

'Petrified unrest': Dickens and Baudelaire on London and Paris 1855-56

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Summary: *This essay takes off from the simultaneous presence of Dickens and Baudelaire in Paris at the time of Haussmanisation. It compares their mood of despair at this juncture, finding expression in an allegorical habit of perceiving the city, which in Dickens's case means London as well as Paris. "I have no present political faith or hope - not a grain", wrote Dickens at this juncture, meditating on the Crimean war and on the frequent contemporary outbreaks of cholera in London, both in his view the consequences of government mismanagement. "Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie/ N'a bougé", writes Baudelaire at the same time. Yet Benjamin's phrase "Erstarrte Unruhe" (petrified unrest) points towards something paradoxical in the deeply melancholic mood of both writers - indeed Dickens constructs a similar oxymoron when he writes of his «vehement despair» in the mud of the Paris streets in the winter of 1855-56. Their despair issues forth in a longing for some kind of violent explosion of the status quo. «Den Weltlauf zu unterbrechen - das war der tiefste Wille in Baudelaire" writes Benjamin, and the same might be said of Dickens, at least in this period.*

Keywords: Dickens, Baudelaire, London, Paris, Flânerie, Allegory, Melancholy

Résumé : *Le présent article prend comme point de départ la présence simultanée de Dickens et de Baudelaire à Paris pendant la période de l'haussmanisation, pour comparer le désespoir ressenti à ce tournant et qui trouve son expression dans une perception allégorique de la ville, qui pour Dickens veut dire aussi bien Londres que Paris. « I have no present political faith or hope - not a grain », écrit Dickens, méditant sur la guerre de Crimée et sur les nombreuses attaques de choléra dans le Londres contemporain, deux événements dus selon lui à la politique du gouvernement. « Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie/ N'a bougé », écrit Baudelaire au même moment. L'heureuse formule de Benjamin « Erstarrte Unruhe » (intranquilité pétrifiée) saisit quelque chose de paradoxal dans l'humeur profondément mélancolique des deux auteurs - semblable à l'oxymore créé par Dickens quand il parle de son "désespoir véhément" dans la boue des rues parisiennes pendant l'hiver 1855-56. De leur désespoir émane une sorte d'explosion violente du statu quo. « Den Weltlauf zu unterbrechen - das war der tiefste Wille in Baudelaire », écrit Benjamin, et on peut en dire autant de Dickens, du moins dans cette période.*

Mots-clés : Dickens, Baudelaire, Londres, Paris, Flânerie, Allégorie, Mélancholie

As a result of the recent popularity of the concept of the flaneur, critics have begun to see more connection between the poetic vision of the city in Dickens and Baudelaire than has previously been the case. This paper aims to further this development in a limited way by focusing upon the period of the middle 1850s, when both were resident in Paris during the time of the massive 'improvements' undertaken in the city by Baron Haussmann, the prefect of the department of the Seine, at the behest of Louis Napoleon. This is the time in which the two writers produced two masterpieces of urban writing, both published in the same year of 1857: Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. Although any serious or detailed rapprochement of these two works is beyond the scope of the present study, it may be useful to examine here how, despite obvious radical differences of temperament and fortune between the two writers, certain relative convergences of emphasis in the period in question are to be observed in their conception of the city and the problematic of its artistic representation, in the twin cases of London and Paris.

We may start in justification of this aim and claim by taking stock of the implications of an important recent contribution to studies of the 19th century flaneur, Margaret Rose's *Flaneurs and Idlers* of 2007, consisting of an edition of Louis Huart's *Physiologie du flâneur* of 1841 and Albert Smith's *The Natural History of the Idler upon Town* of 1848, together with an extensive scholarly introduction comparing the two texts and exploring their intellectual and social context. Rose shows, first, that they belong to a specific comic genre of parodic, pseudo-scientific, anthropological or sociological writings in vogue at the time, entitled 'physiologies' or 'natural histories,' which purport to discover new human species amongst the modern tribes of city dwellers, and provide humorous 'classificatory' description of these creatures. The flaneur was a favourite contemporary example, a concept which, particularly through the work of Walter Benjamin, has survived into our own time, albeit perhaps in remodelled form, and with diminished emphasis on its humorous origins. But Rose also demonstrates beyond doubt that flanererie quickly belonged to London as much as to Paris, and that Albert Smith, who had been a medical student in Paris in the late 1830s, and participant in the Bohemian lifestyle then current, was the architect of its dissemination, introducing the word and the cult itself in London in the early 1840s. His impact, and that of Parisian physiological writing in general, is to be felt amongst various contemporary London journalists, including those like Sala and Wills who worked for Dickens after 1850 on the weekly *Household Words*.

Now Smith also became a close associate of Dickens himself - "he is an intimate friend of mine, for whom I have a great regard, and in whose prosperity in all ways, I am greatly interested," Dickens writes in a letter of August 1857 recommending Smith to the British Consul at Genoa (Dickens, 1995:415) - and often accompanied him on flaneurial excursions in London. One of these is of particular importance for any attempt to link Dickens with Baudelaire. It occurred in November 1855, when Dickens was at work planning and writing the early numbers of *Little Dorrit*: "he sallied out for one of his night walks, full of thoughts of his story," writes Forster (see Dickens, 1993:++9*742). "It was a miserable evening," Dickens wrote in his well-known account of the incident,

entitled 'A Nightly Scene in London,' which appeared in *Household Words* in January 1856: "very dark, very muddy, and raining hard". Dickens and Smith "accidentally strayed into Whitechapel," as flaneurs do, "slowly walking along and looking about us," until suddenly "we found ourselves, at eight o'clock, before the Workhouse."

There follows a paragraph of prose poetry, in the course of which the two train their practised eyes on what Benjamin would call a *Vexierbild*, a visual puzzle whose unintelligibility is rendered in metaphorical cadences moving between a trio of attempts at decipherment ("rags," "bee-hives," "dead bodies") above the monotonous ground refrain of the rain:

Crouched against the wall of the Workhouse, in the dark street,
on the muddy pavement-stones, with the rain raining
upon them, were five bundles of rags. They were motionless,
and had no resemblance to the human form. Five great bee-hives,
covered with rags - five dead bodies taken out of graves, tied neck-
and-heels, and covered with rags - would have looked like those
five bundles upon which the rain rained down in the public street.
(Dickens, 1856)

Smith does the questioning: he asks twice, "what is this?" and receives from Dickens two complementary answers, the one prosaic and matter-of-fact ("some miserable people shut out of the Casual Ward"), the other, as we shall see, very much in the manner of Baudelaire: "Five awful Sphinxes by the wayside, crying to every passer-by, 'Stop and guess! What is to be the end of a state of society that leaves us here!'" (Dickens, 1856:25-7) Forster's account of the same incident, quoting from a letter conveying Dickens's first-hand reactions to the scene, presents this manner in yet sharper outline as it quotes Dickens's original description of "dumb, wet, silent horrors, sphinxes set up against that dead wall, and no one likely to be at the pains of solving them until the General Overthrow." (Dickens, 1993: 742)

The first simple point to make is that this binary answer structure markedly goes beyond the mode of 'classic' realist fiction or journalism. That Dickens was ever claimed as primarily a representative of such writing is perhaps a matter for bemusement: at any rate, it has to be said that it has generated a good deal of confusion and spilt ink. He clearly belongs to a different strand of the realist tradition, usefully labelled 'romantic realism' by Donald Fanger, who aligns him, correctly, with Balzac, Gogol and Dostoevsky rather than with mainstream Victorian realist writing, in particular because of that quintessentially heightened vision of city experience that all four writers share. Baudelaire himself saw that clearly enough about Dickens. In 'Puisque réalisme il y a,' the interesting unpublished draft of an essay dating from precisely the same period of autumn 1855, and marking a break from his previous engagement on behalf of the 'classic' realism of the school of Courbet, Baudelaire discusses the divergent manner of Champfleury and assigns to him a "regard à la Dickens, la table de nuit d'amour. Si les choses se tiennent devant lui dans une allure quelque peu fantastique, c'est à cause de la contraction de son oeil un peu

mystique.” (Baudelaire, 1961:646) The ‘mystic eye’ that Baudelaire found in Dickens is clearly on display in the Whitechapel piece.

Beyond that, it seems clear that, like Baudelaire in his *Tableaux Parisiens* and elsewhere, Dickens approaches these street apparitions as ‘monstrous’ hieroglyphs that the observer is called upon to attempt to decipher. (I use the word ‘monstrous’ here in full consciousness of the etymological derivation of the word ‘monster’ from the Latin verb ‘monere,’ to warn.) An anonymous passer-by underlines the point by saying, ‘This is an awful sight, Sir ... in a Christian country,’ unconsciously echoing Blake’s *Holy Thursday*: “Is this a holy thing to see/In a rich and fruitful country.” To understand the epiphany seems to require some profound prophetic insight into great stretches of time and large historical and political patterns of cause and effect, “ominously linking the impossibility of solution (the Last Judgement) and violent revolution,” as the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters aptly notes.

Indeed, one cannot help being reminded of the phrase in Baudelaire’s great poem *Le Cygne*, “tout pour moi devient allégorie,” and attempting to apply it to Dickens’s approach to the rough sleepers at the Whitechapel workhouse. The rain, the dead wall, the sphinxes themselves - all three are clearly charged in this piece with possible allegorical meaning. Sphinxes in fact are a Baudelaire speciality (see for example *Spleen II*, “J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans”), and it is interesting in this context to note a point of contact between Baudelaire and Dickens in the respective use they make in the 1850s of the Fourierist Alphonse Toussenel’s study of the symbolic meanings of animals. Baudelaire wrote him a long and important letter in January 1856, praising him for the philosophical profundity of his conviction that “chaque animal est un sphinx,” and expressing his own belief “que la nature est un verbe, une allégorie, un moule.” (Baudelaire, 1973: I, 356-7) Dickens published in *Household Words* in 1853 a series of articles by E.S. Dixon expounding Toussenel’s theories of the allegorical significance of animal species, and - with the proviso that the essays must specify that the views they express are those of the Fourierist philosopher, and not necessarily of the journal - entered wholeheartedly into editing them: “‘The bear symbolises savage and primitive equality, and is therefore the aversion of the aristocracy.’ Such is the clue to ursine facts, according to *Passional Zoology*,” he writes. (Dickens, 1993: 125)

In Toussenel’s terms, as we shall see, Dickens became a veritable bear in the mid-1850s, at least in his aversion to one particular aristocrat, Lord Palmerston. But one last point about Dickens, Baudelaire and flanererie might be brought out, before leaving the Whitechapel workhouse episode, by pondering a little further on the thoroughly secondary role of the master flaneur Albert Smith, reduced to that of a mere stooge. To understand it, we can invoke here, I think, an outstanding essay by Ross Chambers entitled ‘Baudelaire’s Paris’, which argues that, with Baudelaire, flanererie goes far beyond the comic genres of the 1840s exemplified in the work of Huart and Smith, interested “in making ... readers feel comfortable with the strangeness of city experience.” It is reconstituted, rather, as “a critical practice, a clinical or diagnostic activity,” in which city street encounters become “awkward and troubling cases of mutual ignorance producing instances of double, sometimes multiple, misprision.” (Chambers, 2005: 105)

Now surely a similar claim can be made for the Dickens of this paper, or the later 'Night Walks' of 1860. In both instances, Dickens offers money to the victims of misery and despair he encounters, and is astonished by the reaction of indifference or even revulsion that he gets from his 'sphinxes'. Here, the first of the five "never thanked me, never looked at me - melted away into the miserable night, in the strangest manner I ever saw," and it's the same with all the others: "in every one, interest and curiosity were as extinct as in the first". There, the novelist accosts "a beetle-browed hair-lipped youth", intending to give alms, but is dumbfounded by the inscrutable return of gaze to a "persecutor, devil, ghost, whatever he thought me", and by the extreme recoil from his would-be benefactor: "it twisted out of its garment, like the young man in the New Testament, and left me standing alone with its rags in my hand." (Dickens, 1964:133) These are clear cases of what Chambers identifies in Baudelaire as central to his representation of Parisians as "people who don't know one another - and so can't understand one another - ... 'monstrous,' in their alienated relations, one to the other." The sphinxes may end up on Smith's bed, but his flaneurial style of writing about city encounters is utterly transcended by Dickens's in the essay they inhabit.

Yet the mention in both instances here of the New Testament ('A Nightly Scene' ends with an address to "people with a respect for the spirit of the New Testament, who do mind such things, and who think them infamous in our streets") highlights an apparent major difference between Baudelaire and Dickens that we must now explore, if only to discover that in the mid-1850s the gap between the two had significantly narrowed. For Baudelaire's unmistakable emphasis after 1848 on the doctrine of original sin marks him out, in opposition to Dickens's manifest adherence to the New Testament Christian doctrine of inherent human perfectibility or redeemability in the Sermon on the Mount, as a Jansenist Old Testamentarian who of course must believe in ineradicable evil to be able to create 'fleurs du mal'. We find major evidence of this, conveniently, in the Toussenet letter, which insists that evil is endemic, not just in mankind, but in the whole creation: "la nature entière participe du péché original", (and so, we may remember parenthetically, cannot be read directly, but must be deciphered allegorically) and pours scorn on the Fourierist faith in "le Progrès indéfini." (Baudelaire, 1973: I, 336-7)

Now Dickens, it is clear, worked throughout his entire life and literary career in a spirit of dedication to the idea of human progress. Though the analysis of systemic social wrongs may darken and deepen immeasurably in his mature fiction, there commonly remains, in a novel like *Hard Times*, for example, completed in August 1854, a residual Goethean faith in the value of self-improvement and its capacity to bring about more general positive change. At the end of that book Thomas Gradgrind is a reformed character, and so too is his daughter Louisa, dedicating her life to "trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall." Rival prophetic visions of the future are pitted against each other, the 'writing on

the wall' of dry statistical prediction versus what can be achieved through effort and endeavour. The narrator in fact ends with a direct exhortation to the reader to join forces with him to sponsor programmes of progressive action: "Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be!" (Dickens, 1998:398)

Turning back to London and Paris and the question of urban progress, it is clear that, initially at least, Dickens took a decidedly more favourable view of Haussmann's street 'improvements' than Baudelaire. In Paris on his way to Italy in October 1853, he wrote home enthusiastically about the changes: "Paris is very full, extraordinarily gay, and wonderfully improving. Thousands of houses must have been pulled down for the construction of an immense street now making from the dirty old end of the Rue de Tivoli, past the Palais Royal, away beyond the Hotel de Ville. ... The general improvement in the essential articles of what is to be seen and what is to be smelt, is highly remarkable." (Dickens, 1973: 163) Later, he had his assistant Wills write a paper for *Household Words* (appearing in the same month of November 1855 as the Whitechapel encounter) praising the Paris initiatives and contrasting them favourably with London's inertia. By contrast Baudelaire seems to have entered a period of personal Calvary during the Haussmann upheavals, moving from May 1854 onwards from one temporary residence to another, a peregrination that Pichois and Avice speculatively link to Haussmannisation ("Baudelaire a-t-il jugé que les travaux étaient insupportable sur la rive droite?" - Pichois and Avice, 1993:103). And even if that question cannot be definitively answered, there remains the sombre testimony of the lines in *Le Cygne* as an index of Baudelaire's response to the modernisation of the city: "Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie/ N'a bougé." (Baudelaire, 1961:81) 'Nothing has budged.' This image of fixity and confinement and hatred of progress in Baudelaire is one that Benjamin develops in his probing of the poet's melancholy, taking us beyond the issue of Haussmannisation, allowing a glimpse at its 'allegorical' meaning for him. He quotes Edmond Jaloux as witness to the intensity of Baudelaire's desperate alienation from his city and epoch - "seuls, peut-être, Leopardi, Edgar Poë et Dostoevsky ont éprouvé un tel dénuement de bonheur, une telle puissance de désolation. Autour de lui, ce siècle, qui semble par ailleurs florissant et multiple, prend la terrible figure d'un désert" (Benjamin, 1982: I 366) - and fastens upon Baudelaire's choice of favourite flaneurial stroll in Paris as its epiphany. Baudelaire declares to his friend Schaunard that he hates free, open water - and only cares for it when it is enclosed: "l'eau en liberté m'est insupportable; je la veux prisonnière, au carcan, dans les murs géométriques d'un quai. Ma promenade préférée est la berge du canal de l'Ourcq." (Benjamin, 1982: I, 362) Benjamin seems to link this with the phrase, "Je hais le mouvement," from the poem *La Beauté* (Benjamin, 1982: I 307), expanding its resonance well beyond the aesthetic sphere. Benjamin in fact sees the urge to arrest the course of human time as the deepest impulse in Baudelaire's writing - "Den Weltlauf zu unterbrechen - das war der tiefste Wille in Baudelaire" (Benjamin, 1982: I 401) - and yet paradoxically insists on the dynamic quality of the poet's melancholic urge towards stasis and death by invoking an oxymoron from Gottfried Keller. "Erstarrte Unruhe," or "petrified unrest," he claims, is the defining characteristic of Baudelaire's allegorical imagination.

Imagery of stasis and movement of course brings into view Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, where the prison (famously allegorised at one point as "the prison of this lower world" - Dickens, 1999: 637) is the master image structuring the novel, hinging as it does around the release of the Dorrits from the Marshalsea at the end of Book One. "Oh, why are they not driving on? Pray, papa, do drive on!" exclaims Fanny Dorrit at the novel's turning-point, to express her desire to move utterly beyond the confines of the prison. (Dickens, 1999:360) But the fact that most of the parties concerned will eventually return there, in some literal or metaphorical sense, makes plain that the oppositions are by no means so clear cut. In fact I shall argue here, focussing on context rather than text, that *Little Dorrit* is the product of a period in which Dickens, more than at any other stage of his career, lost a great deal of his faith in the idea of progress in human history, and that to follow the course of his evolving reactions to Haussmannisation in Paris at that time is to trace a particular strand of this development where the contrast with Baudelaire is anything but clear cut.

Indeed, it is more than arguable that Dickens himself entered a period of settled personal melancholy after the completion of *Hard Times* in August 1854. "Why I found myself so 'used up,' after *Hard Times*, I scarcely know," he writes in November 1854 (Dickens, 1993:453), but the symptoms are plain for all to see in his letters. It is possible to separate out two aspects of this depressive mood, the one personal, the other social and political. First, these are years of mounting tension and dissatisfaction with his wife ("the fat vulgar vacancy" as she is cruelly described by Charles Kingsley in May 1854 - Dickens, 1993:621n), exacerbated in the spring of 1855 by the renewal of contact with his idealised youthful sweetheart Maria Beadnall, and the discovery, once he met her in the flesh, that she too fitted Kingsley's description. To Forster he writes in February 1855 of "one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made," and in April 1856, allegorically, that "the skeleton in my domestic closet is becoming a pretty big one." (Dickens, 1993:523 and 1995:89) But equally, and more importantly here, this is a time of intense political anger, expressed in more active engagement in public affairs through writing and political agitation than at any other time in Dickens's life.

There were two principle targets of Dickens's fury: firstly, the periodic outbreaks of cholera in London, caused by the authorities' failure to adopt Edwin Chadwick's proposals for sanitary reform, but equally, the deaths and sufferings of soldiers caused by incompetent strategy and administrative conduct of the Crimean War. The two abuses seem to have fed into and aggravated each other in his mind, and are both seen as profoundly regressive. Thus, again in November 1854, when he writes about a fund established by Queen Victoria to provide assistance to relatives of killed and wounded soldiers, he remarks on "how the old cannon smoke and blood-mist obscure the wrongs and sufferings of the people at home. When I consider the Patriotic Fund on the one hand, and on the other, the poverty and wretchedness engendered by cholera, of which, in London alone, an infinitely larger number of English people than are likely to be slain in the whole Russian War, have miserably and needlessly died - I feel as if the world had been pushed back, five hundred years." (Dickens, 1993:454) Likewise, in March 1855 we find him commenting bitterly on the hypocrisy of a government proposal to hold a

day of Fasting and Prayer for the success of the War in the same month as bread riots in Liverpool: "You see what we have been doing to our valiant soldiers. You see what miserable humbugs we are. And because we have got involved in meshes of aristocratic red tape to our unspeakable confusion, loss and sorrow, the gentlemen who have been so kind as to ruin us are going to give us a day of humiliation and fasting the day after to-morrow. I am sick and sour to think of such things at this age of the world..." (Dickens, 1993:571)

"I have no present political faith or hope - not a grain" (Dickens, 1993:716) is the constant refrain of 1855, as Dickens prepares to deliver in *Little Dorrit* "a dash ... at the great system of abuse under which we live." (Dickens, 1995: 26) Prior to taking a break in Paris from his despondent mood in February of that year, he writes: "I am hourly strengthened in my old belief that our political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the death of England. In all this business I don't see a gleam of hope." (Dickens, 1993:523) In the "wretchedest Ministry that ever was" (Dickens, 1993:496), a "worthless Government which is afraid of every little interest and trembles before the vote of every dust contractor," (Dickens, 1993: 444) Dickens feels particularly "vicious against Lord Palmerston," "one of the very worst signs of these times" (Dickens, 1993:656 and 1995:90).

The signs that Lord Palmerston seems to emit are portents of revolution. On more than one occasion in 1855 Dickens seems to express a complete loss of faith in the current functioning of the Parliamentary system - a perception, again, that things have regressed several centuries: "representative government is become altogether a failure with us ... the whole thing has broken down since that great seventeenth century time, and has no hope in it." (Dickens, 1993:713) And Dickens sees, in "the alienation of the people from their own public affairs," a condition "extremely like the general mind of France before the first Revolution". (Dickens, 1993:587) As if in some Blakean vision he sees "an enormous black cloud of poverty in every town which is spreading and deepening every hour," (Dickens, 1993:599) just like the conjuror de Caston, who, in Boulogne in the summer of 1854, with his eyes blindfolded, had correctly identified the date of 1666 written on a slate from visions of "a great city, but of narrow streets and old-fashioned houses, many of which are of wood, resolving itself into ruins... I hear the crackling of a great conflagration, and looking up, I behold a vast cloud of flame and smoke." (Dickens, 1993:435)

I want then to suggest that in Dickens's feverish structured oppositional activity in these years we find a different but related kind of 'Erstarrte Unruhe' from Baudelaire's - the phrase we shall shortly light upon in his experience of Paris at this time - 'vehement despair,' being a serviceable comparable oxymoron to describe it. Of course at all times Dickens works within the framework of the Liberal or Radical establishment of which he was a prominent member, which marks him out as different from Baudelaire, a quintessential offsider whose political intervention is described by one contemporary, Charles Toubin, in the following terms: "Baudelaire loved the revolution as something violent and abnormal, for which I feared him more than I liked him." (Pichois and Ziegler, 1991:161) But there is nonetheless a sufficient degree of comparability about their extreme mid-1850s alienation from their surroundings to encourage me

also to look for similarities in their manner of allegorising London and Paris at this time. And the leitmotif of this, I find, is street mud, a commodity produced in vast quantities in the Haussmann era as a symbol for both writers of human corruption and filth.

In the case of Dickens, we find that the seething personal 'spleen' and political discontent starts to infect the way he experienced both London and Paris by about February 1855. This is how he writes in that month about London to Sir Joseph Olliffe, the British ambassador in Paris, shortly after returning from there: "Everything is weeping. All the buildings have severe colds in their heads, all the window-sills are in the first stages of measles, all the water pipes are bursting, all the streets are great black heaps of mud." (Dickens, 1993:548-9) The personifications mark conscious deployment of allegory, as an earlier passage underlines: "the latest joke is that it is very bad weather for the Ministry to be out in. Considering the thaw, and the knee-deep slush in the streets, it is meritorious enough." (Dickens, 1993:526) It is in the same month in that same slush, obviously conscious of how it symbolised the heaped abuses of the government in office, that Dickens began to compose *Little Dorrit* in the course of his London walks, which seemingly also suggest to him the necessity of similar perambulations in Paris: "I am going to Paris on Saturday or Sunday... having motes of stories floating before my eyes in the dirty air, which seem to drive somewhere in that direction." (Dickens, 1993:525) He, like Baudelaire, practising his "fantasque escrime," (*Le Soleil*) by tapping his ashplant against the uneven paving stones, obviously used the rhythmic space opened up by flanerier as a catalyst for artistic creation, despite, or perhaps more essentially because of, the dirty streets.

But at this stage London and Paris are still constructed as opposites in Dickens's mind ("Paris is finer than ever, and I go wandering about it all day," he writes on February 16 - Dickens, 1993:542). That picture was to change drastically after he began to live there in the autumn of that year at the height of Haussmannisation. In the first days of 1856 he reports from Paris to London, in a tone of some surprise, that "we have wet weather here - and dark too for these latitudes - and oceans of mud. Although numbers of men are perpetually scooping and sweeping it away in this thoroughfare, it accumulates under the windows so fast, and in such sludgy masses, that to get across the road is to get half over one's shoes in the first outset of a walk." (Dickens, 1995:9) The tone darkens on the following day, with the introduction of the oxymoronic formula: "We are up to our knees in mud here. Literally in vehement despair. I walked down the avenue outside the Barrière de l'Étoile here yesterday, and went straight on among the trees. I came back with top-boots of mud on. Nothing will cleanse the streets. Numbers of men and women are for ever scooping and sweeping in them, and they are always one lake of yellow mud. All my trousers go to the tailor's every day, and are ravelled out at the heels every night. Washing is awful." (Dickens, 1995:13) The day after that, the tables have turned, and now it is Paris that outdoes London for vile weather and foul mud: "It is clear to me that climates are gradually assimilating over a great part of the world, and that in the most miserable time of our year there is very little to choose between London and Paris - except that London is not so muddy. I have never seen dirtier or worse weather than we have had here." (Dickens, 1995:15)

The collapsing of distinctions and categories implies a universal worsening of climate and hence the sense that it invites reading as allegory, and symbolises the approach of some potentially final calamity. That the apocalyptic note of 'A Nightly Scene' is again touched upon in these reactions to the bog that is Haussmann's Paris can be suggested by a passage where Dickens describes himself and Georgina attempting to spruce up after a muddy walk and reappearing "as clean as anything human can be."

The clear suggestion here is that we are, for the time being at least, at some distance from Dickens's usual New Testament message about the purity and perfectibility of the human soul, as the city mud seems to symbolise the accumulated burden of error and sin in human history.

The same note is not hard to find in Baudelaire, whether we seek it in biographical testimony or in the poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. In December 1855 he writes to his mother: "Je suis las des rhumes et des migraines, et des fièvres, et surtout de la nécessité de sortir deux fois par jour, et de la neige, et de la boue, et de la pluie." (Baudelaire, 1973:327) The fact that even in the happy days of residence at the Hotel Pimodan in 1843-5 Baudelaire lived adjacent to "thick nauseating smoke [that] used to drift up from the cellars with their large doors opened on to the Quai d'Anjou like so many vomitoria" (Pichois and Ziegler, 1991:101) suggests that the Haussmann upheavals were in some sense for Baudelaire the last straw, intolerable aggravations of a long-standing history of suffering through exposure to a disastrous urban environment, which the poems then labour to allegorise. *Le Cygne*, besides offering at the realist level what Chambers calls "a snapshot of central Paris in mid-Haussmannisation", (Chambers, 2005:109) provides as its central *Denkbild* the image of the swan caught in the mud of the streets; *Spleen III* takes us to the threshold of Little Dorrit and "the prison of this lower world" again with its comparison of the slanting rain to the bars of a giant prison ("Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses trainées / D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux" - Baudelaire, 1961:71); and *Un Jour de Pluie* reintroduces the prophetic note common to both writers in their anguished contemplation of the two great nineteenth century metropoli in the 1850s: "Partout fange, déluge, obscurité du ciel; / Noir tableau qu'eût rêvé le noir Ézékiel!" (Baudelaire, 1961:214)

"Tu m'as donné ta boue et j'en ai fait de l'or." (Baudelaire, 1961:180) The great alchemical line that concludes the 'Projet d'Épilogue' for the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* thus manifestly suggests itself as a starting point for the study of how Baudelaire and Dickens transmute their 1850s melancholy into great art. But that, clearly, is a huge task for another occasion. I just want to end with two brief pointers of the direction this might take in the case of *Little Dorrit*. The first concerns Merdle: it seems to me thoroughly plausible that Parisian mud got transformed in Dickens's imagination into Parisian 'merde,' thus allegorising his name and nature as a filthy 'epidemic' spreading through the city like the cholera. He too like Palmerston is a fake sign, a "shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over certain carrion at the bottom of a bath", (Dickens, 1999:594) i.e., his corpse reverts to the material of which it is made, which is shit. He reflects, not only Dickens's experience of railway speculation in the City of London, but his more

contemporary observation in Paris in early 1856 of stock market panic. "There seem to be great misgivings here, that a pecuniary crisis must come," he writes in January (Dickens, 1995:17), and in April of "the steps of the Bourse at about 4 in the afternoon, and the crowd of blouses and patches among the speculators there assembled, all howling and haggard with speculation ... people like that perpetually blow their brains out, or fly into the Seine, 'à cause des pertes sur la Bourse.'" (Dickens, 1995:74) So that Dickens too can be seen, in Benjamin's phrase, as a 'poet in the era of High Capitalism'.

The second more extended and central task would be to look, in the constant dialectic of movement and stasis or progress and regress gathered around the idea of imprisonment in *Little Dorrit*, for the numerous traces of the problematic of 'petrified unrest' that it contains. Eric Santner, in his book *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, offers some remarks that could be of use here, first about the element of restlessness in allegorising itself ("as Benjamin emphasizes time and again, what distinguishes the allegorical sensibility is precisely its restlessness, its extravagant pomp, its excess of animation in the face of historical violence and destruction"), and then about the relationship between individual psychology and the specific historical stage at which 'petrified unrest' seems to become epidemic: "What Benjamin refers to as petrified unrest pertains to the dynamic of the repetition compulsion, the psychic aspect of the eternal recurrence of the same that for Benjamin defined the world of commodity production and consumption." (Santner, 2007:80, 81)

Such a search would inevitably lead to the great sentence ending in oxymoron, and exemplifying Baudelaire's dream of a poetic prose, with which the novel concludes. Here Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit leave the prison for the last time, in an apparent reenactment of the fall of Adam and Eve, and descend into the noxious London streets: "They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar." (Dickens, 1999:688) But into what precisely? And which predominates, the 'usual' or the 'uproar'? And is there any glimmer of upturn and positive outcome in the dynamism of that last word?

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