

Remember This Line?

“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.” Spoken by Kevin Spacey’s character Verbal Kint, it’s probably the most oft-quoted line from the 1995 movie *The Usual Suspects*. Some people mistakenly attribute it to C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*, which involves a dialogue between two demons who are trying to bring about the ruin of their human “patient.”

But the line actually comes from a short story by the French poet Charles Baudelaire entitled [“The Generous Gambler”](#) (1864), in which a man gambles away his soul to the devil. Here is the paragraph containing the quote:

“He [the Devil] complained in no way of the evil reputation under which he lived, indeed, all over the world, and he assured me that he himself was of all living beings the most interested in the destruction of Superstition, and he avowed to me that he had been afraid, relatively as to his proper power, once only, and that was on the day when he had heard a preacher, more subtle than the rest of the human herd, cry in his pulpit: ‘My dear brethren, do not ever forget, when you hear the progress of lights praised, that the loveliest trick of the Devil is to persuade you that he does not exist!’”