bar, making a bet, announcing the batting order to the team, or swearing at the umpire. The second dimension, *mode*, refers to the medium of utterance: a radio sportscast, a newspaper column, a conversation between friends, and the printed program are all modes in which aspects of baseball can be discussed or presented. The major modal distinction is, however, the one between written and spoken discourse. Many of the characteristics of mode are related to another dimension, that of *tenor* (sometimes called "role") covering the relation between speaker and interlocutor. This dimension comprises illocutionary status (the speaker may be questioning, informing, greeting, etc.) and social position, the latter usually correlated with formality or informality of expression.

Obviously, there are interrelations among these categories: we might well expect criticism of an umpire's call to be expressed in the spoken medium and in distinctly informal speech at that. In the sports section of the paper, it would probably be somewhat more formal. If it came up in a law suit brought by an aggrieved player, considerable formality of address would be involved, as well as technical expressions associated with the legal field. When there is considerable predictability of the ways these categories intersect, the sublanguage so formed is called a *register*. Registers may be radically re-
stricted, like the language of bridge-bidding or knitting patterns, or they can have much looser boundaries, like political journalism or sermons or conversations about the weather.\(^5\)

The fact that words and phrases belong to particular registers gives them stylistic connotations. As Kerbrat-Orec cione notes, an expression can give information unrelated to its denotative role: namely, that “la séquence relève de telle catégorie de discours ou registre de langue” (38). For example, part of what patate connotes is that it belongs to familiar discourse \(^6\). The importance of this aspect of language to the study of poetry is obvious: poets make use of the various resonances of terms, among them their register-levels. Gautier recognizes this power of words in his preface to *Les Fleurs du mal*:

> Pour les poètes, les mots ont, en eux-mêmes et en dehors du sens qu'ils expriment, une beauté et une valeur propres comme des pierres précieuses qui ne sont pas encore taillées et montées en bracelets, en colliers ou en bagues. . . . Il y a des mots diamant, saphir, rubis, émeraude, d'autres qui luisent comme du phosphore quand on les frotte, et ce n’est pas un mince travail de les choisir. (46)

In the stanza from Baudelaire quoted above, the religious and poetic connotations of *flamme éternelle* are highly relevant, as are the status of the familiar expressions and the field marking of *recuit*, both of which undercut these connotations. It is important to remember, however, that the stylistic effects of these “marked” terms depend on their context. There are two kinds of contexts that are important and that intersect here: those established by the text itself and those within the genre (more properly the subgenre) to which it belongs. The interrelations between these contexts are of course of great interest as well: *recuit* is an unexpected term in the genre of love poetry of Baudelaire’s time; and, in the context of this stanza, it gains stylistic force through its juxtaposition with *à la flamme éternelle*.\(^7\)

What are the implications of these categories and their connotations for the constitution of a “poetic language”? Some linguists have called literature itself a register, sometimes
proposing a further subdivision of linguistic varieties into genres. Gregory and Carroll see literary genres as individually marked registers within literature (45-46). But others have recognized that, on the contrary, in literature we might expect to find elements from all registers. In some periods the combination of disparate registers can itself serve as a marker of poetry. Symbolism and postsymbolism can accommodate strong juxtapositions of registers, as in Laforgue’s *blocus sentimental* ("L’Hiver qui vient") or Pound’s “a tale for two, / Pregnant with mandrakes” ("Portrait d’une femme"). But such startling combinations of register are not characteristic of poetry of all periods: Racine could use the oxymoron *flammes si noire* but not the medical expression “*inflammation* si noire.” The notion of poetic language as “strangeness,” proposed by the Czech formalists and some of their French structuralist inheritors is a postromantic one: in other cultures and ages “poetic” status depends on conforming to the norms of a restricted poetic diction. This is true in particular for French poetry of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which Bruneau calls “neoclassical” (in Brunot’s *Histoire*).

Each age has its own poetic conventions regarding meter, rhyme, syntax, diction, and rhetoric, though they are of course subject to change. I am using “convention” in the sense of the set of expectations and assumptions the reader brings to a text by virtue of her experience with literature. The standardization of these conventions contributes to the creation of poetic traditions. Poetic practice must take the established traditions into account, whether to confirm them or to counter them.

So, although it is true that any word can enter into poetry, at a given time there are words that can properly be called “poetic” because, by convention, they are marked as such. Not only is this true for the neoclassical norm against which the romantics and Symbolists were writing, but they in their turn developed a characteristic poetic vocabulary: Marouzeau points out the romantics’ *fauve, farouche,* and *ténèbres,* the “Impressionists’ *languide, remembrances, détresses* (Précis, 109). As unconventional language is adopted by poets, it gradually becomes the conventional language, and often, what was first at-
tacked as "unpoetic" becomes the very sign of poetry. Poetry becomes, for example, the "synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits."

The opposition between "poetic" and "ordinary" language has often taken the form of a distinction between high or "elevated" and low diction; between noble and common (in French roturier, "plebian"). The first terms of these sets are obviously highly valorized. Aristotle establishes such a distinction in the sections of the Poetics called "The basic principles of poetic style":

The specific excellence of verbal expression in poetry is to be clear without being low. The clearest, of course, is that which uses the regular words for things; but it is low.... Impressiveness and avoidance of familiar language is achieved by the use of alien terms; and by "alien" I mean dialectical words, metaphor, lengthening of words, in short anything other than the standard terminology.... So, then, poetic expression should have some mixture of this kind in it; the one ingredient, that of foreign words, metaphor, ornamental words, and all the other varieties, will ensure that it is not commonplace or low. (58-59)

The devices Aristotle recommends are those used in his time to set poetic language apart: phonetic alterations of words through metrics; the use of archaisms and literally "foreign" or dialectical terms; and tropes. Such devices were thus part of what constituted contemporary poetic language. Although what counts as "foreign" words varies, the pattern of this opposition can be seen in literature and criticism in other periods and cultures as well.

"Alien" terms may in fact include "everyday language," as in the mixture of styles characteristic of modern poetry. In their otherwise excellent analysis of poetic language, Molino and Tamine attempt to divide poetry into two major groups: the first using standard discourse, a "langue accessible à tous" (whether refined or popular); the second distancing itself from the standard. They put satire, parodies, pastiches, comic verse, vers de circonstance, and "poésie lyrique directe" (examples that use refined language), ballads and songs (popular language) into the first category, characterized by a refusal of
obscurity and of the "grands mouvements de la rhétorique et du sentiment" (94-96). Yet, not only do many examples of the genres they mention make use of obscurity (much circumstantial verse, for instance) or inflated rhetoric (in fact, it is the common coin of most pastiche); but also the poetry of the other pole, "haute poésie," can certainly make use of the characteristics they associate with the "standard." (They do not describe this pole, but it probably includes tragedy and the heroic ode). The standard language relevant here is the poetic standard applicable at the time. As those studying language in context have shown, there are many "standard languages," both within a language as a whole and within any person's idiolect.

Theorists of poetic language have traditionally established a three-level hierarchy of styles. A middle style is introduced between the grand and simple styles; and the three styles correspond to three major divisions of genres. In Introduction à l'architexte, Genette has shown how widely genre classifications have varied from age to age and from theorist to theorist. It can be stated, however, that the more rigidly the genres are defined, the more fixed the stylistic constraints tend to be (Enkvist, 54). With potentially wide variation from genre to genre, even at one age, there is not only one "poetic language." Furthermore, at any period, different poets use poetic conventions very differently, and the way they use them can vary from text to text.

The conventions in force at a given period govern the ranges of linguistic register open to a poet. Whether poetry is to be sung, spoken, or read silently is of consequence to its metrics and phonetic effects. Because most French poetry since the Renaissance is in the written medium, syntax and expressions associated with the spoken mode tend to be avoided in verse. The dimension of field is also important. First, at a given period, certain kinds of speech acts (e.g., exhorting, narrating, addressing one's beloved) may be typical or unusual. Second, certain subjects may be common or banned. We may also expect predictability in the dimension of tenor: formal style is often an important part of "poetic diction," and different levels of formality are often associated with particular subgenres. Of course, a particular text may or may not meet the reader's
register-expectations (Gregory and Carroll, 72-73). In fact, when poets like those I will be studying play against these expectations, that resistance is itself highly relevant stylistically.16

Using the categories of linguistic register can help us both to characterize the poetic discourse belonging to a particular tradition and to distinguish more clearly poetic usage that deviates from its genre-conventions. It is especially useful in studying the language of nineteenth-century French poetry: the poets I am studying resisted the way the theorists and practitioners of French neoclassical poetry had divided up their linguistic world. But before going on to outline the basic characteristics of the neoclassical poetic code, I should mention certain problems that arise in classifying terms: first, with respect to the levels of the signifier and the signified; second, regarding the ways French language levels can be distinguished; and finally, taking into account the ways contemporary dictionaries indicate usage.

In applying the concept of register to poetic texts it is important to distinguish as carefully as possible between the subjects represented and the language levels used in their representation. Kerbrat emphasizes that semantic analysis should disassociate “Les connotations qui ont pour support signifiant l’objet lui-même, indépendamment de toute verbalisation” and “celles qui n’apparaissent que dans le traitement linguistique de l’objet” (73). The difference between bagnole and voiture, for instance, is a purely linguistic one. The French language offers many examples of language choice varying by formality. Thus, when Baudelaire refers to a prostitute, for instance, he has a wide range of tenors to draw on. The paraphrase “célèbre évaporée /Que Tivoli jadis ombragea dans sa fleur” or the synecdoche “Laïs” (“Les Petites Vieilles”) or the euphemism “femme galante” (“Le Vin du solitaire”) belong to the high style. Catin, as in “Au lecteur” and “Crépuscule du soir” belongs to “un langage un peu libre” according to Littré. But in “Le Jeu,” Baudelaire uses not only the euphemistic courtisane but also the vulgar putain to refer to the prostitutes in a casino. Of course, each of these terms carries stylistic connotations; and the language used reflects a certain attitude to what is represented. As Kerbrat notes: “le choix d’un terme de
niveau 'élevé' ou 'bas' est un indice indirect du caractère prestigieux ou méprisable que le locuteur prête au dénoté” (102; see also 103). The signifier carries a further message about the signified; in fact, it has another signified.

The situation is complicated in poetry by the fact that certain subject matters are themselves considered “poetic” or “unpoetic.” Many of the words introduced into nineteenth-century poetry refer to aspects of everyday, contemporary life, words like caoutchouc or photographe: there are no other, more “poetic” words that could be substituted for them. Technological expansion in the nineteenth century brought many such terms into the French language. These kinds of expressions had been avoided not because of their level of formality but because of their semantic field; in Kerbrat's terms, not because of their stylistic connotation but because of their denotation. Neoclassical poetry would have used periphrasis to denote such referents. Thus, the nineteenth-century poets championing the literal term rather than periphrasis sought to open poetic discourse to the field of everyday contemporary life as well as to the familiar tenor and the spoken mode. Furthermore, some concepts are only expressed at one level of style. For instance, as Marouzeau notes, livresque is unlikely to appear other than in refined usage (Précis, 108). So, although technical or scientific terminology, slang, childish expressions, etc., may be classifiable as such by dictionaries, it is often difficult to determine whether it is as signifier or as signified that they are to be analyzed.

A further distinction must be kept in mind, the one between the language of narration and that of reported speech. Traditionally, informality of diction was more acceptable in quotations than in the poet's voice: the distance between the narrator and the speaker assured the former's innocence with regard to what he or she was reporting. A parallel can be seen in the history of the novel: Hugo was proud of having introduced slang into Claude Gueux and Les Misérables; Sue's Les Mystères de Paris was an immense success; but when Zola had his narrator use slang and familiar diction in L'Assommoir in 1876, it created a scandal. Needless to say, the code for lyric poetry was even stricter, and marked terms (colloquial, scientific, childish, etc.) stand out in the context of verse.
The question of whether an expression is to be analyzed in terms of its signifier or its signified arises in particular in relation to “vulgar” language. For Matoré, such language refers to extralinguistic reality; it is “grossier” whether the signifier is “populaire” or not (86). Most other linguists, however, use it as an equivalent of “langue populaire” a language level associated with the familiar tenor and the spoken mode (Kerbrat, 25; Marouzeau, “Langue vulgaire,” 242; Guiraud, L’Argot, 78). Although the divergence between standard and popular language is particularly strong in French (Guiraud, Le Français populaire, 10), there are many different ways lexicographers classify usage that differs from the “langue cultivée” or “langue bourgeoise,” including familier, populaire, vulgaire, style trivial, and grossier. Although dictionaries may disagree on the classification or even on the inclusion of a word, it seems clear that there is a scale of acceptability lying between the ranges covered by slang dictionaries on the one hand and lexicons of “poetic” words on the other. We can make the “mode” distinction between speech and writing, covering such pairs as ça/cela and many syntactical differences. At the beginning of the nineteenth century familiar or vulgar expressions belong to the spoken language alone; both Littré and Robert oppose the words relating to colloquial usage to “langue littéraire.” Therefore, mode, at this period, is largely subsumed under the heading of formality of tenor.

I will be treating three main categories of colloquial usage: familiar language, popular language, and argot. The first is usually taken to be the conversational form of the standard language. The classification Popular French, the language of the working classes, is based on sociocultural criteria as well as properly linguistic ones (characteristics relating to the spoken mode and variations from standard grammar). The distinction between popular language and argot has a more rigid social definition: the latter was, until the nineteenth century, the secret language used by criminals. Though it was always mixed with popular speech, it was a separate language, not to be confused with the later senses of argot as slang in general or technical or professional jargons. Popularized by the 1828 mémoires of Vidocq (the criminal turned chief of the investigative police) and Eugène Sue’s immensely successful novel, Les
Mystères de Paris (1842-46), terms of argot began to turn up at all levels of discourse, if only for comic or picturesque effect.\textsuperscript{19}

The lines between familiar language and popular language on the one hand and between popular language and argot on the other are not clear ones: as Bruneau points out, they vary from one person to another and from one generation to another (Histoire, 12:386). These categories appear to be abstractions linguists apply to earlier periods than their own.\textsuperscript{20}

As Valdman has shown, Standard French and Popular French are fictions, two poles of a continuum that cannot be delimited with precision. Furthermore, all these levels of language are interdependent: they can often be defined only by what they are not. Like all linguistic entities, their existence depends on their diacritical distinction from the other components of the system.

In studying the intrusion of familiar and popular discourse into the poetry of the nineteenth century, it is useful to establish whether an expression was felt to be colloquial at the time.\textsuperscript{21} Fortunately, this was the age of the great lexicographers, especially Littré (whose dictionary was published between 1863 and 1872) and Larousse (Le Grand Dictionnaire universel dates from 1866-76). Littré was particularly concerned with recording usage. He gave a large number of quotations from literary sources as illustrations, to the point that he was criticized for writing a dictionary of the French written language.\textsuperscript{22} But he recognized that these sources do not make up the whole of the French language and that there are problems in determining levels of language: “Cette constatation est œuvre délicate et difficile. Pour peu qu’à ce point de vue on considère les formes et les habitudes présentes, on aperçoit promptement bien des locutions qui se disent et ne s’écrivent pas; bien des locutions qui s’écrivent, mais qui sont ou dépourvues d’autorité ou fautives” (“Préface,” iii). Fortunately, in studying poetry it is written usage that is important, and the precise classification of an expression matters less than the fact of its exclusion from the langue soutenue and the effects it can elicit in its context. Also, Littré did not only report on usage; his dictionary created norms for uses: it was the reference work consulted by writers of the time to find out what was or was not acceptable (Chaurand, 145).\textsuperscript{23}
Of course, phrases that are popular by virtue of their syntax are not to be found in dictionaries in any case. The individual words in Verlaine’s lines, for instance:

Dis, qu’as-tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse?

are all perfectly acceptable. It will be important to take note of such constructions. But the use of a popular or slang word in the context of a poem can have great power. Literary scandals caused by the introduction of familiar language tended to center on individual words: *mouchoir* in Vigny’s translation of *Othello*; *gamin* in Hugo’s *Claude Gueux*, or *torchons radieux* in his “Choses écrites à Créteil.” Using familiar diction outside of its normal context can be startling in everyday situations, too; Bally cites the discomfiture of the French people present when the president of a central European literary group complimented Giraudoux on his *bouquins* (239). Because of the particularly restricted nature of traditional poetic language in the nineteenth century, poets were able to make effective use of the stylistic shocks created when rules of formality were broken. To gauge the innovations in their work, we should look at the poetic code that provided its background.

II. Poetic Diction

In his 1796 “Cours de littérature,” La Harpe discusses how French neoclassical poetry followed Aristotle’s prescription to use “alien” terms by means very different from those the Greeks used:

Chez eux [les Grecs] les détails de la vie commune et de la conversation familière n’étaient point exclus de la langue poétique; presque aucun mot n’était par lui-même bas et trivial. . . . Un mot n’était pas réputé populaire pour exprimer un usage journalier, et le terme le plus commun pouvait entrer dans le vers le plus pompeux et dans la figure la plus hardie. Parmi nous, au contraire, le poète ne jouit pas d’un tiers de l’idiome national: le reste lui est interdit comme indigne de lui. Il n’y a guère pour lui qu’un certain nombre de mots convenus. (1:297)
Because of these limitations, the work of most poets of his time is monotonous: “c’est qu’il est bien difficile de soutenir un langage de convention dont il n’existe aucun modèle dans la société” (1:298). This langage de convention was constructed through a series of restrictions. Its corollary was a set of devices necessary to avoid the two-thirds of the French language La Harpe says it eliminated.

How much of the language was to be excluded varied by genre. Fontanier, for whom poetic language is distinguished by figures and a distinctive vocabulary (as it was for Aristotle), wrote in the 1820s that “Certains genres de poésie s’éloignent beaucoup moins que certains autres du langage commun, soit par le ton et le caractère de leur style, soit par la nature de leur objet” (181). Although there were different systems of genres and different names for the styles corresponding to them, they tended to be grouped into three categories by style: high (ode, epic); middle (tragedy); and low (comedy, satire, epître).24

The major distinction, however, was between high and low language: through the progressive exclusion of terms and situations reputed to be “bas,” their opposite, “noble” language, was constituted. Barthes sees this language as a true écriture, “c’est-à-dire une valeur de langage, donnée immédiatement comme universelle” (42). The prestige of the great writers of the seventeenth century served as its foundation. Voltaire, who with most of his contemporaries believed that the French language had now reached its point of perfection, shows the importance of the classical writers in fixing the language in his Dictionnaire philosophique: “Il me semble que lorsqu’on a eu dans un siècle un nombre suffisant de bons écrivains devenus classiques, il n’est guère plus permis d’employer d’autres expressions que les leurs” (“Langue française,” 19:189). The importance of the classic authors was maintained into the nineteenth century: the dividing point between historical and current usage in Littré’s dictionary entries was the seventeenth century.

Not surprisingly, as this poetic language became codified during the course of the eighteenth century, the rules became stricter, until usage found in Corneille or even Racine was no longer possible. These rules covered all the dimensions of register and included both signifiers and signifieds. This poetry’s
"foreign" words did not include dialectical terms, but rather a category of terms that could really be called "poetic" in the sense that they were to be found only in literature. Such was the prestige and durability of this code that we still think of words like zéphyr, coursier, and so on as poetic terms. That these strictures were maintained can be seen from the existence at the beginning of the nineteenth century of several dictionaries of poetic language, explaining which terms to use in which genres. Words excluded from such lexicons, then, and some that were banished to the fable, verse tale, and so on, could not be "poetic," could not constitute a poem. In addition, many "low" words that had no equivalents in the high style, their fields considered intrinsically unacceptable, were banned from poetry: details of everyday life, especially contemporary life, the entire spectrum of the life of the lower classes, and technical fields like medicine or botany. Even in reported speech, characteristics associated with the spoken mode were avoided: conversations could be recorded only in the high style. Even the "genres familiers" (light poetry, satire, and so on) were expected to restrict themselves to the language of polite conversation. In his Art poétique, Boileau criticizes the writers of burlesques (a short-lived parodic genre) for speaking le langage des halles, counselling: "Quoi que vous écriviez, évitez la bassesse:/Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse" (lines 78-79). As for the dimension of tenor, all informality was forbidden. There were to be no intrusions of familiar speech, let alone popular language or slang.

The problem facing neoclassical poets was, of course, how to write anything interesting when so many subjects and so much of the language was forbidden to them. Their solutions were the devices we now associate with neoclassical style. Because these devices were increasingly standardized they have lent themselves easily to parody and ridicule. They are of three major types: synonyms, rhetorical figures, and epithets. A poet wanting to refer to, say, chocolate could do so: he could consult Carpentier's Gradus français, ou dictionnaire de la langue poétique and find a term equivalent to chocolate in the high style: cacao. Such terms are the so-called synonymes de style, terms with equivalents in more casual genres. They were often words no longer in common use. Thus, Carpentier recom-
mends *labur* for *travail*, *époux* for *mari*, and *s'acheminner* for *marcher*. Another way to add elegance by simply substituting another equivalent was to use the name from classical mythology associated with the referent: thus, a bereaved mother was *Niobé*, the moon, *Diane*.

Tropes offered many other possibilities, especially personification, euphemism, synecdoche, and periphrasis. The importance of such tropes can be seen in Delille's definition of poetry as "une métonymie continuelle" (quoted in Bruneau, 12:23). Synecdoche was very common, usually involving the general term for the particular and the material for the name of the thing. Thus, *la chaudière* became *le bronze*, *peigne* became *l'ivoire* or *l'écaillle*, and so on. The major trope was, of course, periphrasis, and standard phrases were adopted. Thus, Carpentier gives "Le temple d'Hermès" or "le sanctuaire d'Hermès" as equivalents for the word *laboratoire*, and a gun is "un cylindre homicide." Often, periphrases combined several figures: rather than saying that a woman was pregnant, the poet, according to Carpentier, should write: "Elle porte en son sein [metonymy] le fruit [metaphor] de leur union [euphemism]."

Finally, it was possible to use a forbidden term when it was surrounded with enough prepositional phrases or adjectives to raise its style sufficiently. The standard example was Racine's use of *chiens* ennobled by its epithet, *dévorants*. It was this much-discussed phrase that gave rise to Hugo's boasting that he had removed the common noun's *collier d'épithètes*. These epithets became standardized, too, and were listed with appropriate words in the poetic dictionaries.

Neoclassical diction did not disappear with romanticism. Many of the romantics carried on the standard diction (Lamartine and Vigny notably), whereas the Symbolists made it a part of their mixed language. Traces of it still appear in twentieth-century poetry. There were, of course, reactions against this code. At the end of the eighteenth century Delille and his school introduced a great number of words relating to country life and agriculture into what was considered a new genre, "descriptive poetry." In the early nineteenth century, romantic theorists and practitioners sponsored the incorporation of exotic and picturesque words into verse and prose.
Thus, there was a redefinition of "foreign" words, this time including literally foreign words. Various attempts were made to introduce the tenor and the field of everyday life into verse, notably Sainte-Beuve's "Joseph Delorme" poems and Desbordes-Valmore's intimist verse. Among others, Coppée and du Camp continued this tendency; and the middle years of the century saw a great increase in such experimentation, until, according to Cressot, thousands of words had entered literary language (3).

The major poets of the nineteenth century, including Hugo, Baudelaire, and Verlaine, were engaged in creating a new poetic language in opposition to the old. They recognized that the language of the canon, because of the very fact that it was an established language, was now "commonplace." The passage from La Harpe quoted above links restricted diction to "images . . . hardies," an association already indicated by Aristotle. But the figures of neoclassical poetry had themselves become canonical. The limitations of the poetic language had led to extensive use of periphrasis and synecdoche, that is, to a proliferation of figures to avoid the mot propre, which was seen as the ordinary. By the nineteenth century, it was the use of the mot propre or even malpropre that was "hardi." Its concomitant was again striking figure, used to set off a language no longer fully distinct from that of the informal role or the spoken mode. In the 1880s the Decadents made a mixture of familiar and exotic diction part of their program, and the consequent "strangeness" noted by critics was yet another way of setting apart poetic language from "les mots de la tribu." A pattern emerges here, of the estranged becoming familiar and the commonplace becoming strange, opening up the simple opposition proposed by Aristotle. With these developments, too, the relationship between diction and figure becomes an issue.

III. Word and Figure

"Je nommai le cochon par son nom" is Hugo's claim in "Réponse à un acte d'accusation." There are a good many assumptions lying behind this statement, among them that there is one true word for a thing and that referential language is pref-
erable to figurative language. Genette sees the basic characteristic of figurative discourse as the possibility of a simpler way of saying what the figure expresses in a roundabout way (Figures, 205-21). Hugo's statement represents a rejection of such indirection and of rhetoric as such. At the same time, it is a repudiation of neoclassical diction: *cochon* is a provocative word against the background of the contemporary literary code. The introduction of familiar language into poetry has often been linked with a rejection of rhetoric. Lines like Hugo's "Plante là toute rhétorique" ("Genio libri") and Verlaine's "Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou" ("Art poétique") enunciate and illustrate such a view. Yet it has been observed that, in trying to resist rhetoric, nineteenth-century literature paradoxically reaffirms it. I will examine Hugo's claims and the value he accords to literal language in the chapter on his work, but the refusal of rhetoric associated with nineteenth-century poetry bears closer examination here. First, the search for simplicity of expression represents a continuity, not a break, with classical theory; second, familiar language does not stand in simple opposition to rhetoric; and finally, language levels themselves have a figurative dimension.

An important strain of seventeenth-century theory stressed the importance of clarity and simplicity over ornament, following the classical ideals of order and purity enunciated by Malherbe and codified by Boileau. Bouhours, for example, wrote: "la langue française hait encore les ornements excessifs; elle voudrait que ses paroles fussent toutes nues, pour s'exprimer plus simplement" (quoted in François, 1:332). An important purpose of periphrasis was to avoid technical language, to use terms that everyone could understand. Of course, there were conflicting tendencies like the ideal proposed by Du Bos: poetry as "une suite continuelle d'images" (quoted in Barat, 15). As periphrases became more complicated they turned into riddles, like Chénier's periphrase for paper: "un albâtre docile / Au fond des eaux formé des dépouilles du lin" (quoted in François, 2:96). Nonetheless, as Foucault says:

Toute la littérature classique se loge dans le mouvement qui va de la figure du nom au nom lui-même, passant de la tâche de nommer encore la même chose par de nouvelles figures (c'est la préciosité) à celle de nommer par des mots
enfin justes . . . Le romantisme croira avoir rompu avec l’âge précédent parce qu’il aura appris à nommer les choses par leur nom. A dire vrai tout le classicisme y tendait: Hugo accomplit la promesse de Voiture” (134).

The conflict between simplicity and ornament, the latter tending toward obscurity, finds echoes in the nineteenth century. When Brunetière wishes to defend the literary language of his time from “la déformation de la langue par l’argot” he maintains two incompatible positions: the classical ideal of “une langue qui soit immédiatement entendue de tout le monde,” and the vision of a literature that begins only when “les choses de la pensée cessent d’être en quelque sorte accessibles à tout le monde” (944, 943). Like neoclassical poetry, the poetry of the nineteenth century accommodates both the vision of a language for “tout le monde” and the special, hermetic languages of a Nerval or a Mallarmé. Mallarmé’s prizing of suggestion rather than naming itself carries on one aspect of neoclassical theory, echoing Rivarol’s injunction: “la poésie doit toujours peindre et ne jamais nommer” (quoted in Barat, 19).

In neoclassical poetry tropes served to ennoble language not only because of their ornamental value, but also because words unacceptable in their literal senses were often considered appropriate to poetry in their figurative meanings. For example, Carpentier finds acier familiar in the literal sense but noble in the figurative (standing for weapons or instruments made of steel or iron): “ce mot paraît alors appartenir à la langue poétique.” Of indigent he writes: “En prose il ne se dit que des personnes, mais en vers il est beau en parlant des choses.” This capacity of “noble” language was what led Gautier to describe the neoclassical attitude as an “horreur du mot propre” (quoted in Bruneau, Histoire, 12:49). But it would be wrong to associate figurative with poetic and literal with familiar language. On the one hand, by the beginning of the nineteenth century standard synonymes de style and periphrases had lost a good deal of their figurative power: as dictionaries like Carpentier attest, they came to be the only terms to use. In this way they came closer to literal expression. On the other hand, familiar and popular language is by no means lacking in fig-
In fact, just as some terms become elevated when used in their figurative sense, so many others become familiar: *ordure* or *gueule* or *espèce de*, for example. "Fig. et fam." or "Fig. et pop." are common designations in Littré.

When poets came to use many such terms, they had varied effects. An example might be the expression *tas de*. In Baudelaire’s "Le Cygne": "Je ne vois qu’en esprit . . . Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts," *tas de* is used in its literal sense, as a pile of physical objects. But when Hugo called the officials of the Second Empire "ce tas de laquais" and "ce tas de bourreaux" in "La Force des choses" (*Châtiments*), *tas de* is figurative. Its familiar status contributes to the strength of the insult. In "Voix de l’orgueil" (*Sagesse*), Verlaine uses the expression in the following lines:

Voix d’Autrui; des lointains dans des brouillards.

Des noces

Vont et viennent. Des tas d’embarras. Des négoces,

Et tout le cirque des civilisations

Au son trotte-menu du violon des noces.

Here, in conjunction with the enjambments, the broken-up sentences, and the old-fashioned, lightly comic term *trotte-menu*, *tas de* helps to establish a casual tone. The rhythm is that of the spoken mode, countering the regularity of the alexandrine line. Incongruous semantic fields are brought together: wedding parties and negotiations, circuses and civilizations. The added resonance of the slang sense of *cirque* enhances the effect of this striking contrast. The extreme informality and familiar tenor of *Des tas de*, contrasting with the term *civilisation*, destabilize the stanza’s level of formality. Conflicts in register are characteristic of Verlaine’s style, an important aspect of his "imprécision." In Rimbaud’s "L’Orgie parisienne," *tas de* functions in ways related to Hugo’s and Verlaine’s use of the term. It appears in a line describing the Parisians returning after the fall of the Commune: "Tas de chiennes en rut mangeant des cataplasmes." The familiar expression contrasts with the medical term *cataplasme*. Their incongruity underlines the incoherence of the revolting image expressed in this line and the violence of the insult it carries. We can conclude from these examples not only that familiar
expressions are often figurative, but also that their familiar status gives them stylistic connotations, connotations that can be put to use in very different ways. We can also see from lines like these how far we have moved from neoclassical decorum in poetic diction.

The fact that levels of formality have stylistic connotations means that their use can produce figures rather than eliminating them. If, as Genette claims in *Figures*, figure exists in the gap between what is said and what might have been said, then diction, too, has figurative possibilities: if another signifier is possible—*je m’ennuie* for *je m’emmerde*, *femme de mauvaise vie* for *putain*—there comes into existence another kind of figure, a figure of register. The gap between the two terms can be read as parody or humor or satire or opposition to poetic tradition or in many other ways. In the neoclassical tradition, just as *voile* for ship carries the message “I am poetry,” so does *coursier* for horse. When poets begin to use *cheval* or *bidet* or *canasson* instead, their message is different, but not less important.

Studying language varieties makes us aware of the many ways speakers of a language can express themselves. The pig does not have just one name: even simple reference can involve a good many terms, among them the more elevated *porc*. On the other hand, words have many meanings and many uses: *cochon* used in addressing a person is both familiar and figurative, and it is usually used for insulting rather than referring. As poets introduced familiar language, slang, technical words, and so on into their work, they opened new possibilities for stylistic effects and for figurative expression, possibilities that have become an important part of modern poetry.

The poetic program Hugo enunciated in his line “Je mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire” was developed in very different modes by Hugo himself, Banville, and Baudelaire, and it culminated in the striking lexical inventiveness of the work of Rimbaud, Verlaine, and their successors. Both Corbière and Laforgue also use striking diction, but this aspect of their work has been studied extensively, and I will not treat them in detail. Nor will I deal with other minor poets working in the same direction or the Decadents who followed. This develop-
ment was at its height between 1850 and 1880, by when the new poetic vocabulary had for the most part been established.\textsuperscript{34}

In studying these poets, I will examine only their verse. Prose poetry responds to very different stylistic exigencies, genre conventions, and reader expectations. In fact, the prose poem offered freedom from genre constraints lessening conflicts with the established codes.\textsuperscript{35} Verse, on the other hand, had to contend with the conventions of diction that its form led readers to expect. It was the interaction with these conventions that made possible many of the new effects this poetry created.

As the example of \textit{tas de} shows, familiar diction has a different role to play in the work of each of these poets. Those roles can tell us something about the way each uses language in his poetic universe. They also raise different theoretical questions, about the relationship between literal and figurative discourse, about the concepts of "lofty" and "low" subjects and styles, and about the ways familiar diction can be naturalized, either by genre considerations or by a correspondence between the signifier and the signified. Such problems are not only interesting from a theoretical point of view: they inform the poems themselves. It is through their work that these poets established a new model both for poetic language and for the language we use to discuss it.