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**Summary:** *This essay looks at London, Paris and St Petersburg as these are represented in nineteenth-century literature, in novels and in the poetry of Rimbaud and Verlaine. It examines how the urban landscape is seen as marked by new trompe l'oeil effects, which lead the city-dweller in and create the uncanny, and it investigates the meaning of such phantasmagoric effects in making the city strange, and spectral, and exciting, as 'the devil lights the lamps'.*

**Keywords:** *Phantasmagoria, commodity, trompe l'oeil, Dickens, London, Petersburg, Gogol, Rimbaud, Verlaine.*

**Résumé :** *Cet article porte sur la représentation de Londres, Paris et Saint Pétersbourg dans la littérature du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans le roman mais aussi dans les poésies de Rimbaud et de Verlaine. Nous verrons comment le paysage urbain est perçu comme marqué par de nouveaux effets de trompe-l'oeil déroutants et troublants aux yeux du citoyen et nous interrogeons le sens de ces effets fantasmagoriques, faisant de la ville un lieu étrange, fantômatique et excitant comme si « le diable allumait les lampes ».*

**Mots-clés:** *Fantasmagorie, commodité, trompe-l'oeil, Dickens, Londres, Saint Petersburg, Gogol, Rimbaud, Verlaine.*

In Grigory Kaganov's *Images of Space: St Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts*, discussing St Petersburg as a city with correspondences to both London and Paris, Kaganov analyses representations and constructions of city-space in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. St Petersburg was, in Dostoyevsky's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, in comparison with Paris and London, "the most fantastic city with the most fantastic history of all the cities of the earth" (1988:19). For Donald Fanger (1965: 203), Dostoyevsky says this on the basis of the abnormality of St Petersburg's life; it suggests absence of reality in "the most abstract and intentional city in the whole round world" - a statement supplemented by the Underground Man saying that cities can "be either intentional or unintentional" (1972:17-18). The "intentional" drive of St Petersburg, Peter the Great's planned city, is echoed in the Crystal Palace being

read as a model for London, and future cities, and by Haussmann's Paris; which makes it necessary, when talking about one city, to remember that it contains the intentions and unconscious non-intentions, of many other cities. Paris and London are not separate entities, and both are in St Petersburg.

Kaganov discusses simulation of space produced through machines creating optical effects, giving an "illusory animated motion" (1997: 90). What has the power of illusion plays with, makes fun of, the person who believes in the illusion (the word comes from *ludere*, to play); that the city is the place for lost illusions is the subject of Balzac; that the city is in popular culture the place of *trompe l'oeil* is the subject of James Cook's *The Arts of Deception*, on P.T. Barnum in New York. Kaganov discusses the phenakistiscope, (1834, OED), "instrument for deceiving the eye". The expression '*trompe l'oeil*' [trick the eye] appears in French first around 1803, as a term from painting, and was, apparently first used in a metaphorical, non-technical sense, in 1825. It comes into English in 1889. Kaganov maps deceiving the eye on to new representations of city-space taking place in the 1830s, the decade of Balzac, Gogol, and Dickens, so I will consider *trompe l'oeil* as both inside representations of the city, and as constituting its spaces, and compare Paris and London as cities tricking the eye.

Altick's *The Shows of London* portrays London putting itself on display as a show, including the theatre; this was, for Peter Brooks, the "object of Balzac's repeated ambitions and possibly the key metaphor of the nineteenth century experience of illusion and disillusionment" (1976: 122-3). In Dickens' *David Copperfield*, set in the 1820s, when David Copperfield and Steerforth meet up in London, having been to Covent Garden to see *Julius Caesar*, they go out, for a Pierce Egan-like life in London, "in a hackney-chariot, and saw a Panorama and some other sights, and took a walk through the [British] Museum" (DC 20:300). Altick (1978:134-7) discusses the Panorama, which, though not Leicester Square's first 'exhibition', (a word first used for a collection of paintings in London in 1760, the Society of Artists at the Foundling Hospital - Altick, 1978:2), made it virtually synonymous with miscellaneous exhibitions: the Great Exhibition was initially planned for Leicester Square (Altick, 1978:229). In contrast, Paris' panorama was associated with the Passage des Panoramas (1800), in the space between the Bourse (built 1826) and the Boulevard Montmartre, so linking the place of banking and finance with the place of consumption via the *trompe l'oeil* of the Arcades. Altick comments on various exhibitions, and on the phantasmagoria, or magic-lantern show, first shown at the Lyceum in London in 1802, and which concentrated at first on displays of spectral hauntings with an appeal to 'Gothic' imaginings. It was supplemented by the invention, by Henry Langdon Childe (1781-1874), of "dissolving views" developed by 1818, assisted by Sir Goldsworthy Gurney's invention of limelight, which made views dissolve smoothly (Altick, 1978:217-220). 1802 at the Lyceum also saw the beginning of Madame Tussaud's waxworks (Altick, 1978:333). Such displays supplemented new appearances of commodity goods in arcades, exhibition-spaces and plate-glass shops, which by the 1850s, with Haussmann's opening up of Paris, increased round-the-clock visibility, abolishing the night with gas-lighting.

If everything has become visible, the eye is being tricked. Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* compares the phenakistiscope with the toy, the 'thaumatrope', (literally 'wonder-turner'), in London in 1825; here, rapid spinning of a circular disk with a drawing on either side had the effect of uniting the two images into a single one. The phenakistiscope was created by Joseph Plateau (1801-1883), who did research in optics. Crary quotes Plateau: "several objects which differ sequentially in terms of form and position are presented one after the other to the eye in very brief intervals and sufficiently close together, the impression they produce on the retina will blend together without confusion and one will believe that a single object is gradually changing form and position" (Crary, 1992:107-9). As Kaganov says, "By looking through radial slits in a revolving drum, [Plateau] anticipated 'moving pictures'". Crary (1992:117-132) analyses Charles Wheatstone's stereoscope (OED, 1838), which from two pictures made an apparently solid, substantial single image. Ability to see reality is sustained by an optical illusion; the eyes, as with the after-image, sustain what is seen of themselves. The "afterimage", Crary says, "allowed one to conceive of sensory perception as cut from any necessary link with an external referent". Foregrounding it points to "the introduction of temporality as an inescapable component of observation". (Crary, 1992:98) Vision becomes part of memory.

If for Oscar Wilde "the nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac's" (quoted, Brooks, 2005:21), Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* calls the diorama "the recent invention ... which carried optical illusion to a higher degree than the Panoramas." (Balzac, 1991:103) This evokes a commentary on how, under its influence, everyone now jokingly puts '-rama' after every important noun, carnivalising language: as Beryl Schlossman (1993) says, "optical illusion is transformed into the evanescent modernity of language", suggesting language has become a form of trickery just as much as the city's attractions are based on *trompe l'oeil*. Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* ('Ferragus', 'La Duchesse de Langeais' and 'La Fille aux Yeux d'Or') appeared between 1833 and 1835, mapping Paris, its streets and houses, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, its classes and its common pursuit of gold and pleasure, the latter being an urban phenomenon, and both focussed on the image of the girl with the golden eyes. Each story sees Paris as a single total entity, however monstrous, showing the impossibility of reading beyond the illusion. And Paris shows gender as confused through *trompe l'oeil*: south of the Luxembourg gardens is a blank spot, "a space in Paris which has no sex or gender" (151). Gender is disturbed more radically when, in 'La Fille aux Yeux d'Or', the dandy Henri sees a woman one Sunday in the Tuileries Gardens, and pursues and possesses her, only to realise that she, Paquita, is the mistress of his own sister (Mariquita): Paquita was attracted to him because of his resemblance to the woman she loved. Like him, the sister was illegitimate: "the daughter of a Spanish lady, brought up in Havana, conveyed back to Madrid with a young creole [Paquita] from the Antilles, both of them burdened with the ruinous tastes customary in the colonies" (331). Shoshana Felman's analysis shows Henri's attraction to the woman as a desire to have his masculinity mirrored, and Paquita's attraction to him as a desire for the man as woman: she makes him dress as a woman, and at the height of passion calls him 'Mariquita', which makes him a substitute for a woman, and, as Felman points out, an effeminate man, suggesting that homosexuality (as with Vautrin,

whose name *Trompe la mort* puns on *trompe l'oeil*) makes it impossible to read the city (1981:30). (Similarly, Thackeray's *Pendennis* notes how Pen goes to the theatre and sees an actress playing a man, "and that eminent buffo actor, Tom Horseman, dressed as a woman. Horseman's travestie seemed to him a horrid and hideous degradation". (Thackeray, 1994:622) Thackeray dislikes the *trompe l'oeil* of the sexual travesty, but records it.)

The pursued Parisian woman is a lure, for in Balzac, prostitution is, as Eugene Holland says, "the general model for *all* social relations in bourgeois society." (1993:242) So is the city, in Gogol's short story 'Nevsky Prospect' (1834), whose St Petersburg draws on Balzac's Paris, as described in 'Ferragus' which Gogol may have known (Fanger, 1965:103). The Nevsky Prospect was part of Peter's layout of the city, and also known as the Perspective, as Kaganov (1997:30, 82) says, pointing out that it makes the city look as if built for the houses, not the people. The OED's first reference for this 'Prospect' is 1836: "If you can imagine such a thing as a street of gin-palaces just after the painting season...you may form an idea scarcely exaggerated of the Nevski Prospekt". Prospect, "that which is viewed from a particular location or position; a spectacle, sight, or scene" (OED) became Russian, suggesting that what lies before is given to the eye, to be surveyed, and that there is that in the scene which asks to be looked at. It flatters the subject who looks, and plays with him, asking the spectator what he can see. Kaganov quotes Leitch Ritchie, in *A Journey to St Petersburg and Moscow* (1836), comparing the Nevsky Prospect to Oxford Street:

What London has nothing to compare to - and I affirm this positively - is the grandiosity of those perspectives which open out from the main street. Here there are no back streets, alleys, blind-alleys, side-streets ... These cross streets are parts of the main street, only they happen to go at right angles to it. The houses are the very same in shape and colour ... and the view is completed by the same cupolas and spires. (quoted, Kaganov, 1997:84)

Urban space is defined in terms of several perspectives. Kaganov links this new perception, with a decentering of space, which is now no longer empty as it had been before, at the centre of the vista (Kaganov, 1997:62-63). He sees this in Vasily Sadovnikov's *Panorama of Nevsky Prospect: The Left Side* (1835), which shows the perspective down a cross-street. The Prospect appears for only a short space, from the point of view of looking across the street. What is to the right and left of the buildings (all with signboards) is invisible. The street is not seen in its idealized version, but as if it is a lived space, with intersections which defeat total vision, but what is to the right and left may also imply a threat, the uncanny, as another part of *trompe l'oeil*. So, when Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*, walks away from Razumikhin, crosses the Nikolaevsky Bridge and turns his face towards the Neva, looking towards the Czar's palace and towards St Isaac's cathedral:

He stood for a long time gazing steadily into the distance; this spot was particularly familiar to him. A hundred times, while he was at the university, had he stopped at this very place, usually while he was on his way home, to fix his eyes on the truly magnificent view and wonder each time at the confused and indescribable sensation it

woke in him. An inexplicable chill always breathed on him from that superb panorama, for him a deaf and voiceless spirit filled the splendid picture. (Dostoyevsky, 1989: 96)

In draft, Dostoyevsky called it “a spirit of muteness and a certain negation”. The narration confirms and negates the publicly validated artistic value of the panorama. Kaganov points out that the space of the panorama means nothing to Raskolnikov: “his imagination is entirely absorbed by the narrow corners and dark depths of the city. And Raskolnikov (in the sixth chapter of part 1 of the novel - i.e. before he has committed murder) keeps pondering this curious fact” (Kaganov, 130). Raskolnikov wants what cannot be seen; what can be seen takes something away from him, makes him deaf and dumb, makes him mute, or, to use Paul de Man’s pun, mutilates him. As deaf-mute, the panoramic view has the traumatic power of epilepsy (see Mark 9:25 in the Bible). So, for example:

Numbers of dealers and rag-and-bone men of every kind thronged in the basement cook-shops, the dirty and stinking courtyards of the houses, and especially the public houses in the market-square. Raskolnikov preferred these places and all the neighbouring backstreets and alleys when he went wandering about. (Dostoyevsky, 1989: part 1, chapter 5, 52)

And, in chapter 6:

he suddenly began to wonder why, in big towns, people chose of their own free will to live where there were neither parks nor gardens, but only filth and squalor and evil smells. This reminded him of his own walks in the Haymarket. (Dostoyevsky, 1989: part 1, chapter 6, 62)

The attraction to guilt compares with Dickens’s attraction to the slums of Seven Dials. This is not a view of London which is either produced by or produces *trompe l'oeil*; there are virtually no panoramic views of London in Dickens, no views from the bridge, or from the top of the Monument, or Saint Paul’s, nor interest in monuments, save the Monument in the view from Todgers’s. London is not a unity in Dickens as it is in Balzac. Similarly with the Dickensian Dostoyevsky, who says about his eight days in London that he did not see St Paul’s Cathedral; he might have seen it in the distance, but was in a hurry to get to Pentonville (1.5). Perhaps panoramic spaces have a castrating effect, making deaf and making dumb, annihilating the subject, silencing him. Other, unintentional spaces, outside the imperial project, do not disconfirm the subject.

This disconfirmation or annihilation of the subject is basic to Gogol’s *Nevsky Prospect*, narrating the masculine humiliations, one tragic (with the artist, Piskarev) one comic (with the army officer, Lieutenant Pirigov) befalling those who pursue women in the evening, when the lamps are lit. The narrator concludes, “how strangely our fate plays with us”:

But strangest of all are the events which take place on Nevsky Prospect. Oh, do not believe this Nevsky Prospect! I always wrap myself tighter in my cloak and try not to look at the objects I meet at all. Everything is deception, everything is a dream, everything is not what it seems to be! You think this gentleman who goes about in a finely tailored frock coat is very rich? Not a bit of it: he consists entirely of his

frock coat. You imagine that these two fat men who stopped at the church under construction are discussing its architecture? Not at all: they're talking about how strangely two crows are sitting facing each other. You think that this enthusiast waving his arms is telling how his wife threw a little ball out the window at a completely unknown officer? Not at all, he's talking about Lafayette. You think these ladies ... but least of all believe the ladies. Peer less at the shop windows: the knickknacks displayed in them are beautiful, but they smell of a terrible quantity of banknotes. But heaven forbid you should peer under the ladies' hats! However a beauty's cloak may flutter behind her, I shall never follow curiously after her. Further away, for God's sake, further away from the street lamp! pass by it more quickly, as quickly as possible. You'll be lucky to get away with it pouring its stinking oil on your foppish frock coat. But, along with the street lamp, everything breathes deceit. It lies, all the time, this Nevsky Prospect, but most of all at the time when night heaves its dense mass upon it and sets off the white and pale yellow walls of the houses, when the whole city turns into a rumbling and brilliance, myriads of carriages tumble from the bridges, postillions shout and bounce on their horses, and the devil himself lights the lamps only so as to show everything not as it really looks. (Gogol, 2003:277-8)

Gogol makes the army officer central to his narrative vision of St Petersburg; he is also a presence in Balzac, less in Dickens. Army officers, a subject for painting, are more Thackerayan: Thackeray tends towards the historical novel. The absence of the Napoleonic in London makes a difference between the capitals, suggesting that Balzac is less to be compared with Dickens than with Thackeray, admirer of Napoleon, and Balzacian in carrying characters over from novel to novel, maintaining realist illusions. Gogol, like Balzac, but unlike Dickens, sexualises the city as female and deceptive. In *Nevsky Prospect*, everything is sexualised, including moustaches: the moustache speaks of the fetish, and goes under the nose, Gogol's supreme fetish. The fetish works by *trompe l'oeil*, and associates with life on the Nevsky Prospect seen as so many synecdoches, as the Nevsky Prospect is a synecdoche for St Petersburg, a collection of parts, which, as in *trompe l'oeil*, may lack something, or have something in surplus. The paragraph suggests the power of coats, hats and knick-knacks. Seen in the evening, these are more dangerous, for the devil lights the lamps; vision in night-time St Petersburg is (dis)organised by something uncanny, demonic. That element works throughout the narrative, fragmenting people, as when Piskarev is in the rich hall, full of "transparent Parisian creations" (Gogol: 2003, 259) which is, of course, his fantasy: "The extraordinary diversity of faces threw him into complete bewilderment; it seemed as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed those pieces together with no rhyme or reason" (Gogol: 2003, 258). The demonic world comprises pieces connected or disconnected, reality fetishised, the fetish realised, and the fetish includes language, for Piskarev "heard so many French and English words" (Gogol: 2003, 258). This is simultaneously London, Paris and St Petersburg. The deceptiveness of the dark, making white walls stand out in relief, implies that the modern city questions enlightenment, rationality, and symmetry. The prostitute embodies what is true of the city, "she would have been a divinity in a crowded hall, on the bright parquet, in the glow of candles, the awestruck company of her admirers lying speechless at her feet. But alas! by the terrible will of some infernal spirit, who wishes to destroy the

harmony of life, she had been flung, with a loud laugh, into the abyss” (Gogol: 2003, 257). Everything here is trickery; the first vision, which fetishises the woman as the centre of attention as a feminine ideal, deceives like the second, which makes what has happened to her symbolic of the loss of ‘harmony’ - enlightenment order - in the city. Sexuality in the city must be avoided, unlike in *Le Père Goriot*, when Rastignac looks down from Père Lachaise, the newly created (1804) cemetery, upon Paris, which, “tortueusement couché”, lies like a reptilian woman when seen panoramically from above:

Rastignac ... walked a few paces to the higher part of the cemetery, and saw Paris spread out along the winding banks of the Seine, where the lights were beginning to shine. His eyes fastened almost hungrily upon the area between the column in the place Vendôme, and the dome of the Invalides, home to that fashionable society to which he had sought to gain admission. He gave this murmuring hive a look which seemed already to savour the sweetness to be sucked from it. (Balzac, 1991:263)

*Trompe l'oeil* suggestions in the Nevsky Prospect associates St Petersburg with the fantastic, like Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* (1833) and *The Queen of Spades* (1834); Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1848) is *A Poem of St Petersburg*. London is less fantastic for Dickens or Thackeray; Dostoyevsky describes it like the prison of *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, which had just appeared. London is:

A city bustling day and night, as immense as the sea; the screeching and howling of machines; the railroads built over the houses (and soon under the houses); that boldness of enterprise; that seeming disorder which in essence is bourgeois order in the highest degree; that polluted Thames, that air saturated with coal dust; those magnificent public gardens and parks; those dreadful sections of the city like Whitechapel with its half-naked, savage and hungry population. A city with its millions and its worldwide trade, the Crystal Palace, the International Exhibition ... Yes, the Exposition is striking. You feel a terrible force has united all these people here, who come from all over the world, into a single herd ... [people] silently crowding into this colossal palace - and you feel that here something final has been accomplished, accomplished and brought to an end. (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 37)

The Crystal Palace, as a centre for seeing the reality which it puts on display, is so powerful as a lure that “it would require a great deal of eternal spiritual resistance and denial not to succumb, not to surrender to the impression” (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 37). But Paris integrates things into a “calm of order”, and in this regulation, which gives bourgeois, superficial decorum, it is unlike London, so “huge and abrupt in its individuality”. “Every abruptness, every contradiction, gets along with its antithesis and stubbornly walks hand in hand with it; they contradict each other yet apparently in no way exclude each other” (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 36). Equally, Parisians, with their “demand for virtue” (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 45) are marked by another contradiction: Dostoyevsky notes that the Frenchman is “in terrible dread of something, despite all the *gloire militaire* which thrives in France”. This fear consorts with “a remarkably noble look” (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 45). Two pages later, the text asks what the French are afraid of (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 47), but concludes, “I was mistaken about the bourgeois's being all huddled up and about his still being afraid of something. As for being huddled up, he really is all huddled up and is rather frightened, but overall the bourgeois enjoys complete

prosperity. Although he indeed deceives himself, although he declares to himself that everything is all right, this in no way disturbs his apparent self-confidence. Further, whenever his spirits are running high, he is terribly self-confident, even on the inside. How all this can be compatible in him is truly a puzzle, but it is so" (Dostoyevsky, 1988: 56). While London is where contradictions exist side by side, as in Dickens, Paris contains bourgeois self-contradiction, where having outward confidence, which should be a marker of inward insecurity, tricks the bourgeois into thinking everything is all right.

Lacan, in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, discusses the eye's desire to probe, to be envious, to be separate from what it sees. Yet the eye is aware that it is under the 'gaze', whose prior look constructs the subject as one who looks. The gaze cannot be seen, because it is the 'real', beyond symbolisation in any form; but insofar as it may be gestured towards, its non-symbolisable nature annihilates the subject, in showing that something always slips away from being represented in the picture; there is always something which eludes the subject, and which therefore shows up a lack in the subject; it defeats male curiosity (which motivated de Marni with the girl with the eyes of gold) with the marker of castration. "It leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance" (Lacan, 1998: 77). But the picture is "a trap for the gaze" (Lacan, 1998: 89), arresting its effects, so that Lacan can suggest that the picture invites the viewer to "lay down his [own] gaze ... as one lays down his weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting" (Lacan, 1998: 101). The painting seems to confirm the viewer; Lacan calls this a *trompe l'oeil* (Lacan, 1998: 103). Alluding to the classic Pliny narrative of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, he says that the subject always wishes to see more, and the picture lures the viewer on, but for that reason the picture must trick the eye. The following section, 'What is a picture', indicates that what tricks the eye is what cannot be read, the stain, the spot, within the picture. What tricks the eye (*trompe l'oeil*) causes a '*dompte-regard*', a taming of the gaze (Lacan, 1998: 109). Zeuxis's picture is so realistic that birds come to feed on the imaginary grapes. But Parrhasios's picture makes the friend ask what is behind the veil painted on the wall. The ultimate *trompe l'oeil* is painting a veil which makes the person ask what is behind it.

The *trompe l'oeil* of painting pretends to be something other than it is. What is it that attracts and satisfies us in *trompe l'oeil*? When is it that it captures our attention and delights us? At the moment when, by a mere shift of our gaze, we are able to realise that the representation does not move with the gaze and that it is merely a *trompe l'oeil*. For it appears at that moment as something other than it seemed, or rather, it now seems to be that something else. The picture does not compete with appearance, it competes with what Plato designates for us beyond appearance as being the Idea. It is because the picture is the appearance that says it is that which gives the appearance that Plato attacks painting, as if it were an activity competing with his own. This other thing is the *petit a*, around which there revolves a combat of which *trompe l'oeil* is the soul. (Lacan, 1998: 112).

The picture gives 'the appearance'. It points to a completeness which is a *trompe l'oeil*: there is no Idea behind the appearance, but the *trompe l'oeil*,



which is not the real, but its appearance, allows the viewer to live with that uncertainty. Zeuxis and Parrhasios' forms of *trompe l'oeil* suggest that the eye is led into the painting, to be satisfied by it, and to see that every picture contains a lure, suggesting that there is something behind it, but also that there is no identity (Idea) behind appearance. Seeing the city in terms of *trompe l'oeil*, which is true of Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Balzac, looking especially at the city's perspectives, its panoramas, its moving images, has a double effect: it deceives and lets down the subject; because it has the sexual effect of the lure, it traps the spectator. Perhaps the ultimate *trompe l'oeil* may be Manet's *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1881), which Peter Brooks calls 'the greatest painting of the nineteenth century' since he thinks it has a double effect: its "realism is in part about creating the illusion of the real - and about the process of disillusioning that forces [you] to understand that the real is not where you thought it was" (Brooks, 2005: 176). Because of the mirror's flatness, the woman who looks out of the picture and whose back is seen in the mirror, suggests an indifference basic to prostitution, an indifference affecting sexual difference; it says that this is all there is in Paris, so going beyond Balzac (Clark, 1985:205-258). Its *trompe l'oeil* brings into question where the male is in the picture; he is not in the picture, as Lacan would say; there is no room for him in front of the woman, which is where he must be. He has no place, he is annihilated by the painting. And so with the city.

For Patrice Higonnet (241), one way that Paris proves itself more the capital of the nineteenth century is that, though both were cities of refuge, "foreigners, especially artists, journalists, and men of letters, felt more relegated to the fringes of social life in London than in Paris". The point may be illustrated through Rimbaud and Verlaine, who, in September 1872, lived in London for three short periods up to the following July. Both write about it; Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*, forty-two prose poems, epiphanies and bright 'painted plates', relate to then, and London. Verlaine, who in a letter of October 1872 compares Regent Street with the *Chaussée d'Autin* in the time of Louis-Philippe - in other words, with the world of *Le Père Goriot* - notes details, such as the aspect of London, that, as for Dickens, makes Sunday insufferable. Verlaine, in a letter of 6 November 1872, observes that London has '*trompe l'oeil*' effects, but that these have been closed off on Sundays:

Mais voici le comble. Il y a dans Regent Street un photographe-enlumineur dont le great attraction est un portrait de femme peinte en trompe l'oeil d'une façon d'ailleurs très réussie et qui sous un rideau soulevé invite le passant à entrer. Les dimanches, rideau baissé, disparue l'ingénieuse image: elle ne doit pas travailler le dimanche: *elle ne trompe pas l'oeil ...*

[But here's the climax. There is in Regent Street a photograph-illuminator whose great attraction is a portrait of a woman painted in a trompe l'oeil, in a fashion otherwise very accomplished, and who under a raised curtain invites the passer-by to enter. Sundays, curtain lowered, the ingenious image has disappeared: she must not work on Sundays: she does not trick the eye ...]. (Verlaine 1959, 1.1001, my translation)

In London, even *trompe l'oeil* must be the product of work, and you cannot work on Sundays. As in his 'Sonnet boiteux', Verlaine's letter mixes English and French, making the separation of Paris from London fetishistic. Not only do cities contain other cities, but, living in Camden suburbs, Rimbaud and Verlaine question where the city is found. Rimbaud's 'Ouvriers' remembers a February morning walk into the 'banlieue', with the narrator's wife, Henrika, but this is a trick: the wife is also suggestive of Verlaine, and so confuses identity. 'Les Ponts' evokes the bridges crossing Regent's Canal, but finishes with a ray of light which, because it '*anéantit cette comédie*' (reduces this piece of theatre to nothing), makes everything *trompe l'oeil*. 'Métropolitain', the title suggesting the underground Metropolitan line, imagines the city through various 'fantasmagories'. London as a metropolis appears in 'Ville' as 'thought modern because every known taste has been avoided in the furnishings and the exterior of houses as well as in the town-plan. Here you do not see any traces of any monument to superstition'. Verlaine noted (letter, 24 September 1872), that London is "sans monuments aucun, sauf ses interminables docks qui suffisent d'ailleurs à mon poétique de plus en plus moderniste." ("without any monument, except for its interminable docks, which I may add suffice for my increasingly modernist poetic"). Rimbaud's poem means there is an absence of churches, or indeed, any monument to the past: an aspect of the city being thought 'modern'. The contrast is with Paris. Patrice Higonnet discusses the role of the Paris Opera in the nineteenth century, where the contrast with London is striking (Higonnet, 2002:254). (There is no opera in Dickens, unlike Thackeray.) Higonnet says that the monuments of Paris are primarily religious, while London's are monarchical (the Tower), political (the Houses of Parliament), or imperial (see the statuary). Monuments in Munich and Barcelona, Hamburg and Venice, suffer from being municipal or regional. "A Parisian monument is expected to propose a broader message, one that is simultaneously civic and universal and therefore more apt to express the readable and representative myths that the capital incarnates." (Higonnet, 2002:158) François Loyer notes that Paris apartment blocks themselves looked monumental: being so designed, both pre-Haussmann, by Charles Rambateau (1781-1869) and by Haussmann himself, so requiring a new sense of the monument, which was lacking in London: "when apartment buildings became huge, richly ornamented stone constructions, they took on the characteristics of the monument, and thus robbed the latter of its distinctive features. The old distinctions - big/small, stone/wood, rich/poor - could no longer be used to differentiate a monument from a house. To define a monument, other criteria had to be invoked, such as isolation (as opposed to the contiguity of apartment buildings) and verdure (contrasting with the rest of the city's mineral character)." (Loyer, 1988:237, quoted, Scott, 2006:308-9)

Rimbaud's 'Villes', describes one single city through others. The ultimate *trompe l'oeil* is to think in terms of discrete cities; Rimbaud makes one city also the other city, and here it is monumental, beginning with the Acropolis:

The official acropolis far exceeds the most colossal conceptions of modern barbarity. Impossible to render in words the lustreless light emanating from the imperturbably grey sky, the imperial effulgence of the buildings, and the earth's permanent, covering snow. Copies have been made, in an unusual style of *amplificatio*, of all the architectural

wonders of classical times. I visit exhibitions of paintings at venues twenty times larger than Hampton Court. And what painting! A Norwegian Nebuchadnezzar was responsible for the construction of the ministry staircases: the minor officials I had the chance to see already have more self-conceit than Brahmas, and the Herculean build of the construction managers and security guards sent a chill down my spine. By the device of grouping buildings, in closed squares, courtyards and terraces, they have effectively squeezed out the cabbies. The parks represent primitive nature cultivated with consummate art. Parts of the upmarket district are impossible to account for: an arm of the sea, unencumbered with boats, insinuates its sheet of frosty blue between quaysides top-heavy with giant candelabra. A short bridge leads to a postern beneath the dome of the Sainte-Chapelle. This dome is an artistic steel armature about 15,000 feet in diameter.

At several points on the copper footbridges, platforms and staircases which wind round the covered markets and pillars, I felt I could calculate the vertical scale of the city! But one miracle of construction I simply could not get a take on: what are the levels of the other quarters above or below the acropolis? For the contemporary visitor, it is impossible to work out where one is. The commercial quarter is a circus in a perfectly uniform style, with arcaded galleries. No shops are to be seen, but the snow on the roadway has been trampled; a handful of nabobs, as rare as Sunday strollers in London, head towards a carriage all set with diamonds. Several red velvet divans: polar drinks are served which cost between 800 and 8,000 rupees. When it occurs to me to look for theatres in this circus, I tell myself that the shops must have their fair share of shady dramas. I *think* there is a police force; but the law must be so bizarre that I give up trying to imagine what the pivs and racketeers are like hereabouts.

The suburbs, as elegant as the rue de Rivoli, are favoured with a bright atmosphere. The population works out at several hundred souls. Here again, the houses are not built in rows; the suburbs peter out oddly into the countryside, or rather, the 'County' which covers the never-ending 'westliness' of the forests and mammoth plantations, where gentlemen-savages hunt down their family histories by artificial light. (Scott, 2006:273-4).

The opening reference to the Acropolis is a reminder that Renan in 1859 compared the world exhibitions to the Greek festivals, the Olympian Games and the Panathenaea (Benjamin, 1999:197). 'Villes' refers to London, Paris, Athens, Babylon, and Indian cities; Hampton Court is mentioned as a public space, and the Gothic Sainte Chapelle becomes the name for a space crowned by a classical dome. The city's architecture is imperial, classical, colossal. Its 'haut quartier' ('quartier' implying a French division of the city) is inexplicable, unreadable; upriver, the Thames, still an 'arm of the sea' because tidal, rolls its layer of blue ground glass between quays covered with candelabras (the new street lighting of the Embankments). A new steel dome, which perhaps fits the Crystal Palace, which would ironise the idea of the holy chapel, is noted. Perhaps the 'circus' in the commercial quarter is Piccadilly Circus, or Oxford Circus. The words 'squares' and 'terraces' appear to describe the town-planning associated with the laying out of the West End; it is noted that these are private, as opposed to the 'places' such as the Place Vendôme, and the Place Royal, and the Place de la Concorde, which were laid out by the monarchy.

The 'I' of Rimbaud's poem, 'Villes', says that he thought he could judge the depth of the city from a vantage-point on the copper footbridges, but cannot work out the levels of the other districts above or below the acropolis. It is the reverse of the view from Père Lachaise. For the tourist, such as Rimbaud, the panoramic view is impossible. The rest of the paragraph sets out the impossibility of seeing or knowing this city; the last paragraph, by moving out towards the English 'County' and to the pastoral havens afforded there, suggests the loss of a city which matters to its inhabitants: it is neither seductive, nor luring them in. The poem shows the absence of people. The architectural city has nothing but its architecture; there seems no lure left.

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