In his biography of Charles Baudelaire, the late Claude Pichois, Vanderbilt Distin-
guished Professor of French Emeritus, mentioned two reactions to the French poet's most celebrated and infamous work, the collection of poems titled *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A government report called the book, first published in 1857, "an act of defiance in contempt of . . . religion and morality." Victor Hugo, on the other hand, wrote to praise Baudelaire by noting, "Your 'flow-
ers of evil' are as radiant and as dazzling as stars." Sub-
sequent reac-
tions have cov-
ered the full spectrum of those polarized opinions, including visual interpreta-
tions of the poems themselves.

Many of Baudelaire's poems were erotic, sensuous, and flouted conven-
tional mores. In August 1857, he was
prosecuted for "offending public and religious morality." Ultimately, the French court fined Baudelaire 300 francs and banned six of the most erotic and sexually explicit poems from the volume.

In the summer of 1944 French artist Henri Matisse began the project to illustrate *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The edition was completed in 1947 and published by La Bibliothèque Française. This rare first edition has just been acquired by the Jean W. and Katherine T. Bandy Center for Baudelaire and Modern French Studies.

In this book Matisse illustrated a selection of 33 poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal*. His images, mostly of women's faces, also include por-
traits of the poets Baudelaire and Guillaume Apollinaire, and a self-
portrait. Delicate line lithographs face the first page of each poem. Matisse also illustrated the work of such other writers as James Joyce, Pierre Reverdy, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Tristan Tzara.

The illustrations of women's faces, drawn from models, evoke the spir-
it of each poem. Of particular inter-
est is the poem, *L'invitation au voyage*, which contains the famous line "Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, peace, and pleasure)," the title of a 1904 painting by Matisse. The woman's face opposite this poem is traced in a few, sparse and lyrical lines.

Matisse added designs at the end of each poem, which become abstract blossoms mirroring the florid quality of the verse. He also drew the capital letters that begin the first word of each poem, transforming image to letter. It is said that as Matisse pondered how to match the character of the poems, he declared that "the drawing should be the visual equiva-

Let's be certain, ma douce, Sagez à le dormez (Sleep well, my sweet, Peace in your dreams)

Lez, que dir d'etre ou la son 

For you may make these things to appear

De ces rares brindilles

Pour vous en retirer les charmes

Si étranges.

De ces trois poèmes, Faim, l'amour, triomphe vous laisser.

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