

**THE EYE, THE STREET, AND THE MODERN PAINTER: THE
CITY FROM POE TO JOYCE.**

by

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the development of the image of the modern metropolis in conjunction with a unique type of literary hero who appears in literature during the eighteenth century: the city spectator. While investigations of the urban observer have surfaced in many divergent contexts and literary periods, most accounts of the subject rely, to varying degrees, on the same core narrative and assumptions implicit to Walter Benjamin's seminal theorizations of the figure of the *flâneur*. Drawing attention to the distinction between historical and literary spectators of metropolitan spaces, this dissertation proposes an alternative approach to the genesis and development of the figure of the urban observer in Western fiction. Offering a corrective to the discourse of the *flâneur*, this study argues that the origins of the historical and the literary spectator are dramatically different and evaluates the latter figure as a fluid motif that presupposes a wide range of gradually changing assumptions about subjectivity, visibility, and urban presentation.

The dissertation distinguishes three different types of spectators in city texts: 1) the physiognomist of neo-Classical urban sketches and in early realist fiction; 2) the Romantic visionary seer of lyrical verse and late Gothic fiction 3) and the modernist

phenomenological observer of the early twentieth-century metropolitan novel. Each mode of city watching is related to three different models of organizing urban experience: the panorama, phantasmagoria, and montage. Contrasting the leisurely *flâneur* to literary urban beholders of the first half of the nineteenth century, I argue that the latter were a result of a transposition of Romantic sensibility, subjectivity, and modes of visuality from bucolic and dark Gothic settings onto the big city. Tracing the use of the spectatorial persona from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and the tales of Edgar Allan Poe and Nikolai Gogol through Charles Baudelaire's Parisian poems and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this dissertation explores the active representational function of the figure of the observer who seeks in the act of looking to transcend his estrangement from the urban community in the mind alone.

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Introduction

This study aims to analyze the development of the image of the modern metropolis in conjunction with a unique type of literary hero who appears early in nineteenth-century literature: the city spectator.

In the last two decades, the subject of urban spectatorship has attracted growing critical attention from a host of scholars of nineteenth and twentieth-century literary and visual history, urban theory, and cultural studies. While investigations of the urban observer have surfaced in many divergent contexts and literary periods, most accounts of the subject rely, to varying degrees, on the same core narrative and assumptions implicit to Walter Benjamin's seminal theorizations of the figure of the *flâneur* – that highly elusive Parisian gentleman-stroller of the first half of the nineteenth century whom the German philosopher-critic has helped to transform into an icon of capitalist modernity. Drawing attention to the distinction between historical *flâneurs* and the literary spectators of metropolitan spaces, this dissertation proposes an alternative approach to the genesis and development of the figure of the urban observer in Western fiction.

The failure to differentiate real observers and their textual doubles was already evident in Benjamin's critical investigations. Unearthing a popular Parisian vogue of the first half of the nineteenth century, Benjamin championed the *flâneur* in three of his influential essays on Charles Baudelaire and the age of Napoleon III – “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” “Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” and “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” – which he wrote in the mid-to-late 30s as theoretical overtures to his monumental *Das Passagen-Werk*. In his essays, Benjamin reads the figure of the

flâneur against a dazzling array of sociological, cultural, political, and materialist concerns that inform the pre-Haussmann Paris of Baudelaire's youth as well as the later capital of the Second Empire. Highlighting the relationship between the historical city spectator, urban modernity's rising commodity capitalism, and modes of metropolitan representation, Benjamin blurs the lines between real and fictional observers and unites a number of dissimilar, and at times contradictory, spectatorial figures under the same umbrella concept.

As a leisured aristocrat of the boulevards, Benjamin's iconic *flâneur* engages in a modish (albeit short-lived) Parisian pastime taken up by a connoisseur of city life who escapes the monotony of his dwelling to amble through the glassy Parisian arcades, to study the physiognomy of the crowds, to examine the wares on displays, and to parade his appearance before the capital's denizens. The image of Benjamin's dandified shopper-*flâneur* who is observing as much as he is being observed is best epitomized by the critic's reference to the *flâneur*'s transient fashion for walking turtles on a leash through the arcades of the capital.

Yet the *flâneur* in Benjamin's theorizations also assumes the guise of a documentary writer of metropolitan life. Tracing the journalist-*flâneur*'s literary footsteps to the 1830s print culture of the Parisian *physiologies* – cheap illustrated anthologies of city sketches widely popular at the time in Paris – Benjamin posits the writer-observer of the capital as a pivotal figure to understanding the aesthetics of what he calls the “panorama literature” of Paris, comprising the *feuilleton*, the *physiologies*, and other types of contemporary urban tableaux. As a journalist on his beat or a hack boulevardier, Benjamin's writerly *flâneur* would inundate the capital's periodicals with

bourgeois-friendly typologies of everyday city life. “The leisurely quality of [the city writer’s] descriptions,” notes Benjamin to underscore the relationship between the strolling observer and the popular petty-bourgeois genre, “fits the style of the *flâneur* who goes botanizing on the asphalt” (68). Benjamin vividly captures the image of the urbane writer on *flanerie* in “Paris of the Second Empire”:

The street becomes a dwelling place for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among house facades as a citizen is within his four walls. To him, a shiny enameled shop sign is at least as good as a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his living room. Buildings’ walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; newsstands are his libraries; and café terraces are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. (68)

Yet against the image of the *flâneur* as a strolling dandy and a bourgeois documentarian of Paris whitewashing the troubling aspects of urban life, Benjamin pits a diametrically opposite figure, a peripatetic who is a literary creation, but to whom he surprisingly assigns the same name. The relationship of this estranged, anguished hero with the city is radically at odds with the journalist-*flâneur*’s comfortable posture of privileged detachment. Alienation, “shock,” and intoxication characterize for the critic this latter spectator’s metropolitan encounters. Benjamin associates his third type of *flâneur* with Edgar Allan Poe’s and Charles Baudelaire’s figure of the man of the crowd, “someone who does not feel comfortable in his own skin” (79) and seeks escape from the self among the faceless throngs. Reading urban spectatorship in Poe’s tale and Baudelaire’s lyrical poetry against the wider societal forms of production and exchange

of the modern era – the emerging processes of commodification; the growing density of the urban masses and the disquieting experience of the crowds; the psychological effect of metropolitan “shock” on the sensorium of the walker; the allure and “phantasmagoria” of consumption and display – Benjamin underplays the differences between the historical and the fictional and posits a deterministic relationship between material conditions and literary production.

Since the translation and rediscovery of Benjamin’s works in the 1960s, commentators have brought to light a wealth of new critical concerns around the question of urban spectatorship that have given rise, in the words of Anke Gleber, to a “minor renaissance” (215) of scholarly interest in the figure of the *flâneur*. In the last few decades, many intriguing studies have considered in depth the role and development of the observer in literature in light of Benjamin’s seminal theorizations. In his wide-ranging analysis *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Dana Brand has persuasively demonstrated that the origins of the city onlooker in urban representations should be traced not to the Parisian boulevards of the nineteenth century, but as far back as early seventeenth-century London. In *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator*, John Rignall has investigated the role of the *flâneur* in the development of the European novel, while in her provocative book *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Republic*, Anke Gleber has suggested the many ways in which urban watching has shaped the literary landscape of modernist Germany. Analyzing the development of the *flâneur* in *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has offered a helpful survey of the French city

spectator as a writer from his early appearances in French city sketches to his later guises in the works of Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, and Gustave Flaubert.

Yet if these diverse critical evaluations offer important insights into the role of the city spectator for modern fiction, by striving to reveal a family resemblance between nearly all textual metropolitan onlookers and Benjamin's stock figure of the *flâneur*, many studies disregard important discontinuities in the manner the spectator is deployed in various literary genres and periods. Whether investigating the use of a narrative persona in a seventeenth-century London guidebook (Brand) or in Balzac's Parisian novels (Rignall and Ferguson) or treating the sauntering heroes in the fictional works from the age of Romanticism through the postmodern era, Benjamin-inspired accounts of metropolitan spectatorship read a staggering number of texts across a wide spectrum of historical periods, world cities, and artistic movements against the same immutable lineaments of the Parisian icon. Implicitly or overtly positing an unbroken continuity between the *sine qua non* strolling archetype and his countless predecessors and issue, critical accounts of the city spectator present the development of the figure in prose and poetry as a set of continuous transmogrifications of the *flâneur* into ever new characters and poetic personas across the modern literary canon.

The ubiquitous dispersion of the icon into what Susan Buck-Morss has referred to as his "myriad of forms" or "traces" is arguably a byproduct of the ever-growing semantic capaciousness of the term in available critical literature. Commentators have deployed Benjamin's equivocal concept to refer to the following: a nineteenth-century detached gentleman of leisure strolling the boulevards; an intoxicated poet of the crowds passively manipulated by or actively resisting oppressive forces of consumerism and

mechanization of everyday life; a painter or photographer of the city; a metropolitan journalist claiming extraordinary interpretive abilities; a gumshoe detective; any ambulatory novelist whose material is the city itself; any fictional observer irrespective of class, gender, or race loitering through the metropolitan labyrinth of any era; an organizing principle of urban representation as such.

The semantic plasticity of the Benjamin's term allows the *flâneur* to transform from a historically situated walker of Parisian boulevards into any literary character who sallies out onto the city's pavements as their witness. Whether a dandy in 1830s Paris, an African-American woman during the roaring 20s in New York City, a Soviet villager in the big city, or a sci-fi cyborg, Benjamin's *flâneur* continues to surprise us with his remarkable shape-shifting.¹ The *flâneur*'s ever-changing footprints have been sighted in the city parks of eighteenth-century London, on the embankments of nineteenth-century St. Petersburg, on the Belle Époque streets of Rio de Janeiro, and on the sidewalks of pre-war Tokyo and postmodern New York.² In an introduction to an important collection of critical essays on the Parisian icon, Keith Tester finds the vestiges of the *flâneur* in Robert Musil's modernist protagonist Ulrich, whom he purports to be a later-day heir to the French stroller. In a recent study by Parvin Ghasemi and Masoud Ghafoori, Holden Caulfield of *The Catcher in the Rye* becomes a junior *flâneur* in search of an authentic

¹ See Alexandra Smith's "The Return of the Flâneur in Andreï Platonov's Story 'Doubting Makar'" in *Essays in Poetics: The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Circle* (August 2002): p.124-38; Jeanne Scheper's "The New Negro Flâneuse in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*" in *African American Review* 42.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2008): p679-695; and Rob Shields's "Flânerie for Cyborgs" in *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.7-8 (Dec. 2006): p209-220, 334.

² Peter Barta notes the use of the *flâneur* persona in Nikolai Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect"; For the appearance of the iconic figure in Tokyo and other Japanese cities see Rolf J. Goebel's essay "Benjamin's Flâneur in Japan: Urban Modernity and Conceptual Relocation." *German Quarterly* 71.4 (Fall 1998): p377-91. Monika Gehlawat analyzes the treatment of New York *flânerie* in her dissertation *Boom: The New York City Flâneur in Postwar American Literature and Art*.

identity. John Werner reads the term loosely enough to allow not only Poe's characters, but the writer himself to come out no less than a "cosmic *flâneur*." Karen R. Lawrence, Doris Bremm, and Enda Duffy see the remnants of the figure in James Joyce's Leopold Bloom, while Rignall and Ching-fang Tseng note the *flâneur*'s traces in Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway.

Such equation of literary observers with Benjamin's pliable icon leads commentators to overlook radical discontinuities between documentary writers on *flanerie* and literary characters; modes of characterizing the city associated with either figure; and the manner in which successive literary movements use the figure of the spectator and articulate urban experience. Offering a corrective to the *flâneur* approach, I argue in this dissertation that the origins of the historical and the literary spectator are dramatically different and evaluate the latter figure as a fluid motif that presupposes a wide range of gradually changing assumptions about subjectivity, visibility, and urban presentation. I distinguish three different types of spectators in city texts: 1) the physiognomist of urban sketches and early realist fiction; 2) the Romantic visionary seer of lyrical verse and late Gothic fiction 3) and the modernist phenomenological observer of the early twentieth-century metropolitan novel. I relate each mode of city watching to three different models of organizing urban experience, respectively: 1) panorama; 2) phantasmagoria; and 3) montage.

In the first chapter, I posit a critical distinction between the writer-*flâneur* of city sketches – whom following Balzac and Charles Dickens, I call the "physiognomist" – and Romantic literary spectators walking and observing the big city. Drawing on Brand's analysis of the role of the *flâneur* in England, I trace the genesis of the physiognomist of

the streets to the “panorama literature” of neo-Classical London. According to Brand, the peripatetic writers of the British capital were the first to create such non-fictional genres as city guides, urban sketches, “coney-catching” pamphlets, and metropolitan character studies that gained enormous popularity among the English reading public in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Their urban texts cataloged the capital’s motley social types, neighborhoods, and locales into highly detailed and ordered accounts of the big city. What characterizes the physiognomists’ mode of urban portrayal was a single epistemological assumption that the metropolis can be rendered as a legible, comprehensive, and rational totality, and that an observer skilled in “reading” its various facets can order the diversity and complexity of metropolitan life into a coherent and stable taxonomy of types, stock figures, and other easily recognizable categories.

Contrasting the leisurely physiognomist to literary urban beholders of the first half of the nineteenth century, I argue that the latter were a product of the Romantic sensibility, subjectivity, and modes of visibility relocated from bucolic and Gothic settings onto the big city. Unlike *flâneurs* detachedly “botanizing on the asphalt,” the heroes-observers of Romantic prose and poetry never bear themselves with a posture of the amused recognition or the privileged belonging of dandies. Not mere strollers, Romantic city wanderers are perpetual *seekers* for whom the city is not a place to exercise interpretive control or to parade one’s appearance, but an enigmatic soundboard reflecting and amplifying their longings, their projections, their uprootedness, and their enchantments. Inflected through the contorted prism of their consciousness, urban topography becomes an “objective correlative” of a solitary perceiving ego – a

framework for a *problematic* subjectivity for which the sheer act of seeing suddenly becomes existentially meaningful.

I argue that the origins of such a perceiving subjectivity begin at the very end of the eighteenth century with the inauguration of a Romantic poetic persona whose sublime sensory experience becomes the central focus of artistic investigation. The new figure – whom I call “the visionary seer” – is first introduced in Wordsworth’s and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s revolutionary *Lyrical Ballads*, which present their speakers in the act of meditative contemplation of the visible. Three defining characteristics of the visionary beholder’s sensory experience in the bucolic landscape would soon allow him to transform the modern metropolis into a bizarre conundrum: 1) A profound attunement to the transactions between mental events and material reality in the act of perception; 2) Acute attention to sensory details; 3) A reclusive temperament and radical self-awareness of the hero-perceiver endowed with a prophetic spirit and profoundly estranged from the day-to-day world. Positioning the Romantic visionary seer as a dramatic counterpoint to the physiognomist-*flâneur* and his taxonomic mode of organizing urban experience, I suggest that the importation of the new hero’s eye-centered subjectivity and longing to transcend the quotidian allows Romantic writers to discover a new dimension of metropolitan experience that previously went unregistered by the writers of the city-as-panorama. No longer offering familiar, legible metropolitan tapestries, the Romantic visionary in autobiographical works of William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey reveals how the mind and the city can be braided into an unfathomable, spectral phantasmagoria: a private, inward, perpetually changing cityscape rather than the familiar civic space traversed by *flâneurs*.

In the second chapter, I analyze how two authors working on the opposite geographical margins of Western literary fiction – Edgar Allan Poe and Nikolai Gogol – stage in their tales an analogous transposition of the Gothic mode of inward perception from the fantastic universe of their early tales to their later city fictions. Writing independently of each other, both heirs to the Gothic tradition would map out similar maddening urban topographies founded on common premises about vision, subjectivity, and metropolitan experience.

I explore the importation of supernatural Gothic motifs and modes of Romantic subjectivity and visuality into a realistically rendered cityscape in Poe's London tale "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) and Gogol's Petersburg novella "Nevsky Prospect" (1835).

In the first half of the chapter, arguing against post-Benjaminian reading of Poe's story as a paradigmatic fiction about the *flâneur*, I examine Poe's oeuvre to show that the tale's hero-observer – along with his hypnagogic mode of seeing and his brilliant analytical powers – is not an illustration of the *flâneur*, but Poe's typical protagonist-beholder who has been relocated from the supernatural dreamworld of the author's arabesque fictions onto a recognizable, but invented modern London, a capital that Poe himself has never set foot in. Situated far afield from the bustle of the city, Poe's typical visionary spectators are reared in the fantastic confines of uncanny interiors – cloisters, crypts, exotic apartments, and sinister cellars, abysmal pits, or terrific maelstroms. The emotionally overwrought onlookers of Poe's tales usually observe grotesque objects (a animated tapestry, a strange painting, illusory optical effects, or the luminous eyes of their doubles) in dim settings lit by the murky illumination of candles, moonlight, or flambeaux. Poe's observers rivet their obsessive gaze on the morbid and the

otherworldly and experience a state of dream-like consciousness characterized by heightened sense of awareness, anxiety, and fear. I show that in “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe brings his characteristic Gothic beholder, his double, and his typical macabre atmosphere to a metropolitan setting the details of which have been borrowed from Charles Dickens’ non-fictional *Sketches by Boz*. Transforming London into yet another phantasmagoric enigma, a hieroglyphic pattern of urban masses behind which the protagonist discerns the presence of another realm, Poe prolongs his tour of the capital as a preternatural dreamscape to explore the spectral, evanescent allure of the metropolis and its recalcitrant resistance to the walker’s endeavors to probe its secrets.

In the second half of the chapter, I analyze how Gogol uses the Gothic beholder and his subjective mode of perception in “Nevsky Prospect” to inflect modern urban experience into a grotesque vision. I argue that Gogol transfers his bewitched observer of eye-deceiving, otherworldly events from the supernatural forests and farmsteads of his earlier exotic Ukrainian tales with their witches, devils, and sorcerers to the Russian capital where the demonic becomes the hidden structural principle behind deceptive urban facades. I demonstrate how Gogol was able to bring many of his earlier fantastic elements, devices, and themes from the land of fairy-tale exoticism to the humdrum realist urban setting by disguising them in the quotidian.

The third chapter reevaluates the connections between urban representation and spectatorship in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. The study aims to reveal a continuity between Baudelaire’s poet-beholder and the Romantic figure of the visionary seer. Investigating the influence of Romantic “aesthetics of the eye” in Baudelaire, the chapter offers a new reading of the role of spectatorship in the poet’s work by examining the

multifarious, and at times contradictory, modes of seeing the city in Baudelaire against his recurring presentations of fantastic dream visions, exotic artificial paradises, and descriptions of painterly landscapes. Underscoring Baudelaire's indebtedness to the Romantic model of organizing the city as a bizarre house of phantoms, and in particular to Poe's manner of characterizing the city, I explore what is radically modern about the lyrical spectator in Paris of the Second Empire – his status as a redeemer of the quotidian re-essentializing oppressive actuality on his peregrinations by seeking “universal communion” with the social ruins and flotsam of the city.

The last chapter considers a radical transformation in modes of rendering urban perception in modernist fiction. Unlike the Romantic visionary seeking the timeless and the sublime in the act of observation – the Wordsworthian union of the mind with the universe – and unlike the monomaniacal dreamer of Poe and Gogol stalking his own projections, the modern beholder becomes a vehicle for the investigation of what the philosopher Henri Bergson has called the “self in duration”: the present instant and the quotidian stream of consciousness that it elicits. The new “phenomenological” spectator would recuperate the sensual immediacy of each fleeting, ever-changing moment of city life and tear down the veil between the familiar self and its myriad mental events. Not experiencing bizarre mental states or delirious hypnagogic awareness like the street wanderers of De Quincey, Gogol, and Poe, the sensations and thoughts that the new modern peripatetic observer brings to the city are quotidian trains of associations, of ordinary psychological and physiological reactions, of memories, of desires, aversions, and longings that rapidly flicker through transient moments of apprehension. With the mind of the urban walker transforming from the Romantic phantasmagoric projector of

the fantastic into a ceaseless flux of disorganized, heterogeneous mental events, the modern spectator takes on the function of a roving camera-eye continuously registering immediate impressions of city life.

I analyze the new mode of characterizing urban spectatorship in James Joyce's *Ulysses* to show how its two city spectators – Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus – have become observers whose gaze continuously stages the literary effect of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization. Bringing to an ordinary day the poetry of their thoughtspeech both wanderers of the Hibernian metropolis reveal, as Viktor Shklovsky would famously put it, the “artfulness” of mundane experiences. Not longing like Romantic visionaries to dream their way out from reality into the fantastic nor striving to catalog the physiognomies of the city like the *flâneur*, the hero-wanderers of Bloomsday amble from one present moment into the next to wrench the metropolitan now out of the ruts of habitual perception as they continuously arrange it into ever new patterns of literary montage.

Chapter 1

The Physiognomist and the Visionary

When urban peripatetic writers first set foot on the pavements of the early modern metropolis to scrutinize its bustling routines and increasing diversity of social types, their encounters with the city gave birth to an array of new documentary genres – guidebooks, pamphlets, periodical sketches, and essays that Walter Benjamin in his Baudelaire essays has called “panorama literature.”³ From the early seventeenth century well into the fourth decade of the nineteenth, such non-fictional urban depictions presented vast urban tableaux of instantly recognizable social types and amusing spectacles of city life gathered by a leisurely, detached observer on the streets and lanes of major European capitals. Characterized by a posture of privileged independence, comfortable belonging, and remarkable familiarity with metropolitan life, the writer-spectator produced comprehensive, catalog-like accounts of the sights he gathered on his perambulations, which he ordered into coherent, rationally organized, legible presentations. Benjamin has famously identified such an observer with the figure of the *flâneur* “who goes botanizing on the asphalt” (68). To distinguish this type of city spectator from the literary hero-beholder, I will refer to him as a “physiognomist,” a term used by Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens that draws attention to the figure’s taxonomic mode of reading and domesticating the chaotic spectacles of the bustling metropolis.

³ Walter Benjamin applies the term “panorama literature” in his reflections on Parisian print culture of 1830s and 40s in “The Flâneur” section of “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire.” For a comprehensive discussion of urban panorama as a mode of organizing modern metropolitan experience see the first chapter of Dana Brand’s *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*.

The second kind of urban onlooker I take up in this chapter is a literary spectator who appears around the turn of the nineteenth century in British Romantic prose and verse. A stranger to the big city, the new figure exhibits a disquieting sense of estrangement, extreme states of consciousness, and profound longing to transcend the quotidian: characteristics that position him as a dramatic counterpoint to the physiognomist-*flâneur*. His warped, derealized mental landscape inflects the streetscape into a haunting conundrum that resists rational attempts to comprehend the urban environment. No longer offering familiar, legible metropolitan tapestries, the Romantic observer in autobiographical verse and prose reveals how the mind and the city can braid themselves into a bizarre urban phantasmagoria impossible to locate on the map. This chapter aims to demonstrate that the origins of this literary figure should be traced not to the streets on which saunter *flâneurs*, but to the groves and valleys of Romantic bucolic settings where the new observing hero appears for the first time. Contrasting the physiognomist to the Romantic visionary seer, I investigate the emergence of the new urban wanderer in relationship to the massive transformation during the Romantic era in the depiction of perceptual experience.

The Physiognomy of a Panorama

We are very fond of speculating, as we walk through a street, on the character and pursuits of the people who inhabit it; and nothing so materially assists us in these speculations as the appearance of the house doors. The various expressions of the human countenance afford a beautiful and interesting study; but there is something in the physiognomy

of street-door knockers, almost as characteristic, and nearly as infallible.

Whenever we visit a man for the first time, we contemplate the features of his knocker with the greatest curiosity, for we well know, that between the man and his knocker, there will inevitably be a greater or less degree of resemblance and sympathy. (Dickens 46)

The excerpt comes from Charles Dickens' *Sketches by Boz* (1836), a collection of non-fictional urban tableaux of everyday London life that present an expansive panorama of the early Victorian capital. With a brilliant knack for capturing characteristic mannerisms of fellow Londoners, the young author narrates familiar manifestations of the city's daily routines from morning to night. City parishes and gin-shops, the courts of law and the Newgate Prison, public dinners and private theaters, omnibuses and hackney-coach stands, Scotland Yard, and a Greenwich Fair are some of the many settings in the dizzying number of vignette-sized scenes that vividly evoke the historical capital of Dickens' day.

Like many of Balzac's urban narrative personas in *La Comedie humaine*, Dickens' narrator, Boz, is a gifted interpreter of metropolitan life who knows the secret art and pseudo-science of physiognomy and can "read" urban facades. A close observer of minutiae, Boz uses his remarkable familiarity with the capital to serve as the reader's guide to every facet of London life. A quick once-over of any denizen's "manner and appearance" is sufficient for Boz to reconstruct the urbanite's typical day, lifestyle, and biography. He is a physiognomist for whom even door knockers can lend vital clues about the character of their owners.

A product of scrupulous urban observation, the collection offers a highly amusing and amiable portrait of London peopled by easily recognizable social types. In the scene from the *Sketches* entitled “The Streets – Night,” for instance, Dickens treats the metropolis in a characteristically light-hearted manner. The capital after dark presents a “snug and comfortable” (61) procession of inoffensive nocturnal subspecies – kidney-pie merchants, fruit vendors, ragged urchins, gregarious policemen and sleepy coachmen – all of whom appear on the capital’s gas-lit sidewalks at various times of the night.

Permeated by a sense of intimacy, identity, and belonging enjoyed by a London native, Boz’s descriptions reassure the reader that no veil exists to hide the interiority of the other from the all-knowing gaze of its spectator. A constable on his beat, a drunkard stumbling out of a gin-shop, an ink-smudged clerk on the way from his office, or a coal-faced chimney sweeper are possessors of natures readily discernable from their exteriors. Because the inner and the outer correspond to each other, for Boz to describe the quality of a denizen’s frockcoat is to offer an intimation of the its wearer’s private life, and to utter a name of a street is not only to evoke an urban locale – but the worldview of its inhabitants.

The *Sketches by Boz* mark both the culmination and the impending demise of a well-rehearsed model for portraying metropolitan spectatorial experience that at the time of the collection’s publication has been developing for more than two hundred years: a mode of writing the city that begins to emerge around the middle of the seventeenth century in London when urban documentary writers first set out onto the streets and lanes of the capital to become its scrupulous witnesses. Offering the metropolis a looking

glass, the new peripatetic observers would rely on a unique mode of organizing the spectacles encountered on their journeys – a framework according to which metropolitan life would be artistically organized during the neo-Classical age. That model was the panorama: a way of transforming chaotic, diverse, and kinetically charged urban realities experienced by a strolling spectator into a coherent and comprehensive narrative. With its ample inventories, bird’s-eye-view presentations, and panoptic social typologies, the panorama strived to identify the city’s most salient patterns and divest it of any unknowns.

Such a mode of mapping the metropolis presupposed an observer who would bring to his perambulations a sense of comfortable belonging to the urban community as well as the curious detachment of a naturalist armed with a set of interpretive procedures that were in keeping with the assumptions of the Enlightened era. In the manner of Carl Linnaeus classifying nature’s flora and fauna, the city walker strove to establish order among the genera and subspecies of ever-increasing metropolitan social types. His portrayals – the physiognomist was almost always a *he* – were shot through with the encyclopedic intention of his age. A tireless collector of urban specimens, the metropolitan writer of the neo-Classical age served as a knowing guide as well as an entertaining *conférencier* of the city’s ever-changing dramatic presentations.

In transcribing his sensory experience into legible tableaux, the physiognomist brought on his strolls not only an intimate familiarity with every lane and shop of the city, but *a priori* modes of perception of his age – an “encoded eye” obsessed with proliferating classifications, with isolating, dissecting, and grouping the content of human vision into new taxonomic orders. His gaze was bounded by the horizons of what Michel

Foucault refer to as the *episteme* of the era – the collective ordering grid of each culture according to which it organizes the perceived material world into logical frameworks and systems of knowledge.⁴

In his painstakingly-researched study *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Dana Brand details the relationship between the ambulatory metropolitan writer of the neo-Classical age and the panoramic method of mapping urban experience, the early origins of which he locates in post-Renaissance London.⁵ In investigating the city spectator in the British capital, Brand shows how the panoramic model was first born in the early modern city guides like John Stow's *The Survey of London* (1597), which, as Brand maintains, was "a self-conscious effort to describe the physical, institutional and to a lesser extent social and cultural composition of a city in its entirety" (17). With chapters like "Bridges," "Gates," "Schools," "Houses of Learning," "Sports and Pastimes," and "Honorable Things Done by Citizens," Stow's *Survey* was an urban encyclopedia that celebrated the commercial and cultural splendor of the capital and marked the birth of the city sketches as a popular genre among the capital's growing readership.

Other comprehensive presentations of London quickly followed. "Coney-catching" pamphlets like Thomas Dekker's *The Bell-Man's Second Nights-Walke* (1609) offered an inventory of darker, seedier aspects of London and divulged the well-kept secrets of its criminal underbelly (Brand 18). While *coney catchers* instructed young gentlemen on

⁴ In his "archeological" investigations of the neo-Classical discursive formations and social practices, Foucault in *The Order of Things* would conceptualize the *episteme* as an ordering system "which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language..." (xx)

⁵ Brand notes that although "London had been mentioned and briefly described in literary texts before this point, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the origin of a series of urban genres, whose express purpose was to provide images of London" (16).

spotting the various classes of rogues and swindlers, as well as the deceptions each practiced on the unwary, the so-called “Theophrastian” character books provided their readers with a catalog of legible urban types, accompanied by their characteristic behavior, speech, and demeanor: from soldiers, tailors, and prostitutes to reverend judges, gentry, and courtiers (Brand 21).

Although the peripatetic writer rarely appears in the panorama itself, we meet the neo-Classical observer in person in the *Spectator* (1711-1712), the short-lived, but highly influential periodical of Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele. Its fictitious narrator – Mr. Spectator – would venture out on the streets of London to entertain and instruct his readers on the latest fashions, manners, and attitudes proper to a gentleman of good breeding. On his meanderings through the city, Mr. Spectator would present images of a benign capital where order, propriety, and virtue ruled the day in coffeehouses, Whig haunts, and marketplaces. Laying claim to unparalleled urban knowledge, Mr. Spectator would classify and label the objects before his gaze into rational categories, as the following scene in *Spectator* no. 454 vividly illustrates:

We arriv'd at *Strand-Bridge* at Six of the Clock, and were unloading;
when the Hackney-Coachmen of the foregoing Night took their Leave of
each other at the *Dark-House*, to go to Bed before the Day was too far
spent. Chimney-Sweepers pass'd by us as we made up to the Market, and
some Raillery happen'd between one of the Fruit Wenches and those black
Men, about the Devil and *Eve*, with Allusion to their several Professions. I
could not believe any Place more entertaining than *Covent-Garden*; where
I strolled from one Fruit-Shop to another, with Crowds of agreeable young

Women around me, who were purchasing Fruit for their respective Families. It was almost Eight of the Clock before I could leave that Variety of Objects. I took Coach and followed a young Lady, who tripped into another just before me, attended by her Maid. I saw immediately she was of the Family of the *Vainloves*. There are a set of these who of all things affect the Play of *Blindman's-Buff*, and leading Men into Love for they know not whom, who are fled they know not where. This Sort of Woman is usually a janty Slattern; she hangs on her Cloathes, plays her Head, varies her Posture, and changes Place incessantly; and all with an Appearance of striving at the same time to hide her self, and yet give you to understand she is in Humour to laugh at you. (4.99-100)

With the observer-narrator acting as the vehicle for city portraiture, Addison and Steele organize urban space taxonomically as they people their capital with moving stock figures and strolling stereotypes. When Mr. Spectator in the passage distinguishes a single young lady from the sea of “agreeable young women,” he instantly casts her into a type: “I saw immediately she was of the Family of the *Vainloves*” – a grouping he later takes great pains to describe.

Following Addison and Steele’s popular periodical, the image of the capital as a sweeping typological catalog begins to make inroads into Augustan verse – with the writer-spectator usually hidden behind the enumeration of city sights, yet discernable in the narrative tone itself that intimates the same posture of belonging and leisured detachment. An exemplary text is John Gay’s lively tour through the capital’s sidewalks entitled “Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London” (1716). Striking a

cautious balance between a celebration of London's commercial greatness and vilification of its dangers and low-life vices, the writer of *The Beggar's Opera* inventories the city's busy day-to-day rhythms and character types. His poem is divided into three books – “Of the Implements for Walking the Streets, and Signs of the Weather,” “Of the Walking the Streets by Day,” and “Of the Walking the Streets by Night” – with each delineating the pleasures and perils awaiting visitors on their journey through the streets and neighborhoods of London at various hours and seasons. Here is a portrait of Gay's London early in the morning before its crowds have poured out onto the streets:

For ease and for dispatch, the Morning's best;
No Tides of Passengers the Street molest.
You'll see a draggled Damsel, here and there,
From *Billingsgate* her fishy Traffick bear;
On Doors the sallow Milk-maid chinks her Gains;
Ah! how unlike the Milk-maid of the Plains!
Before proud Gates attending Asses bray,
Or arrogate with solemn Pace the Way;
These grave Physicians with their milky Chear
The Love-sick Maid and dwindling Beau repair;
[...]
Now Industry awakes her busy Sons,
Full charg'd with News the breathless Hawker runs:
Shops open, Coaches roll, Carts shake the Ground,

And all the Streets with passing Cries resound.⁶ (65-6)

Like the panoramic presentations of Addison and Steele, Gay's poetic overview of characteristic moments in the life of the capital transfigures its urbanites into single-word satirical generalizations. The poem's Damsels, Toughs, Milkmaids, Bricklayers, and Physicians are peripatetic groupings that (as the eighteenth-century system of noun capitalization further exaggerates) epitomize the qualities and traits particular to their professions and social stations.

As a flexible representational model for vividly evoking metropolitan culture, the taxonomic characterization of the city was hardly static. Evolving from the eighteenth into the early decades of the nineteenth century, panoramic urban accounts display a gradual movement in their descriptions towards increasing particularization, detail, and recognizability. As the urban writer endeavors to portray his encounters with the big city with new levels of verisimilitude, personifications and stock figures begin to yield to more differentiated presentations of urban ephemera, typology, and milieu: a transformation that suggests increasing complexity, social diversity, and the anonymity of the emerging modern experience.

One of the most important new tools of the urban observer at the end of the eighteenth century becomes the art of physiognomy popularized in the essays of Johann Caspar Lavater, a Swiss pastor and theologian who transformed the ancient practice of reading appearances into a highly influential pseudo-science that quickly swept through contemporary Europe.⁷ Lavater's physiognomic analysis was based on the corollary that

⁶ I have kept Gay's original capitalization that for ease of reading has been removed from the modern edition.

⁷ Published in the 1770s, Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* were translated into most major European languages and enjoyed wide currency (as well as some notoriety) among Europe's intellectual circles well

an individual's external traits reflect and contain his or her inner character and can be "read" by any observer skilled in interpreting its unmistakable signs in the human exterior. Its practitioner was an analytical spectator whose gaze, as Michael Shortland notes, could penetrate "to hidden layers of meaning [...] prising off deceits, postures, affectations, pretences and hypocrisies" (389) to deduce the invisible character of the sitter.

For the writer of the city, Lavater's physiognomy would offer a systematic approach to reading urban human facades and made him a keen-eyed observer of legible minutiae. Few panoramic genres rely upon Lavater's science more emphatically than the French *physiologies* of 1830s and 1840s – cheap but lavishly illustrated volumes of urban vignettes presenting Parisian life as a sensational gallery of portraits, which, as Benjamin observes in "The Flâneur," assured the capital's inhabitants "that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by" (70). In cataloging contemporary urban society, the writer of the *physiologie* would rely on Lavater's interpretive procedures to identify and classify the city's types, grouping them according to their characteristic foibles, habits, and activities.⁸

after their initial publication. Summarizing the reception and impact of Lavater's work, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1853-1860) offers the following entry: "Its publication created everywhere a profound sensation. Admiration, contempt, resentment, and fear were cherished towards the author. The discoverer of a new science was everywhere flattered or pilloried; and in many places, where the study of human character from the face became an epidemic, the people went masked through the streets." (qtd. in John Graham 61)

⁸ Often these Parisian collections were dedicated to a single metropolitan social type as suggested by their titles such as *Physiologie des amoureux*, *Physiologie de l'anglais a Paris*, *Physiologie du buveur*, *Physiologie du creancier et du debiteur* (Physiology of Lovers, Physiology of the Englishman in Paris, Physiology of the Drunk, Physiology of the Creditor and Debtor). For a general discussion of the genre, see Richard Sieburth's essay "Same Difference: the French Physiologies, 1840-1842."

The great realist Honoré de Balzac – whose works evince a close familiarity with Lavater’s method – has himself contributed a few *physiologies* to the genre. Analyzing the influence of Lavater on the writers of Europe, Martina Lauster notes an anonymous city sketch in *La Mode* from June, 1830, now widely attributed to Balzac, which describes a consummate physiognomist-*flâneur* who boasts the ability to unmistakably deduce the quarter from which any Parisian by the distinctive *ennui* inscribed into his or her facial features and demeanor:

This counterpart of Doctor Gall and of Lavater was able to distinguish, from the nuances of an individual’s physiognomy, the heavy and rustic ennui of the Jardin des Plantes from the more elegant and civilized ennui of the Tuileries... According to him, each quarter of Paris had an atmosphere which it was impossible to escape from, and thus a man who came from the rue Mouffetard or the place Maubert could not help conveying in his gestures, in the way he carried and dressed himself, and in the tone of his voice, something common and trivial which betrayed him as a pilgrim of the Latin quarter. (Lauster 163)

In his mammoth *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac makes extensive use of the physiognomic method of reading urban appearances and relies on the panoramic model for characterizing the city when evoking Paris in the long rhetorical set-pieces that often open his early novels. Balzac’s narrative personas, whom Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson calls “*artistes-flâneurs*,” are skilled physiognomists of the capital of which they profess to be all-knowing interpreters and guides. In *Ferragus* (1833), for instance, as if referring to himself, Balzac writes: “Only a few devotees, people who never walk along

in heedless inattentiveness, sip and savour their Paris and are so familiar with its physiognomy that they know its every wart, every spot or blotch on its face” (33). The novel’s narrator celebrates such urban walkers who are the “true lovers” of the capital:

...they raise their eyes at this or that street corner and know they will see a clock-face; they tell a friend whose snuffbox is empty to go through such and such a passage, and that there they will find a tobacco shop on the left, next door to a pastry-cook’s, a man with pretty wife. (33)

Striving towards totalizing, comprehensive, and rational order, the panoramic depictions of the physiognomist-*flâneur* shared yet another significant premise: the near total absence of subjective response to the sights the city onlooker encountered on his journeys. The writer-spectator would impose a grid of classifications on the metropolitan world, but never his own moods and private associations. He would recall the historical past of the landmarks he witnessed on his ambles, but never personal recollections. The cityscape he presented was wholly severed from his interiority. It was a spectacle without a spectator: a *collective* civic landscape where intimate motives, moods, and fascinations were out of place.

Yet three decades before Parisian *physiologies* would enjoy the height of their popularity, British literature would witness the birth of a radically different model for portraying urban spectatorship that would shatter all the assumptions implicit to the broad impersonal “panoramic” characterizations of city life associated with the *flâneur*. Descriptions of the metropolis would acquire a new idiom, a new mode of literary organization, and a new type of onlooker with a different temperament and disposition

towards the city. The amused and detached physiognomist would give way to a highly estranged observer for whom the metropolis becomes a bizarre, mysterious realm of fleeting, enigmatic perceptions inseparable from his derealized, warped mental landscape.

It is hardly coincidental that the appearance of a new inflection of metropolitan treatment follows the inauguration less than a decade earlier of a new type of spectator in British Romantic poetry – a looking subject with the mental and sensory armature that could catapult the act of perception to the center of narrative action. Discovering a visionary hero in the rural settings of British verse – evoked with the new “language of the senses,” to use the phrase of Kerry McSweeney – Romantic writers import the visionary beholder’s sensibility to the big city to tap into an entirely different dimension of urban experience that previously went unregistered by the physiognomist-*flâneur* who would continue to create panoramic depictions well into the 1840s.

Romanticism and the Eye

The philosophical underpinnings behind the subjective mode of perception of Romantic literary protagonists and lyric personas who appear at the very end of the eighteenth century should be traced to the momentous shift in the status of subjectivity and vision ushered in by the publication of Emanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

Kant’s “Copernican” revolution in philosophical thought propels the subject to the center of Western metaphysical order. In the *Critique* the mind ceases to be a Lockian *tabula rasa* passively registering external perceptions as Ideas and becomes an active contributor of its experience, structuring reality through the cognitive faculties of

apprehension that spatially and temporally unify perceptions below the level of rational understanding. A century earlier, John Locke compared visual sensation to the workings of a *camera obscura*. For him the senses were “the windows by which light is let into this dark room” (65) so as to leave its passive “imprint” of the external objective world.⁹ In Locke’s dark and hollow “closet” of the mind, Kant uncovers an *a priori* cognitive infrastructure that actively orders externally received appearance. In the preface to the second edition of his *Critique*, the German philosopher summarizes his revolutionary premise as follows:

Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. (22)

Kant’s transcendental idealism posits a subject who is cut off from the thing-in-itself (the noumenal realm) and exists in a sensible world of pure *appearances*, spatiotemporal sensations that must be subsumed under the formal organizing principles of the mind itself. As no position is available for the subject outside the limits of the Categories of

⁹ In his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), Locke would compare the mind to a “dark closet” into which enter “pictures” of the outer world:

... external and internal sensations, are the only passages that I can find, of knowledge, to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this *dark room*. For, methinks, the *understanding* is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or *ideas* of things without; would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of man, in reference to all objects of sight and *ideas* of them. (65)

Understanding, perception – the *sensory manifold* – becomes the only link between the mind and the external world and the only possible object available to representation:

What we have meant to say is that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them – a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, certainly, by every human being. With this alone have we any concern.

(82)

The *Critique's* revolutionary epistemology thrusts the looking subject into the mysterious realm of phenomena – a dazzling perceivable drapery veiling the noumena inaccessible to his senses or reason. With visible appearance emerging as the middle ground separating the sensing subject and the sensed object, the act of looking begins to imply an inward turn since the mind now becomes the sole guarantor of the real.

Kant's critique not only questioned the empirical *camera obscura* schema of subjectivity, it also shattered Cartesian epistemological certainty that rested on the foundational principle of the *Cogito* – the “I think” that assumes the existence of innate,

well-formed ideas from which the subject could derive all metaphysical truths prior to experience through reason alone. Emptying out the *Cogito* of the subject, Kant replaces it with an abstract notion of “transcendental apperception,” a synthetic principle unifying different mental processes and categories of understanding into universal human experience. Kant’s negation of the *Cogito*, as Mikhail Iampolski points out in his book *The Spectator: Essays in the History of Vision*, leads to “a disappearance of ‘Ideas’ and their replacement by visual perceptions, which are apprehended and synthesized together through the enigmatic, empirically unrepresentable transcendental apperception” (8).¹⁰ As Iampolski observes, Kant’s epistemological revolution transforms the subject into a beholder, one who is no longer a thinking subject, but a perceiving one.

Discussing the role of Kant’s *Critiques* on the sweeping transformation of the status of the observer in his influential account of the role of spectatorship in nineteenth-century discourses and social practices, Jonathan Crary notes:

In the aftermath of Kant’s work, there is an irreversible clouding over of the transparency of the subject-as-observer. Vision, rather than a privileged form of knowing, becomes itself an object of knowledge, of observation. From the beginning of the nineteenth century a science of vision will tend to mean increasingly an interrogation of the physiological makeup of the human subject, rather than the mechanics of light and optical transmission. It is a moment when vision escapes from the timeless order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another

¹⁰ As of this writing, Iampolski’s book has not been translated from the Russian. Its original title is *Nabludatel’: Ocherki istorii viden’ya*. The quotes offered above are my own translations.

apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body. (70)

Contrasting the neo-Classical observer of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, who exists separately from external reality, with the spectator of the nineteenth century, whose mind is inextricably intertwined with the outer world in perception, Cary suggests that the new subject has become a “site and producer of sensation” (75).

As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy contend in *The Literary Absolute*, Kant’s epistemological revolution “opens up the possibility of romanticism” (29). The collapse of the split between the perceiver and the outer world in Kant’s metaphysics is indirectly echoed in Romantic poetry by the appearance of a new lyrical subject-protagonist whose enigmatic and sublime sensory experience becomes inseparable from mental events.

The new role of the beholder in Romantic lyric investigations attests to an active participatory function of subjectivity in observation analyzed by M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams argues that the transactions of inwardness and the landscape in perception after “the Copernican revolution in epistemology” become the central focus of many Romantic texts, which begin to portray the mind “as contributing to the world in the very process of perceiving the world” (58). Discussing the Romantic reevaluation of the act of seeing in poetry, Abrams writes: “Usually, in these metaphors of the perceiving mind, the boundary between what is given and what bestowed is a sliding one... in most passages the implication is that the content of perception is the joint product of external data and of the mind” (61).

No longer a passive receiver of sensation, the mind of the perceiver now becomes a fantastic projector superimposing mental events onto the screen of the real. A new optical apparatus would come to replace the *camera obscura* as the dominant metaphor of the mind in perception: the magic lantern used in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century to stage spectral optical illusion-shows known as “phantasmagorias.” As Terry Castle argues in her study, these phantasmagoric shows become a “master trope in the nineteenth century romantic writing” (43) for the inner “ghosts” of the self: hallucinations, dreams, moments of heightened awareness, visionary experiences, and other “states of neurasthenic excitement in which images whirled chaotically before the inward eye” (48).

The appearance of the new subjective mode of perception in English poetry announces itself most expressively in the verse of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. From their revolutionary *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) to their later works, both poets often depict their lyric personas in a heightened moment of sublime contemplation of the visible. Their speakers are beholders enraptured by the new union between the cosmos and the mind, of which Wordsworth would write in the 1805 edition of *The Prelude*: “creator and receiver both/Working but in alliance with the works/Which it beholds” (II.258-60). In their lyrical verse, the gaze of the poets, unlike that of a physiognomist obsessed with categorizing and ordering the material world, would seek out that which lies beyond language and rational comprehension: powerful, restorative states of consciousness that seem to infinitely reproduce the self in the visible landscape. For the British Romantics the act of perception now gains metaphysical implications and becomes a quest to recover a paradise lost in silent moments of sensory apprehension.

Four defining characteristics of the new figure's sensory experience in the bucolic landscape would soon allow him to inflect the modern metropolis into a bizarre, phantasmagoric conundrum: (1) A profound attunement to the transactions between mental events and material reality in the act of perception; (2) Acute attention to sensory details: visible surfaces, optical effects, and gradation of hues; (3) A reclusive temperament; (4) and a self-awareness of the hero-perceiver inspired by a prophetic spirit and profoundly estranged from the day-to-day world.

To illustrate these, let me begin with Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," one of his best-known poems from *Lyrical Ballads*. Describing his re-visitation of the Wye River after an absence of five years, the speaker meditates on the tranquil, rustic scene and explores the way his memory has absorbed its "beauteous forms" upon numerous returns to sustain him in times of solitude and despair with "Sensations sweet,/ Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" (lines 27-8). Watching the natural landscape, Wordsworth renders it *impressionistically*. The poet does not present the reader with a catalog of external sights, but rather with the manner in which they present themselves to his senses:

...Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb
The wild green landscape. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild ... (4-17)

Objects “lose themselves” amid the veil of color and underbrush. The “simple” green of summer plots and orchards mingles with the “wild” green of the forests. As if described by a painter’s brush, hedgerows transform into “little lines/ Of sportive wood.”¹¹

Underscoring the act of perception with verbs like “behold,” “view,” and “see,” the poet celebrates the creative coalescence of the seer and the seen in descriptions, which are irradiated with his private moods and recollections. The scene before his view impresses fleeting mental affects, “thoughts of more deep seclusion,” that subtly alter and inflect the very landscape he views. The speaker is at once looking at the concrete reality of “all the mighty world/ Of eye and ear” (106-7) and also sees a “picture of the mind” (61) – recollections of moments “amid the many shapes/ Of joyless day-light” (52-53) when the poet turned to the reviving images of “sylvan Wye” in the “lonely rooms” of cities. Contrasting the naïve, immediate way of seeing of his boyhood when no “remoter charm by thought supplied, nor any interest/ Unborrowed from the eye” (82-83) was still

¹¹ Analyzing Wordsworth’s “grammar of seeing” in “Tintern Abbey,” Reginald A. Foakes notes that the poet “was composing the scene very much as contemporary artists did, which is to say he beheld it with an eye tutored in a visual language he had acquired through reading and through seeing paintings” (143).

required of the beholder, Wordsworth's poet valorizes his mature mode of perception imbued with "a sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused" (96-97).

The landscape, as if stuck between two parallel mirrors, eternally recedes into the mind of the poet-beholder. Such transactions between the viewer and the view allow the Romantic seer to enter a "blessed mood" in which, transcending the needs of "this corporeal frame" and "with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy" (47-8), he is able to "see into the life of things" (49).

The regaining of an earthly paradise in consummating the "holy marriage" of the mind and the outer cosmos, as Abrams maintains in *Natural Supernaturalism*, is the high argument of Wordsworth's autobiographical epic *The Prelude*, in which on his visionary encounters with nature the speaker is revived by the sublime experience of what he calls "spots of time."¹² Geoffrey Hartman defines these revelatory moments as "strong memories dating from the first act of [the poet's] life, surviving in him as fresh as when they happened, and often unconsciously restorative [that] guide him like stars" (210) on his epic pilgrimage. The most important of such "spots of time" announces itself in the concluding book of *The Prelude* in the climactic vision the poet experiences while climbing Mount Snowdon. On his early morning ascent to the mountaintop, the speaker is awed by the sight of the moonlight reflected brilliantly on the "silent sea" of clouds extending to the Atlantic:

...at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,

And with a step or two seemed brighter still;

¹² Wordsworth introduces the concept of "spots of time" in Book XI of the 1805 *Prelude*. These transcendental loci are powerful memories of places through which "our minds are nourished and invisibly repaired -/ A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,/ That penetrates, enables us to mount/ When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen." (XI.215-219)

Nor had I time to ask the cause of this;
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash. I looked about, and lo,
The moon stood naked in the heavens at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle, and give up his majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach. (XIII.36-51)

For Wordsworth, the luminous vista from Mount Snowdon over the cloud cover serves as “The perfect image of a mighty mind, / Of one that feeds upon infinity” (XIII.69-70) and is made free and vast as a “genuine counterpart/ And brother of” (XIII.88-9) the cosmos itself. The sublime moment when the natural landscape suddenly becomes interfused with the mindscape is accompanied – as in “Tintern Abbey” – by a heightened acuity to visible surfaces treated in a language that evokes highly expressive, sensory images. The glimmering ground, the sudden “flash” of moonlight, and the brightly lit “shapes” of mist that “seemed to dwindle” are images of the borderland between the mind and the material world – the Kantian realm of phenomena that can only be represented by recreating the

manner in which the scene appeared to the poet in that visionary instant. Mimicking the eerie ocular effects of lights and shadows, the poet creates what he calls a “shew”: an illusionist’s theater of dramatic ghost-like imagery and illumination that evoke the murky atmosphere of phantasmagoric exhibitions staged by the projections of a magic lantern.

The reciprocal transactions between subjectivity and the material world are also the great theme of the poetry of Wordsworth’s friend and collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In many of Coleridge’s works the poet reveals himself as a beholder transfixed in a state of extraordinary perception. Contemplating a silent, tranquil winter scene in “Frost at Midnight,” for instance, the poet observes a “film” – a loose piece of soot – quietly fluttering on the grate of the glowing hearth and thinks that

... its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought. (17-22)

The film before the beholder’s gaze enters into “dim sympathies” with the self and becomes its “companionable form” – an external correlate or an “echo or mirror” of the poet’s self seeking its own analogies in the outer world in moments of rapt apprehension.

In Coleridge’s poetry the new-found visual acuity in the treatment of perceptual experience is even more pronounced than in the verse of Wordsworth, particularly in those works that utilize “Gothic” atmospheric effects and themes to treat the supernatural.

Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* (1798) is a foremost example of an "ocular" poem: an ever-changing phantasmagoric sequence of bizarre optical spectacles observed by a fictional beholder at sea. The terrifying and lonely ordeal of the "bright-eyed" mariner is replete with references to colors and uncanny effects of lighting. Under the moonlight illuminating the mariner's journey, the ocean's ice becomes as "green as emerald." Stunning displays of atmospheric electricity ("death-fires") dance on the ship's mast at night while "the water, like a witch's oils/ Burn[s] green, and blue and white." The face of the mariner's steersman is gleaming "by his lamp"; sea snakes move "in tracks of shining white"; fish give off an eerie luminance in "hoary flakes," while glowing sea creatures leave a brilliant "flash of golden fire" in the nocturnal waters. The entire poem is a fantastic, eerie illusionist show of a sea voyage into the supernatural.

The lyrical works of both Wordsworth and Coleridge define a new relationship between language, vision, and subjectivity that marks a dramatic rupture with the assumptions about seeing and writing of the neo-Classical Age. Both poets tether their imagery to the mind of a solitary ego in a state of heightened awareness. No longer depicting the material world as external to the observer, the Romantic writers discover new strata of representable experience – a universe of ocular events, appearances and visible surfaces that perpetually point back to the beholder's subjective mode of perceiving them. It is this inward mode of perception of their observing heroes amid the vales and glens of the countryside that the Romantic writers would relocate to the big city. Their visionary onlookers would continue to search for the sublime states of self-awareness amidst metropolitan glitter and grime. Yet the transcendental adventure of the eye among the jostle of urban throngs would no longer beckon them with the same

revivifying “spots of time.” Instead, in the transactions of the mind and the outer world, the reclusive beholders in the big city would discover a new interstice between the self and the alien metropolitan universe: one that would thwart their endeavors to find wholeness and spiritual resurrection yet would hint with promises of an otherworldly realm no less bewitching and fantastic than the haunted icy wastelands through which the ancient mariner of Coleridge journeys.

The Visionary and City of the Mind

Once the Romantic mode of perception emerges in English nature poetry, it would only be a matter of time for the lyric beholder to venture out onto the streets of the metropolis and begin seeing the cityscape as a bizarre analogue of the perceiving self. Wandering into the British capital from the dales of rural settings and sinister Gothic fantasies, the new spectatorial hero would seek on the sidewalks not physiognomic knowledge, but a glimpse of mysterious irreality. By bringing from the country into the modern cityscape a fictional sensory apparatus keenly attuned to visual effects and subjective obsessions, the Romantic poet uncovers on the dark lanes and streets a mode of seeing that is directly antithetical to the “panoramic” observations of a neo-Classical spectator. No longer assuming the posture of amused, privileged detachment, the visionary beholder stumbles on his (and occasionally her) urban rambles upon unaccountable pockets of urban geography that Thomas De Quincey would call the city’s “terra incognita.”

William Blake’s “London” (1794) presents an overture of the new relationship between the Romantic spectator and the modern city:

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.
How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning church appals;
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

Blake's poet-wanderer does not offer a *flânerie*-inspired catalog of recognizable sights or physiognomic generalizations but, as Raymond Williams suggests in *The Country and the City*, reveals "suppressed connections" and "a new way of seeing the human and the social order" (149) that lies beyond taxonomic knowledge. The haunted images of the soot-blackened church and the blood-stained palace are sinister visionary revelations of well-masked relations between the woes of urban subjects (chimney sweepers and soldiers) and oppressive ruling institutions (the church and the monarchy) – hallucinatory projections that testify that the London of Blake is as "mind-forged" as the clatter of manacles the poet hears in the desperate cries of fellow urbanites.

Yet it is William Wordsworth who relocates the new Romantic mode of inward perception from the rural to the urban landscape in his London sonnet “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802”:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

The poet contemplates London’s skyline of “ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples” in a manner identical to the way he scrutinizes the “valley, rock, or hill” of his characteristic rural-set verses. The same aspects of his sensory experience out in the country’s sylvan settings – transactions of the self with the landscape, acute awareness of visual surfaces, and a sense of the reclusive remove of a solitary observer – are inscribed into the sublime moment of urban perception of a sleeping capital. Once the sonnet’s

octet evokes a highly vivid image of an “all bright and glittering” capital, the sestet couples the perceptual experience to its beholder: “Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!” Lit by the sun’s rays and “open[ing] unto the fields, and to the sky,” the fabricated, man-made creation is fused through the gaze of the poet-seer with the natural universe to become, as the critic Harvey Sucksmith suggests, “the ultimate objective correlative to convey and fulfill his deepest desire for a perfect inward calm, for a complete reassurance that beauty is everywhere” (118).

But if Wordsworth, a poet of nature *par excellence*, surprises us by confessing that the most sublime vision of beauty which he beheld was that of the big city, encountering the busy, everyday frantic London of crowds in Book VII of *The Prelude*, the speaker is no longer able to *naturalize* metropolitan experience into the same serene, organic vision. As Julian Wolfreys observes, “The confusion and multiplicity which attend London worry at the medium of language itself, which for Wordsworth has always been a medium for the contemplative consideration of fixed scenes, single events, objects which suggest unity, centre, origin” (129). No longer celebrating the city’s “mighty heart,” Wordsworth’s stance towards the busy capital becomes dramatically ambiguous: at times professing “obscure delight” (VII.91) in its frenzied spectacles, while towards the end of the book vehemently condemning London as a place of “lies,” a site of “blank confusion” (VII.696) and “anarchy and din/ Barbarian and infernal” (VII.660-1).

But although, as Jonathan Wordsworth writes in *The Borders of Vision*, the poet in the big city is “confronted with his own littleness, transience, [and] irrelevance” (298), his treatment of urban experience in Book VII largely relies on the same model for characterizing the rapport between the self and the outer world evident in the poet’s

bucolic verses. The urban realm which traverses the visionary beholder, “a traveler from pastoral hills,” is a product of an analogous mind-landscape dialectic: the city – like the country – is a correlative of its perceiver who invests its streets with his moods and fascinations, proliferating the phantasms of a solitary self among the crowd’s multitudes.

As are most of Wordsworth’s settings, the seat of which is the poet’s memory, the London of *The Prelude* is a place recollected in tranquility: an urban terrain summoned by the speaker in his “favorite grove” in rural Cumbria where in solitude he watches the city of his youth present itself to his mind’s eye as memory re-perceived that has through time began to trade places with “fancy.” In what Lucy Newlyn suggests as “an astonishing reversal” of “Tintern Abbey,” in which the poet was able to recall in his “lonely rooms” amid “the din/Of towns and cites” the spirit of nature, “it is urban life,” writes Newlyn, “that [the speaker of *The Prelude*] looks back on, from his “lonely places” in Cumbria...” (181). Finding himself in Grasmere once again fit “for the Poet’s task,” Wordsworth opens his urban excursion by lodging it in the mind as a remembrance of a city past:

Shall I give way,
Copying the impression of the memory,
Though things unnumber'd idly do half seem
The work of fancy, shall I, as the mood
Inclines me, here describe, for pastime's sake
Some portion of that motley imagery,
A vivid pleasure of my Youth, and now

Among the lonely places that I love

A frequent day-dream for my riper mind? (VII.145-153)

The result is the earliest subjective montage of urban life – a feverish tour through the “motley imagery” and “random sights” of London that have become the poet’s “frequent” day-dreams, which themselves originate in his own rhapsodies about nature.

It is noteworthy that Wordsworth writes the city of memory primarily in the present tense. Describing himself walking the hills of Cumbria and seeking inspiration from nature for his poetic endeavor in the fall of 1804, Wordsworth resorts to the simple past to depict his rejuvenating rambles taking place only “yester-even.” Yet when the speaker sets off on his reminiscences of London of 1791, he slides into the present:

And first, the look and aspect of the place –

The broad high-way appearance, as it strikes

On strangers of all ages, the quick dance

Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din,

The endless stream of men, and moving things,

From hour to hour the illimitable walk

Still among streets with clouds and sky above... (VII.154-160)

The use of the present tense testifies that the “place” presented by the poet has undergone a dramatic temporal doubling as both a) a concrete cityscape portrayed in the present to mimic the manner in which it was perceived by the young poet in 1791 and b) an internal site where the “impression[s] of the memory” are reviewed and recorded by the mature poet in the now of writing itself.

But Wordsworth not only internalizes the city as a recollection, he treats his youthful encounters with London with the same recurrent focus on the coalescence of the beholder and the landscape in the act of imaginative perception with which he treats his pastoral settings. Uniquely attuned to the way the mind and landscape can braid themselves into analogues of each other, Wordsworth becomes one of the first writers to discover the “urban sublime”: the private shadow cityscape uncovered by the solitary onlooker behind the brick-and-mortar of familiar streets.

While the speaker condemns metropolitan life as deceitful, sinful, and “falsely gay” and calls it “a hell/ For the eyes and ears!” (VII.685-6) his closing dismissal of the urban experience belies the “vivid delight” and profound fascination with the strange pleasures the city offers to the poet’s senses – “the lustres, lights/ The carving and the gilding, paint and glare” (VII.441-2) – which he registers with the same ocular acuity with which he perceives provincial England in his nature poetry.

Not delineating the city as a taxonomic enumeration of types, Wordsworth registers London as a collection of perceptual events and mesmerizing sensory fragments inseparable from their perceiver. Bathed in visually evocative language, the fragmentary impressions of endless spectacles exist for the poet without the need to subsume them into a rational order of comprehensive tableaux. Looking at the singular passersby on the streets, the poet consciously resists the dissecting observations of an urban physiognomist:

...Such candidates for regard,
Although well pleased to be where they were found,
I did not hunt after or greatly prize,

Nor made unto myself a secret boast

Of reading them with quick and curious eye. (VII.577-581)

Instead of making a “boast of reading” urban facades, Wordsworth’s beholder sees only a disorienting whirl of illegible surfaces, a deceitful veil of “lies to every sense,” amid which he stumbles upon an unreal, mysterious realm, which as Raymond Williams notes, gives “first expression of what has since become a dominant experience of the city” (150): a murky uncanny domain that is the fused product of the observer’s inwardness and the city he observes:

O Friend! one feeling was there which belonged

To this great city, by exclusive right;

How often, the overflowing streets,

Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said

Unto myself, “The face of every one

That passes by me is a mystery!’

Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed

By thought of what and whither, when and how,

Until the shapes before my eyes become

A second-sight procession, such as glides

Over still mountain, or appears in dreams:

And all the ballast of familiar life,

The present, and the past; hope, fear, all stays,

All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man

Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known. (VII.593-607)

Watching the faces of passersby on “overflowing streets,” the speaker intuits an ineffable “mystery” that defies “all laws of acting, thinking and speaking.” Transmuting the throng into passing “shapes” observed in a dream-like state of awareness, the poet’s gaze collapses the panorama’s divide between the city and the self to reveal the capital as an inscape that is neither in the mind of the observer nor in the city itself, a “receding referent,” as Carol Bernstein calls it, that beckons the spectator but which is too evanescent and spectral to be ever linguistically grasped.

In the climactic passage, London exists as a double image. The capital is both a visible setting recalled as well as a “second sight procession,” an enigmatic dreamscape of a solitary monad experiencing a profound disconnection from other passersby who morph before his eyes into riddles. Although the union of the perceiver with the perceived in the metropolis does not offer illuminations of sublime oneness awaiting the poet in Book XIII – a revelatory vision of “promontory shapes” of mist flowing over Mount Snowdon into the sea – the interfusion of urban space and subjectivity distills a surprisingly similar image of pedestrian “shapes” gliding over a “still mountain.” Yet unlike the perfect vision of “a might Mind” in Book XIII, the fusion of the urban landscape with its beholder “lost/ Amid the moving pageant” of the crowds produces a profoundly solipsistic construct, a spectral space where encounters with anonymous strangers reveal the observer’s estrangement from the urban community.

At the center of such bizarre encounters is the speaker’s meeting with the blind beggar, which, as Newlyn points out, is the most “unaccountable, the most traumatic, of the [poet’s] ‘spots of time’” (181):

’twas my chance

Abruptly to be smitten with the view
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
The story of the man, and who he was.
My mind did at this spectacle turn round
As with the might of waters, and it seemed
To me that in this label was a type
Or emblem of the utmost that we know
Both of ourselves and of the universe,
And on the shape of the unmoving man,
His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked,
As if admonished from another world. (VII.610-623)

Shattering the physiognomic correspondence between appearance and inner person, the poet's confrontation with the beggar reveals an unbridgeable chasm between descriptive language, which could assign experience its proper conceptual niche (the words on the "written paper"), and mysterious actuality that has transmogrified into a haunting symbol of the limits of human comprehension. The mendicant's sign only further augments the sense of his illegibility, while the blind man becomes a bizarre "emblem" not of the analogy of the human mind and the universe, but "of the utmost that we know" of each. In a feverish state of bewitchment, the eye of the poet begins to intuit a secret realm ("another world") beyond the level of everyday linguistic description. As William Sharpe observes in *Unreal Cities*, "Where one expects to find the soul of the man, there is

only more surface. For the beggar reveals to the poet, far more strongly than even the theater does, that the entire city, or rather one's knowledge of it, is illusory: the 'delusion bold'" (26). The uncanny meeting with the strange figure makes the poet conclude:

Though reared upon the base of outward things,
These chiefly are such structures as the mind
Builds for itself. Scenes different there are –
Full-formed – which take, with small internal help,
Possession of the faculties: the peace
Of night, for instance, the solemnity
Of Nature's intermediate hours of rest
When the great tide of human life stands still,
The business of the day to come unborn,
Of that gone by locked up as in the grave;
The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
Unfrequent as in deserts ... (VII.624-636)

Wordsworth's beholder charts out a new kind of urban topography – a private London founded on the entanglement of the material world – “the base of outward things” – with the isolated ego in the empty nocturnal capital. Cross-fertilized with the altered mood of the wanderer, the streets transform into “structures as the mind builds for itself.” The speaker catalogs such urban moments that lend themselves “with small internal help” to these luminous transmutations: the sleeping cityscape at night with its quiet streets speckled by the moonlight or the bustling late-winter evenings when passersby shuffle

home through the cold, rainy haze. But Wordsworth's city, as the poet admits a few lines later, can only be "falsely catalogued." It consists of "things that are" and "are not": a murky and ambivalent terrain where totalizing knowledge of the physiognomist proves to be both presumptuous and illusory.

In prose, the Romantic beholder in the metropolis makes his appearance in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). De Quincey's descriptions of London are dramatically split between his early pre-addiction stay in Soho as a starving, penniless adolescent from Manchester who wanders the capital in a state of dejection and his later sojourns as "a solitary and contemplative man" who meanders through the visionary London of Blake and Wordsworth under the influence of laudanum.

His anguished London of sobriety is described in the "Preliminary Confessions" section of the book. It is a "a city of losses, disappearances, obscured identities, [and] dreariness" (Wolfreys 104), a place of extreme physical and psychological deprivation, where the future opium-eater would experience the "fiercer stage of my long-sufferings" (19) and would spend his days in precarious vagrancy with his only companion, a sixteen-year-old streetwalker named Ann whom one day he would lose to the faceless crowds of Soho.

But against this "doleful" portrait of the city of loss stands the image of a psychotropic London, a visionary metropolis that, like Wordsworth's moonlit, empty streetscape, bears the inflection of an interiority that perceives it. Never having established a sublime rapport with nature like Wordsworth's poet, De Quincey's opium-

eater brings to London visionary powers bought at a local druggist: powers that make him no less attuned to the mysterious reciprocity existing between the beholder and the urban landscape. Not revived by sights of valleys and hills, the hero of the *Confessions* becomes a spectator of his own feverish hallucinations experienced “under the Circean spells” of laudanum that grant his mind an ability “of painting . . . upon the darkness, all sorts of phantoms” (75). Lying awake at night, the inward observer watches “vast processions” of never-ending visions seep into his dreams only to become subtle “apparitions” upon their return to the waking self. Among the many processions of exotic imagery, the narrator mentions hallucinating fantastic cityscapes such “as was never yet beheld by the waking eye” (79), cities created by the mind alone that violently alters all sense of space and time:

Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity. This, however, did not disturb me so much as the vast expansion of time; I sometimes seemed to have live for 70 to 100 years in one night. (76)

But De Quincey not only envisions the metropolis in his “architectural dreams.” In “a creative state of the eye,” he sallies out on peripatetic forays into London to which he brings an extraordinary palette of “faint and visionary colours” of his opiate mind. As a solitary beholder, he “wander[s] forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance” (52) on fantastic nocturnal journeys to encounter the capital as an eerie dream-city established on the borders between the sleeping and the waking self:

I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages.... Some of these rambles led me to great distances ... And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such Sphinx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares, as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (52-53)

De Quincey's city is a spectral enigma, a terra incognita that is as much a product of the dark architectural urban maze as the labyrinthine patterns of the beholder's feverish moods and longings. His gaze, unlike that of the trained physiognomist, fails to distinguish familiar features that would help him navigate through the newly discovered "Sphinx's riddles of streets": a luminous urban realm that like the London of Wordsworth defies both summation and comprehension.

Often "in divinest state" of drugged repose, the opium-eater – like Wordsworth's prophetic seer – seeks in "mystical" moments of apprehension the objective correlative of the self in the outer world. Watching the city of Liverpool from his window on a summer night extending towards the Atlantic, the narrator writes:

...it has often struck me that the scene itself was somewhat typical of what took place in [my] reverie. The town of L—represented the earth, with its sorrows and its graves left behind, yet not out of sight, nor wholly forgotten. The ocean, in everlasting but gentle agitation, and brooded over by a dove-like calm, might not unfitly typify the mind and the mood which then swayed it. (54)

While the fusion of the streetscape with the mental landscape of the meandering opium-eater and of Wordsworth's loitering visionary poet is elicited by remarkably different experiences, both stumble upon the private cityscape manufactured in a dream-like state of consciousness. The former perceives London through opium-swirled reveries; the latter observes other passersby transfigure into a bizarre procession that "appears in dreams." In such a heightened state of awareness, each Romantic wanderer is no longer relying on the taxonomic approach of the physiognomist-*flâneur* to articulate urban experience, but instead presents a radically subjective portrait of a phantasmagoric metropolis projected by the magic lantern of the alienated, solitary, altered mind.

Chapter 2

The Gothic Eye and the Magic Lantern

The previous chapter examined how the literary beholder's rambles through the metropolis of Romantic autobiographical verse and prose offered a radical departure from the *flâneur's* panoramic urban presentations – with their recognizable urban patterns, familiar details, and legible social typologies – by transmuting the city into a chimerical, mirage-like landscape inseparable from the mind of its perceiver. I argued that this new mode of portraying the cityscape was a product of a massive shift in Romantic popular epistemology that ushered in a radically different literary subject: a visionary seer depicted in the sublime moment of apprehension of the outer world. Importing the new beholder's fantastic mode of perception from the natural to the urban landscape, Romantic writers like William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey began to portray the metropolis as a “Sphinx's riddle of streets” – an otherworldly realm devoid of recognition, descriptive immediacy, clock-time, or factual particulars, a bizarre, unfathomable maze where, as Wordsworth would write in *The Prelude*, “the face of everyone ... is a mystery” (VII.628-9).

This chapter explores how around the second half of the 1830s – when the physiognomist's “panoramic” mode of urban representation would enjoy the height of its popularity in the French *physiologies* and other documentary metropolitan sketches – the image of the big city as an urban phantasmagoria would make its way into short prose fiction. Its spectatorial heroes, successors to the Romantic visionary beholder, would wander from the supernatural landscapes of Gothic fiction into a seemingly realistic

metropolis evoked with a sense of “classificatory comprehensiveness” (Bowlby 307) of contemporary physiognomic depictions. Peeking behind the vast metropolitan canvas of recognizable appearances, the new fictional city prowlers, whose subjectivity was now more emotionally overwrought and off-kilter, would discover under the veil of the visible a haunting demonic depth.

At the center of this study are two authors, working on the opposite geographical margins of Western literary fiction – Edgar Allan Poe and Nikolai Gogol – who stage in their tales an analogous transposition of the Romantic inward mode of perception from the Gothic universe into city fiction. Writing independently of each other, both heirs to the European Romantic tradition would map out similar fantastic urban topographies founded on common premises about vision, subjectivity, and the metropolitan experience.

In stories such as Gogol’s “Nevsky Prospect” (1835) and Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), these authors present a portrait of a metropolis that, at least on the surface, vividly evokes the realities of the modern city. Their tales open with a vast panorama of the crowd stampeding on the capitals’ thoroughfare that offers a physiognomist-like dissection of passersby who busily stream along the main avenue and act in keeping with the deportment fitting their social and economic stations. Yet with the coming of darkness, the tapestry of the crowd in both tales quickly gives way to a sinister, spectral vision centered on an obsessive stalker chasing his own illusions through the dark, gas-lit streets and narrow lanes of the metropolis.

Part I

Edgar Allan Poe and the Metropolis

Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) – a story written almost halfway through his literary career – offers one of the most complete portraits of the fictional urban observer in nineteenth-century prose fiction. No words are exchanged in the course of the narrative. No physical contact ever transpires between its characters. Without a soundscape, the tale is dedicated entirely to the act of looking.

The story opens towards the late evening "on one of the principal thoroughfares" (388) of London, a city that Poe himself has never been to. Sitting in front of a large window of a hotel's coffeehouse as the gas-lamps become "well lighted" and the night settles over the British capital, an anonymous protagonist-narrator finds himself in a mood of "calm but inquisitive interest in everything" (388) and looks outside the smoky panes of the bow window as he becomes "absorbed in contemplation" of the bustling pedestrian throngs:

...two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without. (388-9)

Peering from his observation post, the storyteller, an American abroad who has recently recovered from an unnamed illness, offers what amounts to a whirling taxonomy of urban pedestrians. In a state of "keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision

departs” (388), the beholder dissects the rushing urban pedestrians according to their class, occupation, dress, gait, and general demeanor: from businessmen, lawyers, and other “decent” passersby to “clerks,” “pick-pockets,” and “gamblers,” “street beggars,” “Jew peddlers,” “invalids,” “women of the town,” “porters,” “coal-heavers,” “organ grinders,” “monkey-exhibitors and ballad mongers,” “ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every descriptions” (389-391). The observer’s “descent in the scale of gentility” begins as follows:

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but re-doubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and overdone smile upon the lips, the course of the persons impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.

(389)

The protracted sketch of the species and sub-species of urban dwellers that spans the first half of the tale showcases the remarkable interpretive skills of the narrator who knows the art of reading outer appearances. Like a physiognomist-*flâneur*, Poe’s onlooker makes

inductive leaps from carefully observed traits to establish a social category to which each pedestrian belongs. As in the panoramic tableau, the city is presented at first as an extended catalog of walking stereotypes.

Yet as the narrator's dissection of the crowd continues, it becomes more and more puzzling and obscure: a mock classificatory system that has been so exaggerated as to become absurd, if not almost spooky. The spectator, for instance, can distinguish the "upper" London clerks from their junior colleagues because "they had slightly bald heads, from which the right ears ... had an odd habit of standing off on end" (390). He is able to spot pickpockets amongst the throng by "their voluminousness of wristband" and "air of excessive frankness" (390). He can identify London's gamblers hurrying past "by a certain sodden swartheness of complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip" (390). He recognizes dandies by their "long locks and smiles" and military men by their "frogged coats and frowns" (391). The hyperbolic arbitrariness of the tale's classification system of moving social types signals that Poe's crowd has been reworked into a taxonomic grid by purely artificial means.

But the real conundrum of the story begins to reveal itself when the hero's attention becomes hypnotically drawn to "the wild effects" of the gas-lamps and shifts his scrutiny of passersby from an abstract analysis of types to the study of individual countenances:

...the rays of the gas-lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over every thing a fitful and garish lustre. All was dark yet splendid — as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian.

The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years. (392)

Under the brilliant “garish” rays of the lamps, the spectator’s fascination reaches a feverish pitch when he spots a bizarre, decrepit old man with an “absolute idiosyncrasy” of features – a loitering wanderer, roughly sixty-five to seventy years of age, whose face and demeanor “at once arrested and absorbed” the storyteller’s attention:

Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retsch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictorial incarnations of the fiend. As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of extreme despair. I felt simultaneously aroused, startled, fascinated. ‘How wild a history,’ I said to myself, is written within that bosom!’ (392)

Finding the illegible itinerant figure strange enough to make him leave his comfortable observation post, the narrator spends the second half of the tale in a frantic pursuit of the

old man to try to learn something of his identity. As in Wordsworth's uncanny encounter with the blind beggar in Book VII of the *Prelude*, the narrator's meeting with the old man of the crowd takes the reader into the city of the mind – a visionary realm that is both a concrete *topos* and a mental construct of a haunted observer probing reality from the distance of his estrangement. For Wordsworth's poet, the sight of the beggar unsettles “all the ballast of familiar life” (VII.637-649) and becomes a symbol “of the utmost that we know/ Both of ourselves and of the universe” (VII.619-620). For Poe's hero, the old man of the crowd questions the narrator's pretension to interpretive control over the city and becomes an emblem of the “hideous mysteries which will not suffer themselves to become revealed” (388).

Stalking the wanderer “as he came now and then within the strong glare of a lamp” (393) through fog-enshrouded back lanes and squares in “perfect silence” during the course of the night, morning, and next afternoon, the narrator pursues the old man to the “verge of the city” only to return back on the thoroughfare twenty-four hours later having learned nothing of his identity. Throughout their circuitous journey, the stranger never stops to exchange a word with others, but relentlessly continues to seek out ever-new crowds of people. By the next evening, the hero finally succumbs to exhaustion and stopping right in front of the bizarre wanderer at last admits: “This old man ... is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds” (396). The tale ends with the narrator concluding that it is one of God's mercies that “the worst heart of the world [...] *er lasst sich nicht lesen*” (396) – does not permit itself to be read.

The implausible agility on the part of both characters as record walkers who have miraculously transcended physical limitations is surprising in itself, given the lack of any other markers of the supernatural in the story. But what is more puzzling than the sheer impossibility of their untiring circumambulation, is the ambiguous nature of the pursuit itself. Nothing in the outer appearance of the old man justifies the narrator's obsessive fixation with the figure or his final condemnation of the old man as the "worst heart of the world." We are told that he is "short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble" (393), wears "filthy and ragged" clothes made from expensive and "beautiful" fabric, and that his face fascinated the storyteller "on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression" (392). The rest of the old man's physical characteristics are a patchwork of internal, unreliable impressions, an array of subjective and misty hunches, haunted associations, rapidly changing deductions, and unjustifiable conclusions – "ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror" (392) – that arise "within the mind" of the walker. As readers, we patiently wait for an unequivocal sign of the old man's fiendish nature to manifest at the end, but the story creates an anticipation of a fantastic climax that never arrives. Throughout the pair's long and restless itinerary, Poe keeps the old man's conduct on the very cusp of credibility and never allows him to wander off too far into more familiar regions of the Gothic tale. Because the old man of the crowd acts as a real-day dispossessed city dweller, yet is treated by the narrator as a grotesque fiend, the reader is caught between multiple and irresolvable modes of interpreting both the mystery of the character and by implication the story itself, which

like the figure of the old wanderer “does not permit itself to be read” in any determinate manner.

Poe, Optics, and the Hypnagogic Gaze

In the last two decades, the spectator-hero of the “The Man of the Crowd” as well as its old wanderer have received a wealth of critical attention from scholars working within the framework of Walter Benjamin’s theorizations of the figure of the *flâneur*. Although in “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” Benjamin equates his iconic walker with the tale’s man of the crowd – whom he sees as the last *flâneur* about to relinquish his grip on the modern city to make way for the *badaud*, a loitering urban gaper – recently post-Benjaminian critics have shifted the burden of *flânerie* in Poe’s story from the ghostly wanderer to its stalking protagonist. James Werner, for instance, maintains that “the narrator of the tale is more clearly a flaneur figure than the wanderer, despite his ultimate inability [to] read the wanderer’s secret history” (142). Dana Brand and Tom Gunning see in the tale’s hero Poe’s illustration of the failure of the *flâneur*’s method of organizing urban experience.¹ According to Brand, Poe depicts a physiognomist-*flâneur* (whom, Brand argues, Poe would have encountered in contemporary American journalism²) who boasts exceptional interpretive control over the city only to show how his “epistemological pretensions” collapse when he discovers

¹ Gunning suggests that “Poe’s story seems to chronicle a recognition that in the modern metropolis the detachment of the *flâneur* was giving way to a related but more powerful form of fascination. It is the gawking and desperate stranger that disturbs the *flâneur*-narrator’s sense of the city landscape and impels him to adopt a detective-like mode of observation” (10).

² Brand argues that Poe would have adopted his alleged *flâneur* from the sensational journalism of Nathaniel Parker Willis, “the most prominent American flaneur of the 1830s and indeed the most prominent magazine writer of the time” (80) and that his narrator would have been associated by most of the story’s readers with Willis (81).

an illegible old man in whom Brand detects the lineaments of the *badaud*. Arguing that the tale is “Poe’s demonstration that urban life is too terrifying and opaque to be read by the flâneur” (90), Brand claims that the tale anticipates the icon’s better-equipped update – a hardnosed private eye like detective Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, whose methods of interrogating urban phenomena would be more in keeping with the increasing anonymity and illegibility of modern metropolitan life.

While Brand’s connection of the tale’s narrator with Poe’s later detective is insightful, I am less convinced by his and other critics’ equation of fictional hero-spectator with Benjamin’s historical walker. Although its protagonist acts as a consummate physiognomist – a trait that Benjamin and later critics have associated with the *flâneur* – the storyteller lacks other salient characteristics of the leisurely stroller of the boulevards. Not a privileged urban insider like the narrators of Dickens or Balzac, the tale’s hero is a foreigner who struggles to make sense of London sights in the void of non-identification.³ As Susan Elizabeth Sweeney notes, the protagonist “unlike the flaneur ... seems motivated less by a desire for amusement than by a desperate need to make sense of the ‘tumultuous sea of human heads’ that rushes, ebbs, and flows before his eyes” (5). Likewise, the *flâneur*’s comfortable posture of blasé detachment is wholly absent in Poe’s monomaniacal beholder whom the metropolis fills with a “delicious novelty of sensation.” Not a dandified stroller, the hero of the tale is an obsessive stalker of an undecipherable mystery that propels his footsteps. His eerie twenty-four-hour

³ Like most of Poe’s anonymous narrator-protagonists, the hero never mentions his origins, yet he supplies enough hints throughout the story to make the reader understand that he is not a London native. Looking outside the coffee-shop window, the storyteller confesses that he has “never been in a similar situation”: the sight of metropolitan crowds fills him with a “novelty of sensation.” An outsider unfamiliar with the capital, he never provides a single street name during the long nocturnal pursuit and compares one of London streets to Broadway “near the park” at noon.

pursuit of the vagrant stranger through a dark foreign capital reveals that he is not chasing a mere gaper, but shadowing a Hoffmannesque “fiend” who is “the essence of all crime.” The fact that the storyteller “caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger” (393) under the old man’s “roquelaire” – uncommon accoutrements for a *badaud*, but standard-issue equipment of many a Gothic hero – further underscores the limitation of positing any direct referentiality between a set of Poe’s doubles in gothicized, fictional London and Benjamin’s paired stock figures in historical Paris.⁴

If the hero-onlooker in “The Man of the Crowd” is similar to anyone in his mode of perception, it is not to the leisured *flâneur* strutting on the real streets, but to a long line of Poe’s other solitary fictional protagonist-beholders fascinated by chimerical perceptual phenomena that defy the boundaries of their comprehension. Critics who have looked for the footprints of the *flâneur* in “The Man of the Crowd” have myopically failed to see that its spectator enters London not from the backdoor of history, but from Poe’s other fictions set far from metropolitan chaos and bustle.

In many of his gothic tales of Grotesque and Arabesque, Poe presents, as he does in “The Man of the Crowd,” an anonymous protagonist-narrator who assumes in the course of the narrative the role of an observer of mysterious perceptual events – abstractly patterned tapestries, ghostly shadows, the bizarre effects of dim illumination, or the haunting expressions of his doubles. In the grips of mesmeric fascination, Poe’s lonely and isolated beholder is transported into a state of feverish reverie characterized by heightened visual acuity, inexplicable anxiety, curiosity, and terror as well as a drug-like “hypnagogic” enchantment. The recurring climactic moment in which the gaze of Poe’s

⁴ In Poe’s “William Wilson” the hero’s double is “wearing a Spanish cloak of blue velvet, begirt about the waist with a crimson belt sustaining a rapier.” In “The Cask of Amontillado” the murderous avenger also wears a *roquelaire*.

reclusive hero is hypnotically drawn to luminous eyes or the mysterious “splendour” and “lustre” of dimly lit veneers is inscribed into nearly all of Poe’s horror tales.

Inseparable from their mental preoccupations, the haunted hypnagogic engagements of Poe’s characters testify to the author’s indebtedness to the Romantic model of intense subjective perception. Relocating Romantic modes of visuality into the genre of the short story, Poe constructs fantastic narratives around heroes whose sensory experience is narrated as an ineffable reciprocation between the mind and the material world.⁵

Yet if Poe was influenced by Romantic motifs of phantasmagoric vision and notions of subjectivity, his protagonists’ fantastic sensory experience bears the mental inflection of a radically different type of interiority. If the visionary poet in the verses of Wordsworth and Coleridge sought out in sylvan landscapes the sublime union of the mind with the cosmos, the ocular encounters of Poe’s heroes testify not to the transcendent possibilities of the human soul but to its abysmal and demonic depths – the disturbed perversity of an isolated ego that intuits its own derangement under the luminous cloak of the visible.

Like a clinician, Poe presents the moment in which psychopathology crystallizes in the act of visual apprehension: a moment that he dilates into a gradually unfolding sequence of increasingly dream-like, sinister mental states that he registers with empirical precision. It is this unique fictional beholder and his hypnagogic way of seeing that Poe transfers from his claustrophobic fantastic settings into the London of “The Man of the Crowd.”

⁵ For more on the direct influence of British Romantics on Poe, see Alexander Schlutz’s excellent essay “Purloined Voices: Edgar Allan Poe Reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge” as well as Robert Morrison’s article “Poe’s De Quincey, Poe’s Dupin.”

The most salient illustrations of how Poe uses his hypnagogic perceiver and articulates his perceptual experience can be found in his early tales. In Poe's first published story "Metzengerstein" (1832), for instance, a murderous young baron rivets his gaze on the fantastic tapestry in his ancestral chamber that portrays a heraldic horse that would later come to symbolize his demise:

The rich although faded tapestry hangings which swung gloomily upon the walls, represented the shadowy and majestic forms of a thousand illustrious ancestors. *Here*, rich-ermined priests, and pontifical dignitaries ... *There*, the dark, tall statures of the Princes Metzengerstein — their muscular war-coursers plunging over the carcasses of fallen foes — startled the steadiest nerves with their vigorous expression [...]

On Frederick's lip arose a fiendish expression, as he became aware of the direction which his glance had, without his consciousness, assumed. Yet he did not remove it. On the contrary, he could by no means account for the overwhelming anxiety which appeared falling like a pall upon his senses. It was with difficulty that he reconciled his dreamy and incoherent feelings with the certainty of being awake. The longer he gazed, the more absorbing became the spell — the more impossible did it appear that he could ever withdraw his glance from the fascination of that tapestry.

(136-7)

The psycho-perceptual dynamics of the tale closely mirror those of "The Man of the Crowd." The baron's examination of the ornamental fabric begins with an enchanting throng of the "thousand" figures, but soon his attention is hypnotically gripped by a

single detail – the fantastic horse that triggers a monomaniacal state of “dreamy and incoherent feelings” reminiscent of the “absorbed” mood and “confused and paradoxical” intimations of the city spectator in London. In both tales, the intensifying state of mesmeric absorption makes the hero unable to “withdraw his glance” (137).

In the “MS Found in a Bottle” (1833) a nameless seafarer finds himself in the role of an observer inside a ghostly vessel manned by “ancient” sailors. At first the spectator hides in the hatch of the ship’s hold – an observation post from which he can study its mysterious crew. After watching their eerie assembly with a sense of “awe” and “vague novelty, doubt and apprehension” (194), the observer’s attention is hypnotically drawn to their old captain:

I have seen the captain face to face, and in his own cabin — but, as I expected, he paid me no attention. Although in his appearance there is, to a casual observer, nothing which might bespeak him more or less than man, still, a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with the sensation of wonder with which I regarded him. In stature, he is nearly my own height; that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well-knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkable otherwise. But it is the singularity of the expression which reigns upon the face — it is the intense, the wonderful, the thrilling evidence of old age, so utter, so extreme, which excites within my spirit a sense — a sentiment ineffable.

(197)

The “singularity of expression” of the “hoary” commander out at sea initiates in the narrator a hypnagogic mood – “a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with

the sensation of wonder” – similar to the state of “wild amazement” and fascination of the London storyteller that was brought forth by the “absolute idiosyncrasy of [...] expression” of the old man of the crowd.

The tale “Berenice” (1835) offers the most complete portrait of Poe’s haunted beholder. Born into “a race of visionaries,” its anonymous narrator-protagonist is sequestered in his hereditary chamber where he had “dissipated [his] youth in reverie” (226). Like the hero of “The Man of the Crowd,” the tale’s storyteller suffers from a mysterious illness – an ailment the nature of which in “Berenice” is revealed at length. The malady is a bizarre monomania marked by “a nervous intensity of interest” (like the “inquisitive interest in everything” of the London spectator) that becomes active “in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects” (227):

To muse for long unwearied hours, with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin, or in the typography of a book; to become absorbed, for the better part of a summer’s day, in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry or upon the floor; to lose myself, for an entire night, in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; [...] to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in. (227)

While any “frivolous” pattern can cause the narrator to “become absorbed” in a state of mesmeric trance, his morbid fascination is aroused to a delirious pitch when he sees the teeth of his sickly wife-cousin in the murky light of his ancestral halls. As in “The Man of the Crowd,” the visionary in the first half of the tale contemplates abstractions and

experiences a “quiet” sense of absorption: “absolute bodily quiescence” (227) reminiscent of the London storyteller’s “calm but inquisitive interest in everything” (388). Yet in both tales, the tranquil state of enchantment soon gives way to a brooding monomania triggered by a meeting with a strange countenance, which either hints at, as in the London story, or directly culminates in, as in “Berenice” a terrible psychopathic transgression: the protagonist of the latter tale extracts the teeth of his wife, who is buried alive.

Poe not only relocates the characteristic psychological situation and his haunted hypnagogic perceiver – who is anything but a privileged *flâneur* – from his otherworldly tales to the contemporary cityscape, but also brings to London the same modes of fantastic visuality and atmospheric effects of his other Gothic tales.

Like the spectator of “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe’s typical hero finds himself transfixed before an indecipherable ocular mystery. In nearly all of the writer’s horror tales, the protagonist must gradually position himself closer and closer to the mysterious visual phenomenon which conceals behind its luminous, brilliant surface the source of his hysteria, fear, and fascination. His rapt gaze often telescopes onto the bewitching object and brings it closer into view until finally its bizarre proximity makes the character certain that he is standing at the threshold of another metaphysical order. Nearly always, Poe’s tales render the gradual approach towards an eye-centered enigma with minute attention to the optical characteristics of the uncanny object and the manner in which it is viewed: physical distance between the seer and the seen; chiaroscuro effects of dim, narrowly focused illumination orchestrated through candles, flambeaux, lanterns,

moonlight, or infernal fluorescence; “lustre” and reflections that the strange lighting produces on “ebony” surfaces; as well as continuous referencing of eyes and eyesight.⁶

Haunting, strange light, dim reflections, and lurking shadows are staple visual motifs repeatedly utilized in Poe’s fictions to pattern his enchanted, dream-like interiors that mesmerize the hypnagogic gaze of his heroes. The “wild effects of the light” of the gas-lamps in the “The Man of the Crowd” that throw “over every thing a fitful and garish luster” reproduces a nearly identical uncanny atmosphere of Poe’s murky, frightening settings. Here is, for example, the narrator’s description of illumination of the bridal chamber in “Ligeia”:

The room lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey, was pentagonal in shape, and of capacious size. Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—as single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or the moon, passing through it, fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within. (270)

Stained glass serves to create a similar dramatic effect within the multiple dark interiors of Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death.” In the seventh apartment-chamber of Prince Prospero’s castellated abbey, “a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass” (486) stands in the corridor by a scarlet window. Streaming through the tinted glass into a dark room, the fire-light creates an effect that “was ghastly in the extreme and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few

⁶ For more on the role of optics in Poe’s tales see William J. Scheick’s essay “An Intrinsic Luminosity: Poe’s Use of Platonic and Newtonian Optics.” For an exploration of the relationship between optics and psychology in Poe, see Rae Beth Gordon’s article “Poe: Optics, Hysteria, and Aesthetic Theory.”

of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all” (486). In “The Pit and the Pendulum” the protagonist is locked inside a dark chamber of the dungeon where he is subjected to lurid tortures. The pit’s interior is illuminated by “a wild sulphurous lustre” that sustains the mood of terror throughout the ever-changing horror show of the devilish torments. The dim lighting streams from the murals on the iron walls that radiate “a wild and ghastly vivacity [...] and gleam with the lurid lustre of a fire” (504). In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” where optical effects are multiple and more pronounced, the narrator notes that within the dark room of Rodrick Usher “feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the treillised pane” (320). During his morbid conversations with Usher inside dim halls, the storyteller observes that “an excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphurous lustre over all” (324). The same atmospheric effect is replicated inside one of Usher’s paintings – “one of [his] phantasmagoric conceptions” (325) – that depicts a dark underground vault where “no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendour” (325).

Lurid illumination, surface reflections, and stark shadows in Poe’s tales form a brilliant universe of glowing surfaces and of mirror-like varnished veneers. Under the light of a lamp or a candle, Poe’s chambers transform into a phantom-show where all objects acquire otherworldly and supernatural meanings. As Rae Beth Gordon points out, Poe’s illusory interiors, which are “emptied out of meaning, rendered abstract, thus enter a visionary realm where they transcend reality and where the Subject’s sensory perception of them attains a strangeness that approaches pain” (54). Carefully staging the manner in which his spectators perceive the “arabesque” abstractions inside their murky

claustrophobic enclosures, Poe grounds his tales' fantastic imagery in the *visual field* of the deranged, mesmerized gaze of his perceivers.

Bringing the same atmospheric effects and a narrative advance towards an eerie, fantastic ocular experience from the interior to the streets of London, Poe presents his crowds as yet another abstract optical illusion. As Sweeney demonstrates, its hero's highly focused vision mimics the "process of optical magnification" (6). Sweeney notes that while looking at the city throngs under the gas-lamps, the spectator "seems to peer more and more closely at the passersby even while he remains inside, keeping his distance from them" (6). When at first the convalescent presses his "brow to the glass" to watch the rushing tides of passersby, he makes out an indistinguishable "sea of human heads." But gradually his eyes begin to "descend to details" as they examine of more and more minute particulars – wristbands, eyes, ears, thumbs, frowns, and locks – until finally the hero spots the central uncanny object of the tale, the idiosyncratic countenance of the old man, which the stalker directly examines towards the end. The continual referencing of the incandescent, spectral effects of gas-lamps throughout the story – the last is "a blaze of light" that "burst upon the sight" of the narrator – helps to sustain the illusion of a cityscape *perceived* through the narrow keyhole of an obsessive mind.

One other aspect of Poe's typical hypnagogic mode of perception relevant to the London tale is the role of time and internal duration for his hero-beholders. In his magisterial *Studies in Human Time*, Georges Poulet has noted that many of Poe's first-person narrators often act as "awakened dreamers" who report their bizarre encounters with the otherworldly as "reminiscences" of a dream-universe. The storyteller, who like the reader is now awake, reconstructs his "memories of a prenatal epoch [...] that

transcends time” (331) as he himself experienced its fantastic events one moment after the next in a highly alert, electrified mental state. In such recollections of a timeless domain, as Poulet puts it, “all the attention is directed, to what is happening the instant it happens” (332). Presenting a dream-like world as it is directly experienced by his heroes, Poe prolongs a short fictional span of time by oversaturating it with descriptions of fleeting sensations that the dream scores upon the consciousness of its perceiver. This temporal protraction is central to Poe’s unique mode of urban treatment in “The Man of the Crowd.”

The Dream and the Panorama

Poe, who had lived in the largest cities on the Eastern seaboard, could have found in the contemporary urban realities of his day all the staple atmospheric devices of his most bizarre Gothic fantasies. Refashioning his typical spectatorial hero into a tourist and his fiendish double into a destitute urban wanderer, Poe merely had to heighten and dramatize the evanescence of the big city at night to create his typical unity of effect. The city’s gas-lamps could provide a murky, fitful illumination that is more haunting than the luster from the flambeaux and braziers.⁷ Its dark narrow streets and squares were no less uncanny and confining than Poe’s otherworldly interiors. Urban anonymity staged the same conditions of isolation relished by Poe’s solitary heroes in their claustrophobic enclosures. All that would have been needed was an animated tapestry that could hypnotize the gaze of Poe’s monomaniacal beholder like the fantastic drapery in

⁷ Discussing the “symbolist effects” of public illumination in Poe, J.G. Keogh notes that “Garish and lurid, coal-gas lamps in the streets made faces unfamiliar in its luminous yellow, perhaps encouraging the use of make-up, in an environment where every pedestrian or shopper was suddenly “on stage” (21-22).

“Metzengerstein” or another in “Ligeia” whose black “arabesque figures” changed their shape depending on the observer’s angle of vision:

To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms ... The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies — giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole. (271)

This tapestry, of course, would present itself in the image of the urban crowds whose dark “ghastly forms” stage a similar “phantasmagoric effect.”

But Poe, who has never set foot in London, was not merely recasting contemporary urban life according to the lineaments of his fictions. None of his settings are products of direct observation, of actuality reworked into a literary text, and “The Man of the Crowd” is certainly no exception. While Poe’s own encounters with New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore must have played a seminal role in his choice of a more “realistic” type of backdrop, as Stephen Rachman shows in his reading of the London story, Poe’s urban verisimilitude should be attributed to a *textual* encounter of the American author with Charles Dickens’ *The Sketches by Boz*: a collection of London’s tableaux that Poe reviewed in the *Southern Literary Messenger* of June 1836, three years before his own city tale was published. Discussing the *flâneur*-centered readings of the tale, Rachman points out:

...in their efforts to extend the metaphoric act of reading the public...critics have tended to overlook the literal acts of reading that inform Poe's narrative...Poe is a textual flaneur, and if Poe's flaneur-like narrator is observing anything it is Dickens's text, not the street of London, Paris, or New York. (77)

Analyzing Poe's complex appropriation of other literary texts, Rachman compares a number of city descriptions from Dickens with Poe's to make a convincing case that the writer had closely studied the urban collection of the young British novelist and relied on some of its urban details. Here, for instance, are the descriptions of London's gin-shops from "The Man of the Crowd" and one of Dickens' sketches entitled "The Drunkard's Death" as quoted in Rachman's study:

Dickens

The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper. .. You turn the corner. What a change! All is light and brilliancy. The hum of many voices issues from that splendid gin-shop...It is growing late, and the throng of men, women, and children who have been constantly going in and out, dwindles down to two or three occasional stragglers—cold, wretched –looking creatures.

Poe

It was the most noisome quarter of London, where every thing wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. By the dim light of an accidental lamp, tall, antique, worm-eaten, wooden tenements were seen tottering to their fall....Suddenly a corner was turned, a blaze of light burst upon our sight, and we stood before one of the huge suburban temples of Intemperance—one of the palaces of the fiend, Gin. It was now nearly daybreak; but a number of wretched inebriates still pressed in and out of the flaunting entrance. (Rachman 75)

Noting that “despite the brevity of “The Man of the Crowd,” these thinly veiled borrowings from the *Sketches* are not isolated incidents” (75), Rachman cites other culled city images in the tale, such as the descriptions of London’s fog, of prostitutes, and of theater crowds that crossover from the Dickens’ collection into Poe’s story.

Rachman’s suggestion that “Poe borrowed details from Dickens to pretend to the same kind of intimate knowledge of the city” (75) sheds new light on how the American Gothic author was able to construct his own fantastic cityscape in “The Man of the Crowd” by absorbing the factual particulars of Dickens’ panorama into his hero’s hypnagogic gaze. Looking at the story’s introductory sketch of the capital, it becomes clear that from its businessmen and ambling upper crust to its clerks, pickpockets, gamblers, dandies, and peddlers, Poe’s London pedestrians are *intertextual* passersby condensed into an imagined evening throng – a crowd that Poe transmutes into yet another enchanted visual mystery. Poe gathers Dickensian Londoners who were scattered throughout the *Sketches* on a single nameless thoroughfare and assigns to each a set of uniform, deliberately exaggerated outer traits – “innumerable varieties” of appearance that link up to their respective social subgroups – based on a purely arbitrary, preconceived schema: a product of an artist’s fancy, not of *flanerie*. Because the correspondence between the passersby’s outer appearance and their social standing is synthetically prearranged, all of the tale’s passing gentry have “flushed faces,” its gamblers all exhibit a “sodden swarthiness of complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip,” its dandies all sport “long locks and smiles,” and the right ears of its clerks all are “standing off on end.” As Rachman aptly notes, Poe “transmogrifies the socially intelligible world of Dickens into a diabolical parade of

types” (76), which the author makes inseparable from the mesmerized state of his perceiver.

The above parallel passages illustrate how Poe was able to appropriate Dickens’ physiognomic metropolis into his own fantastic version of London. In the *Sketches*, Dickens’ “wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper” are external sights not conjoined to any single perceiver. The shattered buildings are images that epitomize the economic and social realities of “this part of London.” Conversely, in a hallucinatory re-dreaming of the capital of the *Sketches*, Poe assimilates the same houses into the tissue of his text by lodging them into the mindscape of a foreigner. Illuminating the neighborhood with his characteristic “dim light,” Poe makes the second-hand urban terrain suddenly “seen” – the tottering buildings “burst into sight” of the stalker and in crossing from one literary universe into the other suddenly become unreal and otherworldly.

An inflection of a Dickensian panorama twice removed from historical actuality, Poe’s story renders the city as a series of unfolding perceptual moments that dramatize the gulf between an aloof ego and the urban community – an effect that Poe achieves by clashing one fantasy against another, by reimagining the capital he had pictured while reading Dickens through the vicarious subjectivity of his macabre beholder. Enchaining the metropolis to the ocular field of the monomaniacal hero, Poe shows London perceived from the distance of an impervious mental remove, an inscape from which the walker probes the author’s dream realm with rational deductions, misty conjectures, and haunted intimations. No longer privy to a sublime rapport with “the spirit of Nature” in the big city like Wordsworth’s poet, Poe’s spectator discovers a London that, as Janis

Stout puts it, is “a projection of a tormented consciousness” (63), a mind that takes note only of what is sinister, gloomy, and mortifying.

Poe’s textual intertwining of the physiognomist’s urban universe with his typical hypnagogic interiority distills, protracts, and refines the city’s dark, unfathomable, mysterious allure – its perverse, recalcitrant resistance to the walker’s attempt to demystify its “otherness.” At first, like a Martian envoy trying to understand earthlings with the help of a taxonomic table, the London spectator approaches the passing things as an eerie cipher. But with the coming of darkness and the gas-lamps’ “phantasmagoric effect,” he begins to fall through into the city’s shadow double, an enigmatic, elusive landscape beckoning him with its inexplicable irreality. In the second part of the story, the illegible man of the crowd – yet another perceivable surface without an intuitively recognizable interior – serves as a receding transcendental signifier the chase after whom allows the pursuer to penetrate deeper and deeper into Poe’s mythical urban order. A projection screen for the spectator’s uncanny suspicions, the old man becomes a vehicle for a dramatic prolongation of the author’s tour into his metropolitan dreamworld.

An objection can be raised that while Poe’s spectator of “The Man of the Crowd” might be analogous to his other obsessive beholders in psychological makeup, the manner in which he classifies and dissects the crowds is still in keeping with the physiognomic method of the *flâneur*; this is an argument advanced by Brand who maintains that Poe was able to offer “one of the fullest portraits in literature of the figure of the flâneur” with whom, according to Brand, Poe would have come into contact through contemporary American journalism (81). Yet such a conclusion disregards the

fact that the analytical methodology of the tale's spectator has little to do with the panoramic method of the physiognomist.

"The Man of the Crowd" straddles two of Poe's most recognizable genres – his earlier horror fiction and his later tales of ratiocination – stories of disentanglement of ciphers, mysteries, and hieroglyphics, that according to Daniel Hoffman, embody a "single effect – the demonstration of the extraordinary intellect" (107) able to solve the most knotted enigmas. The new hero's analytical genius – epitomized by Poe's detectives Dupin and William Legrand – takes the reader into the heart of a dark conundrum the solution to which has escaped lesser minds. Unlike a *flâneur* whose physiognomic readings rely on comfortable familiarity and commonsense, Poe's analyst solves his enigmas through a logical sequence of rational operations: a system of inductions and deductions of a philosopher-poet who, like most of Poe's heroes, has removed himself from society. Not a reader of crowds and physiognomies, the detective is first and foremost a reader of *books*. ("Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries," writes the narrator of detective Dupin whom he meets not on the streets, but in "an obscure library.")

Poe's London stalker is a transitional hero: a macabre dreamer of Poe's earlier fictions who shows a proclivity for rational analysis of the later detective. Nor is the London observer the only character whose mind can both enter a terrified hypnagogic state but can likewise disentangle a mystery through analytical thought. Less than a year after the publication of "The Man of the Crowd," Poe would present an almost identical hero-beholder in "The Descent into the Maelstrom" (1841): a story about a mariner whose ship enters a colossal whirlpool that violently spins the vessel inside its "ebony"

moonlit vortex. Like the London observer who watches the rushing tides of the crowds with “keenest appetency,” the sailor eyes with “keenest curiosity” the prodigious spectacle of the whirling maelstrom where other ships and driftwood continuously gyrate:

Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down, upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth, and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony, but for the bewildering rapidity with which they spun around, and for the gleaming and ghastly radiance they shot forth, as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds which I have already described, streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss. (444)

Both tales recreate a similar psychological moment. The state of terror and fascination of the observer; the “rapidity” of passing imagery (in London the spectator is dazzled by the “rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window”); and the “gleaming and ghastly” moonlight nearly identical in its effect to the “fitful and garish” luster of London’s lamps – all of these closely shared motifs are found in both stories. The method by which the London convalescent analyzes the crowds from the window of the coffee-shop and the way the sailor scrupulously studies the movements of broken pieces of other vessels churning inside the darkly-lit colossus are nearly identical. The mariner says that at first “I was too much confused to observe anything accurately. The general burst of terrific grandeur was all that I beheld” (444); the city spectator notes that “at first my observation took an abstract and generalizing turn.” The mariner carefully studies his

physical “descent” into the maelstrom; the London visitor analyzes the “tumultuous sea of human heads” by noting the “descent” in their gentility. Both investigate their fantastic perceptual experience through a series of inductions. The city hero uses rational analysis to dissect the passersby; the sailor embarks on “a train of reflection” (446) on the passing objects in the vortex until he figures out how to ride up the maelstrom back to the surface.

But unlike the mariner who succeeds in solving the mystery of the watery deep, the London hero realizes that the conundrum given to him by the author is essentially insoluble. Like the sight of the old beggar before Wordsworth’s poet, the city reveals to the wanderer’s gaze the impermeability of “both of ourselves and of the universe.” What makes the story’s spectatorial hero ideal for the protraction of this ultimate mystery is precisely his transitional status between the earlier mesmerized protagonists of Poe’s arabesque tales and the detective, who would appear less than a year after the London tale in “The Murder of the Rue Morgue.” While the city hero’s macabre fascinations are still in keeping with those of the monomaniacal visionary of such stories as “Berenice” or “Ligeia,” he comes to the capital equipped with some of the future analytical powers of Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, to whom Poe would soon outsource the mysteries of his who-done-it genre. Because the London protagonist can be both hypnotically enthralled and intellectually teased, given an enigma of the highest caliber, he is seduced by the author into turning yet another corner or crossing yet another street in an attempt at its disentanglement. His relentless struggle to probe the recalcitrant mystery of the metropolis is what allows Poe in “The Man of the Crowd” not merely to create an

“embryo” of a detective story, but to invent the ur-form of modernist city fiction seemingly out of his own head.

Part II

The Devil on Nevsky Prospect

To turn from Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" to Nikolai Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect" is to witness surprising parallels in both authors' manner of urban treatment, visual motifs, and the use of atmospheric devices.

Written five years before "The Man of the Crowd," Gogol's novella marks a dramatic turning away for the Ukrainian-Russian author from his earlier fantastic Gothic tales set in rural fairytale Ukraine towards a recognizable contemporary urban backdrop. Like "The Man of the Crowd," Gogol's tale centers on an obsessive beholder in a spectral metropolis patterned with the brilliant glow of streetlamps and other optical effects of artificial illumination. The dissection of the crowds, the acute vividness of the urban imagery, the pursuit of the wholly Other through the dark streets by a mesmerized stalker, as well as a sense of the bizarre, demonic unreality of the city – all of these shared overlays and themes are readily notable in both stories.

Just like Poe's tale, which presents a comprehensive sketch of the city throngs, Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect" opens with a mesmerizing portrait of the main thoroughfare on which stampede the capital's ever-changing pageantry of crowds. Gogol's depiction of the life of St. Petersburg's central avenue begins with a panegyric on the grand prospect laden with celebratory superlatives: "There is nothing better than Nevsky Prospect, at least not in Petersburg; for there it is everything. What does this street – the beauty of our capital – not shine with!" (245)⁸ The "quick phantasmagoria" (*bistraya*

⁸ Except where indicated, all translations of Gogol in this chapter are from Richard Pevear's and Larissa Volokhonsky's *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*.

fantasmagoria) that happens on Nevsky Prospect commences at dawn when the thoroughfare “smells of freshly baked bread and filled with old women in tattered dresses and coats carrying out their raids on churches and compassionate passers-by” (246). Beggars are standing in front of pastry shops to receive yesterday’s leftovers, an occasional sleepy clerk scurries to the office, and Russian muzhiks trudge to work in lime-encrusted boots. But comes noon and the “exhibition” (*vistavka*) of the prospect changes as foreign tutors – “English Jones and French Coques” – bring their little charges for a stroll on the “pedagogical Nevsky Prospect.” By two o’clock, the avenue becomes besieged by “the best products of humanity” – well-heeled couples, self-important civil officials, dandies, military officers, ladies of quality, and other respectable pedestrians:

At this blessed time, from two to three in the afternoon, when Nevsky Prospect may be called a capital in motion, there takes place a major exhibition of the best products of humanity. One displays a foppish frock coat with the best of beavers, another a wonderful Greek nose, the third is a bearer of superb side-whiskers, the fourth of a pair of pretty eyes and an astonishing little hat, the fifth of a signet ring with a talisman on his smart pinkie, the sixth of a little foot in a charming bootie, the seventh of an astonishment-arousing neck-tie, the eighth of an amazement-inspiring mustache. (249)

[В это благословенное время от двух до трех часов пополудни, которое может назваться движущею столицею Невского проспекта, происходит главная выставка всех лучших произведений человека.

Один показывает щегольской сюртук с лучшим бобром, другой - греческий прекрасный нос, третий несет превосходные бакенбарды, четвертая - пару хорошеньких глазок и удивительную шляпку, пятый - перстень с талисманом на щегольском мизинце, шестая - ножку в очаровательном башмачке, седьмой - галстук, возбуждающий удивление, осьмой - усы, повергающие в изумление.] (Sobranie Sochinenii III:11)

Having lived in the bureaucratic imperial capital of Nicholas I for more than five years after moving to Petersburg from his native Ukrainian province of Poltava at the age of nineteen, Gogol creates a portrait of Nevsky Prospect that is a product of the writer's intimate, first-hand observation of its bustling rhythms and colorful façades. Unlike Poe's purely imaginary, hyperbolized presentation of London's throngs, which was based on Dickensian tableaux, in the first part of the story, Gogol offers one of the earliest realistic presentations of the capital's crowds in Russian literature. Gogol's narrator – who, unlike Poe's, is not the hero of the tale – provides a detailed description of Nevsky Prospect which reveals him to be a careful observer of the busy rhythms of the capital. Like a physiognomist, the storyteller creates a comprehensive, coherent account of the hourly changing pageantry, organized by social classes, types, their demeanor and dress.

9

Yet although, in contrast to Poe's intertextual Londoners, Gogol's presentation of the crowds relies on direct experience, both tales dramatically shatter the physiognomic

⁹ The tale's chronological sketch of a day in the life of Nevsky Prospect would in fact help transplant the French *physiologie* (*fiziologii*) genre from Paris to Petersburg. The most famous of such later collections would be the two-volume *Fiziologiya Peterburga* (1845) edited by the poet Nikolai Nekrasov. For a discussion on the role of Petersburgian *physiologies* in the development of Russian realism see A.G. Zeitlin's "O fiziologicheskom ocherke" section in his *Stanovlenie realisma v russkoi literature*.

correspondence between outer façades and inner character through a grotesque hypertrophy of details of figure and dress. Gogol's colorful passersby morph into shards of exterior features that, as Olga Raevsky Hughes points out, reveal the "basic disparity between the appearance and the essence" (78) on which rests the entire tale. After two o'clock, Nevsky is besieged not by privileged strollers, but by their well-kept whiskers, flawlessly groomed mustaches, dazzling smiles, expensive hats, luxurious overcoats, dresses and kerchiefs – hyperbolized markers of superficial distinction, which become the more tangible strollers of the prospect:

Whatever you meet on Nevsky Prospect is all filled with decency: men in long frock coats, their hands in their pockets, ladies in pink, white and pale blue satin redingotes and hats. Here you will meet singular side-whiskers, tucked with extraordinary and amazing art under the necktie, velvety whiskers, satiny whiskers, black as sable or coal, but, alas, belonging only to the foreign office. [...] Here you will meet wondrous mustaches, which no pen or brush is able to portray; mustaches to which the better part of life is devoted [...] A thousand kinds of hats, dresses, shawls –gay-colored, ethereal, for which their owners' affections sometimes lasts a whole two days–will bedazzle anyone on Nevsky Prospect [...] Here you will meet such waists as you have never seen in dreams; slender, narrow waists, no thicker than a bottle's neck [...] And what ladies' sleeves you meet on Nevsky Prospect!... (248)

[Все, что вы ни встретите на Невском проспекте, все исполнено приличия: мужчины в длинных сюртуках, с заложенными в карманы руками, мамы в розовых, белых и бледно-голубых атласных рединготах и шляпках. Вы здесь встретите бакенбарды единственные, пропущенные с необыкновенным и изумительным искусством под галстук, бакенбарды бархатные, атласные, черные, как соболь или уголь, но, увы, принадлежащие только одной иностранной коллегии. [...] Здесь вы встретите усы чудные, никаким пером, никакою кистью не изобразимые; усы, которым посвящена лучшая половина жизни [...] Здесь вы встретите такие талии, какие даже вам не снились никогда: тоненькие, узенькие талии, никак не толще бутылочной шейки [...] А какие встретите вы дамские рукава на Невском проспекте!] (III:10)

Fragmenting urban appearance, Gogol reduces his strollers to caricatured appendages of their perfectly manicured façades. The tale's passersby, in the words of Renate Lachmann, become "bodily husks...masks concealing the void" (248).

Just as in Poe's panoramic description of London's thoroughfare, the sketch of Nevsky Prospect gains an uncanny dimension as the evening settles over the avenue and the lanterns begin to throw "a marvelous alluring light" upon the nocturnal capital.

But as soon as dusk falls on the houses and streets, and the sentry, covering himself with a bast mat, climbs the ladder to light the lantern, and prints which do not dare show themselves in the daytime peek out of

the low shop windows, then Nevsky Prospect again comes to life and begins to stir. Then comes that mysterious time when lamps endow everything with some enticing, wondrous light. (250)

[Но как только сумерки упадут на дома и улицы и будочник, накрывшись рогожею, вскарабкается на лестницу зажигать фонарь, а из низеньких окошек магазинов выглянут те эстампы, которые не смеют показаться среди дня, тогда Невский проспект опять оживает и начинает шевелиться. Тогда настает то таинственное время, когда лампы дают всему какой-то заманчивый, чудесный свет.] (III:12)

The prospect now enters into its “mysterious time” (*tainstvennoe vremya*). As stark shadows start to flit over its walls and pavement, the late-evening avenue beckons a different demographic seeking nocturnal diversions: young civil servants forget all propriety and decorum of the afternoon and rush “to peek under the hat of a lady spotted from far off, whose thick lips and rouge-plastered cheeks are liked by so many strollers” (250).

With the night enshrouding Nevsky Prospect, the tale’s presentation of the crowds comes to a close and the narrator introduces the story’s protagonists: the young, poverty-stricken painter Piskarev as well as his companion and foil, the smug Lieutenant Pirogov, whose brash pragmatism stands in dramatic contrast to Piskarev’s starry-eyed idealism and emotional naiveté. Walking the avenue under the streetlamps, the companions chance upon two attractive young women – a blond and a brunette – and split up in their pursuit, with their respective itineraries presented separately in the tale.

The pursuit of Piskarev is narrated first. Stalking the young beauty through the dark maze of the capital, Piskarev idealizes her into a heavenly apparition. Contrary to Poe's hero-spectator – who unlike the Petersburg artist can easily recognize a streetwalker behind the “Lucian marble” of her beautiful façade – Piskarev knows little about the art of reading urban appearances and does not possess the former's probing, detective gaze. An “artist in the land of snows,” the young man “never looks you straight in the eye; or if he does, it somehow vaguely, indefinitely; he does not pierce you with the hawk's eye of an observer” (252). Lacking the London spectator's analytical powers, Piskarev is a Romantic dreamer who, like Poe's other cloistered visionaries, lives in a world of his reveries. Yet despite the differences between the two heroes, it is not hard to perceive affinities between the artist in Petersburg and Poe's bewitched “convalescent” in London.

Both are marginal outsiders in their respective capitals. Poe's hero is a foreigner who lacks any sense of civic identification. Gogol's Piskarev is an exile in his own city owing to his vocation and Romantic idealizing bent:

This young man belonged to a class which represents quite a strange phenomenon among us and belongs as much to the citizens of Petersburg as a person who comes to us in a dream belongs to the real world. This exceptional group is highly unusual in a city in which everyone is either an official, a shopkeeper, or a German artisan. He was an artist. A strange phenomenon, is it not? A Petersburg artist! An artist in the land of the snows, an artist in the land of Finns, where everything is wet, smooth, flat, pale, gray, misty. (252)

[Этот молодой человек принадлежал к тому классу, который составляет у нас довольно странное явление и столько же принадлежит к гражданам Петербурга, сколько лицо, являющееся нам в сновидении, принадлежит к существенному миру. Это исключительное сословие очень необыкновенно в том городе, где всё или чиновники, или купцы, или мастеровые немцы. Это был художник. Не правда ли, странное явление? Художник петербургский! художник в земле снегов, художник в стране финнов, где все мокро, гладко, ровно, бледно, серо, туманно.] (III:14)

Strangers in the city, both encounter a singular passerby whose features defy and transcend the quotidian and beckon the pursuer with promises of a metaphysical revelation. Piskarev is captivated by the young woman to the same degree that the narrator of Poe's tale is enthralled by the appearance of the old man. In the figure of the wanderer, Poe's narrator-protagonist sees a mysterious fiend worthy of Moritz Retzsch's dark Romantic etchings. Piskarev links the "heavenly" beauty to Pietro Perugino's painting of Bianca.

Good God, what divine features! The dazzling whiteness of the exquisite brow was framed by hair lovely as an agate. They curled those marvelous tresses, and some of them strayed below the hat and caressed the cheek, flushed by the chill of evening with a delicate fresh color. A swarm of exquisite reveries hovered about her lips. All the memories of childhood, all the visions that rise from dreaming and quiet inspiration in the

lamplight—all seemed to be blended, mingled, and reflected on her delighted lips. (246-7)

[Боже, какие божественные черты! Ослепительной белизны прелестнейший лоб осенен был прекрасными, как агат, волосами. Они вились, эти чудные локоны, и часть их, падая из-под шляпки, касалась щеки, тронутой тонким свежим румянцем, проступившим от вечернего холода. Уста были замкнуты целым роем прелестнейших грез. Все, что остается от воспоминания о детстве, что дает мечтание и тихое вдохновение при светящейся лампаде, - все это, казалось, совокупилось, слилось и отразилось в ее гармонических устах.] (III:16)

While the London hero associates the appearance of the stranger with “ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice,” examining the girl’s “divine features” under the streetlights, Piskarev associates her with “a whole swarm of the loveliest reveries,” of “memories” and of “visions.” Like Poe, Gogol presents the urban Other as both a real-day pedestrian and a fantastic allegorical embodiment existing nowhere but in the mind of its pursuer.

As Gogol’s tale progresses, shared visual motifs become more apparent. Fixating his gaze on the object of his fascination, Poe’s convalescent “pushed through the crowd” to come within sight of the old man; Gogol’s painter “flew along so quickly that he was constantly pushing staid gentlemen ... off the sidewalk” (252) so as to keep the beautiful young woman in view. Just as the London hero watches the old man of the crowd as “he

came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp,” Piskarev is hypnotized by the divine “creature” who is “bathed in bright light as it approached a street lamp, now instantly covered in darkness as it left it behind” (251). While the London spectator is not sure if his “vision deceived” him or if he actually “caught a glimpse [...] of a diamond and of a dagger” of the old man under the gas-light, the painter is not sure if he saw the young woman suddenly smile or if this was only the “the streetlamp’s deceitful light showing the semblance of a smile” (254).

As the artist tracks the young woman in silence with “his senses and thoughts on fire,” his heart beats faster, and he feels a “secret tremor” and “invincible force and agitation” of mood and enters a similar dream-like altered awareness reminiscent of the London hero’s “peculiar mental state.” Believing that he is trailing a “divinity” that has “descended for a visit,” Piskarev’s bewitched gaze suddenly transfigures the Russian imperial capital into what might be the first verbally rendered Cubist painting:

...all his feelings were ablaze and everything before him was lost in a sort of mist; the pavement seemed to be moving under his feet, carriages drawn by trotting horses seemed to stand still, the bridge stretched out and seemed broken in the center, the houses were upside down, a sentry box seemed to be reeling toward him and the sentry’s halberd, and gilt letters of the signboard and the scissors painted on it, all seemed to be flashing across his very *eyelash*. And all of this was produced by one *glance*, by one turn of a pretty head. Hearing nothing, seeing nothing, understanding nothing, he followed the light traces of the lovely feet, trying to moderate

the swiftness of his own steps which moved in time with the throbbing of his heart... (429)

[...все чувства его горели, и все перед ним окунулось каким-то туманом. Тротуар несся под ним, кареты со скачущими лошадьми казались недвижимы, мост растягивался и ломался на своей арке, дом стоял крышею вниз, будка валилась к нему навстречу, и алебарда часового вместе с золотыми словами вывески и нарисованными ножницами блестела, казалось, на самой реснице его глаз. И все это произвел один взгляд, один поворот хорошенькой головки. Не слыша, не видя, не внимая, он несся по легким следам прекрасных ножек, стараясь сам умерить быстроту своего шага, летевшего под такт сердца. (III:16-7)]

What is motionless begins to move, what moves freezes, architecture stands on its head, objects begin to lengthen and break up, and perspective and distance collapse in a single instant in which the mind of the beholder and the urban landscape suddenly braid.

Luring the painter with a promise of another realm – a glimpse of a “holy place” from which she came – the enthralling mysterious beauty walks up to an entrance of a four-story building, the lit windows of which “glare at” Piskarev like the brilliant lamp of a tottering house that “burst upon the vision” of the London stalker. The angelic pedestrian motions the young man to follow her inside where all too quickly Piskarev’s divine vision is shattered as he realizes that he has been led by a beautiful streetwalker straight into a brothel. As the young woman reveals who she is, the sensitive artist is

horrified to see his idealized “angel” morph into a messenger from a demonic realm: “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” (257). Running away in embarrassment, the artist continues for weeks to feed his own hallucinatory idealized fantasies in cloistered seclusion.

At first Piskarev seeks out his divinity in nocturnal dreams. In one of the tale’s three dream sequences, he envisions a fantastic society ball, where amid the glitter of luxury, he spots his “angelic creation” – the crown jewel of the luxurious evening. During the vision of the regal “brightly lit” (*yarko osvesheniy*) and “brilliant” (*blestyashiy*) ball, which is depicted in acutely visual terms, Piskarev experiences another moment of radically fractured perception:

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. Ladies’ gleaming shoulders, black tailcoats, chandeliers, lamps, airy gauzes flying, ethereal ribbons, and fat double bass peeking from behind the railing of a magnificent gallery – everything was splendid for him. (258)

[Необыкновенная пестрота лиц привела его в совершенное замешательство; ему казалось, что какой-то демон искрошил весь мир на множество разных кусков и все эти куски без смысла, без толку смешал вместе. Сверкающие дамские плечи и черные фраки,

люстры, лампы, воздушные летящие газы, эфирные ленты и толстый контрабас, выглядывавший из-за перил великолепных хоров, - все было для него блистательно.] (III:21)

Encountering the young woman in his dream, the artist wakes up to the “repulsive reality” of “the walls of his own room” and struggles once again to fall asleep and re-experience his celestial visions. Soon his entire life becomes an attempt to enter the fantastic: a single-minded Romantic pursuit that Piskarev shares with many of Poe’s solitary hypnagogic visionaries. Like the monomaniacal narrator of Poe’s “Berenice,” who confesses that “the realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, not the material of my everyday existence, but [...] that existence utterly and solely in itself” (Poe 226), for the Russian painter “dreams became his life, and his whole life thereafter took a strange turn; one might say he slept while waking and kept awake while asleep” (262).¹⁰ The artist continues to meet the object of his enchantment nightly and later resorts to opium to prolong his dreams until one day he musters the courage to speak with the young woman in person, reveal his love, and ask for her hand in marriage. Leaving his little studio, the artist, like Poe’s London hero, feels himself “a convalescent who has decided to go out for the first time after a long illness” (265). But when he enters the brothel and makes his naïve proposal, the young streetwalker, who as the narrator tells us is “a beauty touched

¹⁰ Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* is a likely common source for the visionary reveries in Poe’s and Gogol’s tales. The narrator of the *Confessions* notes that during his drugged reveries, “whatsoever things [...] I did but think of it in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms of the eye; and, by a process apparently no less inevitable, when thus once traced in faint and visionary colours [...] they were drawn out by the fierce chemistry of my dreams” (75). For a discussion of De Quincey’s influence on Gogol see V.V. Vinogradov’s “*O literaturnoi tsiklizatsii*” in *Evoliutsiia russkogo naturalizma*. Vinogradov argues that Gogol’s encounter with the *Confessions* played a pivotal role for the author’s turn away from the Hoffmannesque aesthetics of the early Ukrainian stories towards the proto-realism of his so-called “Petersburg Tales,” which include “Nevsky Prospect,” “The Nose,” “Overcoat,” “The Portrait,” and “Diary of a Madman.”

by the putrid breath of vice,” dismisses Piskarev’s offer with a scornful laugh, shattering Piskarev’s remaining illusions about his angel. Unable to bridge the gap between his Romantic ideals and “drab” actuality, Piskarev succumbs to madness and after “aimlessly” (*bez zeli*) wandering the streets of Petersburg like Poe’s old man of the crowd, returns to his room where he is later found with his throat cut by a razor.

But the novella continues with the amorous misadventures of Lieutenant Pirogov. For his part, the artist’s brash foil fails to gain the favors of the young woman of his choice who turns out to be the dutiful wife of a German ironmonger named Schiller. Together with his friend and drinking companion Hoffmann, both men later give the lieutenant a thorough thrashing. But the smug and self-assured military officer is hardly troubled by the incident and is later seen stuffing himself with pastries and dancing the night away at an officers’ ball. As Donald Fanger points out in *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism*, Gogol’s story is an indictment of the capital where “only *poshlyaki*, the conventional and the self-satisfied...can thrive” (114).

The novella ends with a complete reversal of Gogol’s opening panegyric on the “all-powerful” avenue as the storyteller offers an admonition about the czarist capital where “everything breathes deceit.”

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! [...]. Further away, for god’s sake, further away from the street lamp! pass it by 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 leaves it 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. (278)

[О, не верьте этому Невскому проспекту! Я всегда закутываюсь покрепче плащом своим, когда иду по нем, и стараюсь вовсе не глядеть на встречающиеся предметы. Всё обман, всё мечта, всё не то, чем кажется! [...]
Далее, ради бога, далее от фонаря! и скорее, сколько можно скорее, проходите мимо. Это счастье еще, если отделаетесь тем, что он зальет щегольской сюртук ваш вонючим своим маслом. Но и кроме фонаря, все дышит обманом. Он лжет во всякое время, этот Невский проспект, но более всего тогда, когда ночь сгущенною массою наляжет на него и отделит белые и палевые стены домов, когда весь город превратится в гром и блеск, мириады карет валятся с мостов, фореиторы кричат и прыгают на лошадях и когда сам демон зажигает лампы для того только, чтобы показать все не в настоящем виде.] (III:42-3)

Unlike the fictional stalker, the narrator is not lured by the bewitching visual deceptions the city practices on the unwary. He knows that in Petersburg a chase after its shadow mirages can result not merely in an uncanny thrill, but a total

dissolution of the deceived dreamer. As Lachmann concludes, in “Gogol’s theatre of fantasms it is the devil who is its director and principal actor. The diabolic puppeteer directs the ‘phantasmagoria,’ opens the show (*vystavka*) on [Nevsky Prospect], and lights its streetlamps, which shed a delusive and miraculous light” (247). Gogol’s demonic principle makes the city not merely illegible as in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” but deliberately deceptive.

Although the disparities between Gogol’s and Poe’s urban tales are obvious, the overlays, nonetheless, are striking. Each story presents the city – to quote Wordsworth – “as the mind builds for itself,” a dreamscape manufactured from the mental remove of an estranged observer. As in Poe’s story, the transmogrification of a realistically rendered depiction of the main avenue into a dark city fantasy is founded in Gogol’s tale on the visual fascinations and semi-hallucinatory mental states of its stalking observer.

Both tales not only center on similar metropolitan moments – the encounter with large crowds, the strange effect of street illumination at night, the sense of the unreality of the metropolis – the manner in which they convey their actions is likewise saliently analogous. To demonstrate this, let me present a counterexample from Honoré de Balzac’s *Ferragus* (1833), a novel written two years before “Nevsky Prospect” which, as Fanger mentions, might have suggested to Gogol a “direction to explore, a theme and an approach” (103) for his own urban treatment.

After Balzac’s opening oratory on the physiognomies of Parisian streets, the action of *Ferragus* commences with a young officer encountering a beautiful woman late in the evening on an empty street of the capital – a beauty “worthy of inspiring the kind

of platonic love which occasionally sprang up like a flower amid the blood-drenched wastes of medieval times” (35). Balzac stages the scene with scrupulous exactitude. It is half-past eight in the evening; the young man is walking on Rue Pagevin, looking in the direction of Rue Soly, and is turning into Rue des Vieux-Augustins. He resides on Rue Bourbon; the action takes place in “the beginning of February” thirteen years ago; the woman reminds him of someone he is secretly in love with. Having set forth the background details, the narrator now describes the young man’s pursuit:

Paris by night can produce singular, strange, unimaginable effects. Only those who have spent time observing them are aware what a thing of fantasy a woman may become after dusk. At one moment the creature you are following, by chance or by design, looks willowy; at another her stockings, if they are immaculately white, convince you she has dainty and shapely legs; then her figure, although wrapped in a shawl, or a pelisse, appears to be youthful and voluptuous in semi-darkness; finally, the wavering flare from a shop or a street-lamp throws on this unknown woman a fitful but always deceptive gleam which awakens and fires the imagination and sends it hurling into the realm of unreality. At that point the senses are aroused. All is colour and animation. The woman is totally transfigured; her body is embellished; at moments she is no longer a woman but a wild spirit, a will-o’-the-wisp who with high-power magnetism draws you along... (36)

Both Balzac and Gogol describe “how fantastic” a passing woman can appear at night to a bewitched beholder whose feverish imagination falls prey to an urban deception. Yet

the contrast between the manner both stories convey such a spectral metamorphosis on the streets could hardly be more stark. Foregrounding the incident's typicality, Balzac's *flâneur*-like narrator extols the city's "strange, weird, inconceivable effects." Because the scene evokes a common experience shared by those Parisians "who have amused themselves by watching those effects," the novel never grants the reader access to the private vantage of Balzac's hero. Gogol, instead, renders these same "effects" by simulating the moment-to-moment fragmentary perceptions of his fictional pursuer. Conjoining the urban imagery to the ocular field of his observer, Gogol – like Poe – articulates the deceptive transfiguration as a series of shifting mental events. Throughout the young artist's nocturnal chase after his idealized beauty, the story linguistically mimics the sense data of his experience: "The young man [...] went with timid and tremulous step towards where, some distance away, the colorful cloak was fluttering, now bathed in bright light as it approached a street lamp, now instantly covered in darkness as it left it behind" (251). Ignoring all other passersby, Piskarev's obsessive gaze is so concentrated that he trails not the young woman but either her luminous "colorful cloak," her lips, her smile, or the "light tracks of [her] beautiful feet" – impressionistic synecdoches that fuse the street scene with the mind of its perceiver. To heighten the effect of confining the reader to the private vantage of the hero, the story's narrative voice and Piskarev's thoughts imperceptibly coalesce during the pursuit. The sentence "No, it was the street lamp with its deceitful light showing the semblance of a smile on her lips" might belong as much to the narrator as to Piskarev own inner monologue.¹¹

¹¹ Poe's tale likewise portrays urban experience as a kaleidoscope of subjective, fleeting impressions. The stalking protagonist obsessively watches the old man under the passing street-lamps with the same "wild

Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect" and Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" share not merely a set of urban themes, but a unique mode of entering and expressing the fictional space-time continuum imported from the writers' earlier supernatural tales. Just as "The Man of the Crowd" introduces Poe's earlier modes of dream-like, obsessive perception to an urban panorama, "Nevsky Prospect" transplants Gogol's fantastic visual motifs and beholder from his unabashedly Romantic settings to Russia's contemporary capital.

The Seer and the Conjurer

Gogol's Petersburg tale was first published in a collection of stories and critical essays entitled *Arabesques (Arabeski)* (1935), released just four years before Poe published his own *Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque* – a parallel revealing the indebtedness of each writer to the Romantic movement and the Gothic literary tradition.¹²

Gogol's third published collection, *Arabesques*, marks a dramatic turning away from the rural Ukrainian settings of the earlier *Evenings Near the Farm of Dikanka (Vechera na khutare bliz Dikanki)* (1831) and *Mirgorod* (1835) cycles with their exotic fusion of local color, southern folklore, witches, demons, sorcerers, and brave-hearted

amazement." His riveted glance continuously tracks the changing expressions of the old man's countenance through their pursuit.

¹² The concept of the "Arabesque" – a term that describes the abstract, geometric designs of Islamic art – enters European imagination in the context of literature through Goethe's essay "On the Arabesques" (1789) as well as Friedrich Schlegel's writings. Daniel Hoffman argues that for Poe the arabesque was associated with "extreme psychological states" triggered by an encounter with "intricate patterns of abstraction [that] create a synthetic and harmonious – though often horrifying –experience..." (208). The critics Susanne Fusso and Mikhail Iampolski suggest that the notion of the arabesque in Gogol becomes a structural principle, one that combines broken fragments into a whole. In *Tkatch i Vizioner (The Weaver and the Visionary)*, Iampolski writes that the arabesque in Gogol "not only reflects the heterogeneity of diverse fragments included by writer in [his] collection, but also the presence of a movement that could join those fragments into a unified form" (352). Fusso notes that "throughout the *Arabesques*, whether the subject is history, geography, or art, Gogol reiterates the need no only to apprehend multifarious, individual, partial detail but to use one's intellectual powers and artistic sensitivity to assemble the seemingly fragmentary data of experience into a unified whole" (113).

Cossacks. Set in the northern bureaucratic capital far from the Russian Empire's warm southwestern province, all three of the collection's fictional tales ("Nevsky Prospect," "Portrait," and "Diaries of a Madman") trace the mental dissolution of their heroes in the big city. But while Gogol discovers a new range of concerns in his Petersburg tales, as Yury Mann has argued, he was able to bring many of the earlier fantastic elements, devices, and themes from the land of fairy-tale exoticism to the humdrum realist setting by "veiling" and disguising them in the quotidian.¹³

The artist Piskarev is hardly the first of Gogol's characters to encounter a deceptive, bewitching, and mentally fractured spectacle at night that proves to be, in the words of Victor Erlich, "the devil's snare" (81). Many of the lineaments of the artist's illusory encounter with the streetwalker on the streets of Petersburg have been rehearsed in Gogol's previous two collections of stories set on rural farmsteads and in enchanted forests.

Relying no less than Poe's stories on optical effects, Gogol's Ukrainian tales introduce characters who become bewitched observers of strange visual spectacles when accosted by diabolical forces.¹⁴ The tales' fantastic plots creep towards the demonic that reveals itself in dark arabesque settings, which, like Poe's horrific chambers, are dimly illuminated with chiaroscuro effects. Using candles, moonlight, glimmers, reflections, and deep shadows, Gogol orchestrates the uncanny atmosphere of his rural landscapes as if working not with the medium of language but with a painter's palette.¹⁵

¹³ In *Poetika Gogolya: Variazii k teme (Gogol's Poetics: Variations on a Theme)*, Mann tracks the gradual transformation of the fantastic from the "straightforward" supernaturalism of his early tales into a hidden structural principle of Gogol's later works.

¹⁵ Vladimir Nabokov in *Nikolai Gogol* might have been the first critic outside of Russia to note the acute role of vision in Gogol's writings. Nabokov suggests that "It was Gogol [...] who first saw yellow and violet at all. That the sky could be pale green at sunrise, or the snow a rich blue on a cloudless day, would

Usually, the hero-beholder of “unclean forces” (*nechistaya sila*) in Gogol’s early tales is a God-fearing Cossack who must either trick the demons or else fall prey to their deceptions, which are often described in acutely visual terms. The dream-like encounter with the supernatural is presented through the subjective viewpoint of the hero and is prolonged to heighten its powerfully charged effect. As in Poe’s tales, the imagery of the bizarre events is irradiated with the feverish moods of its observer. But if the meeting with the uncanny elicits in Poe’s storytellers a terrifying, hypnotic state of awareness, the encounter with the supernatural in Gogol’s fantastic tales triggers in his protagonists a state of maddening sensory vertigo, a vortex of broken, chaotic, and misty images in the mind of the bemused observer.

In the tale “Lost Letter” (“Propavshaya gramota”), for instance, the frame narrator relates the story of his Cossack grandfather who is sent to the Russian czarina to deliver an official letter that gets stolen early into the trip by a petty devil (*chert*). The theft occurs at night when the Cossack is drunk and ready to fall asleep. With his vision already impaired, the grandfather seems to see “something gray poking its horns” under a wagon.

Then his eyes began to close, so that he was obliged to rub them every minute with his fist and to keep them open with the rest of the vodka. But soon, when they were a little clearer, everything had vanished. At last a little later something strange showed itself under the wagon... Grandad

have sounded like heretical nonsense to your so-called ‘classical’ writer, accustomed as he was to the rigid conventional color-schemes of the Eighteenth Century French school of literature” (86-87). For more on Gogol’s visual “poetics” in the context of the plastic arts, see Robert Maguire’s discussion of Gogol and the picturesque in the “Poet as Painter” section of *Exploring Gogol* (pp. 98-102).

opened his eyes as wide as he could, but the cursed sleepiness made everything misty before him. (81)

[Тут глаза его начали смыкаться так, что принужден он был ежеминутно протирать кулаком и промывать оставшеюся водкой. Но как скоро немного прояснились они, все пропадало. Наконец, мало погодя, опять показывается из-под воза чудище... Дед вытаращил глаза сколько мог; но проклятая дремота все туманила перед ним. (I:87-8)]

To recover the purloined letter, the grandfather goes at night to a haunted forest (“dark and dim as a wine cellar”), which quickly transforms into a stage for spectral optical effects and propels the hero into the position of an observer. With not a star shining in the sky, the forest suddenly “lights up as if from lighting” and reveals a hidden trail. Illumination flickers in the distance. The grandfather “gapes” at the wondrous spectacles before him. Soon he wanders into a devilish swarm of demons and witches and “peers” at their animal-like mugs illuminated by the campfire. When he tries to speak to them, a demonic carnival ensues:

... everything was in a turmoil before him, the earth shook, and all at once – he never knew how to explain this part – he found himself almost in hell itself.

“Merciful heavens!” groaned Grandad when he had taken a good look around. What wonders were here! One ugly face after another, as the saying is. The witches were as many as the snowflakes that fall on

occasion at Christmas. They were all dressed up and painted like fine ladies at a fair. And the whole bunch of them were dancing some sort of devil's jig as though they were drunk. (84)

[... все перед ним перемешалось, земля задрожала, и, как уже, - он и сам рассказать не умел, - попал чуть ли не в самое пекло. "Батюшки мои!" - ахнул дед, разглядевши хорошенько: что за чудища! рожи на роже, как говорится, не видно. Ведьм такая гибель, как случается иногда на рождество выпадет снегу: разряжены, размазаны, словно панночки на ярмарке. И все, сколько ни было их там, как хмельные, отплясывали какого-то чертовского тропака.] (I:91)

The devilish jig is, of course, reminiscent of Piskarev's dream ball, which "threw him into complete bewilderment; [...] as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces."

The tale "St. John's Eve" ("Vecher nakanune Ivana Kupala") presents a more dramatic example of a demonic ocular deception. The story recounts how an evil conjurer named Basavriuk tricks the young Cossack Petro into committing a terrible murder. The devilish encounter of Petro with Basavriuk occurs at night in a "blind dark" (*temno khot' glaz vikoli*) forest ravine. As in Gogol's other fantastic tales, with the coming of darkness, the hero becomes a beholder of otherworldly supernatural spectacles.¹⁶ The dream-like sequence of fantastic optical effects continues until a witch

¹⁶ The conjurer commands Petro to gather a magical fern that blossoms only on St. John's Eve: But, lo—a small flower bud showed red, moving as if it was alive. A wonder indeed! Moving and growing bigger and bigger, and reddened like a hot coal. A little star lit up,

brings Petro a small boy whom she commands to kill in exchange for a buried treasure. Delirious, Petro plunges the knife into the child. The scene climaxes with a feverish array of fractured images:

The witch stamped her foot; blue flame burst from the ground; its whole inside lit up and looked as if it were molded from crystal; and everything under the ground became visible as in the palm of your hand. [...] His eyes glowed... his mind darkened... As if insane, he seized the knife and innocent blood spurted into his eyes... A devilish guffawing thundered on all sides. Hideous monsters leaped before him in throngs. [...]

Everything whirled in his head! Summoning all his strength, he broke into a run. Everything before him was covered with red. The trees, bathed in blood, seemed to burn and groan. The sky, red hot, was trembling... Fiery spots, like lighting, came to his eyes. Exhausted, he ran inside his hut and collapsed as if he had been mowed down. (12)

[Ведьма топнула ногою: синее пламя выхватилось из земли; середина ее вся осветилась и стала как будто из хрусталя вылита; и все, что ни было под землею, сделалось видимо как на ладони. [...] Глаза его загорелись... ум помутился... Как безумный, ухватился он за нож, и безвинная кровь

something cracked softly, and the flower unfolded before his eyes, shining like a flame on others around it. (10)

[Глядь, краснеет маленькая цветочная почка и, как будто живая, движется. В самом деле, чудно! Двигается и становится все больше, больше и краснеет, как горячий уголь. Вспыхнула звездочка, что-то тихо затрещало, и цветок развернулся перед его очами, словно пламя, осветив и другие около себя.] (I:46)

брызнула ему в очи... Дьявольский хохот загремел со всех сторон.
Безобразные чудища стаями скакали перед ним. [...] Все пошло кругом в
голове его! Собравши все силы, бросился бежать он. Все покрылось перед
ним красным цветом. Деревья, все в крови, казалось, горели и стонали.
Небо, распалившись, дрожало... Огненные пятна, что молнии, мерещились в
его глазах. Выбившись из сил, вбежал он в свою лачужку и, как сноп,
повалился на землю.] (I:47-8)

Deceived by the demons into killing his beloved's kid brother, Petro enters a nightmarish vortex of spinning dream imagery – a fragmented sensory experience similar to Piskarev's Cubist vision of the street during his pursuit of the streetwalker. The whirling, dream-like images elicited by the meeting with the demonic in both stories are a result of bewitchment and deception that eventually lead to the hero's mental breakdown.

In the *Mirgorod* cycle, Gogol's motif of demonic visuality is dramatized in the tale "Viy." As the foremost Soviet Gogolian Vasily V. Gippius has observed, "the invasion of men's lives by the demonic was the theme of *Evenings*. The invasion of the *beautiful* by the demonic is the modified version of this same theme in ['Viy' and 'Nevsky Prospect']" (46). "Viy" recounts the story of a seminary student Khoma Brut who for three nights must read prayers over the coffin of a rich Cossack's beautiful daughter. Khoma's first reaction to the young woman – who moonlights at night as a terrible witch – is strikingly similar to Piskarev's first impression of the young streetwalker:

A shudder ran through his veins: before him lay a beauty such as there had never been on earth. It seemed that facial feature had never before been assembled into such sharp yet harmonious beauty. (175)

[Трепет пробежал по его жилам; перед ним лежала красавица, какая когда-либо бивала на свете. Казалось, никогда еще черты лица не били образованы в такой резкой и гармонической красоте.] (I:174)

Throughout the story, Khoma continuously encounters supernatural spectacles. Early into the tale, he is taken by the witch on a magical nocturnal aerial journey over rural Ukraine. Flying over the moonlit fields – “the timid midnight radiance lay lightly as a transparent blanket and steamed over the earth” (164) – Khoma, like the artist Piskarev, asks himself whether he is dreaming and questions if what he is seeing is real. As in many other tales of the two collections, the narrator presents the fantastic imagery through the visual vantage of the hero:

The earth just flashed beneath him. Everything was clear in the moonlight, though the moon was not full. The valleys were smooth, but owing to the speed everything flashed vaguely and confusedly in his eyes. (164)

[Земля чуть мелькала под ним. Все было ясно при месячном, хотя и неполном свете. Долины были гладки, но все от быстроты мелькало неясно и сбивчиво в его глазах.] (I:163)

When later Khoma is locked inside a dim candle-lit chapel to perform his prayers, the dead beauty transforms into a hideous monster who struggles to kill the student but

succeeds only on the third night when she enlists the help of a retinue of other monsters.

The approach of the demons begins with another violent vortex-like vision:

Wind whirled through the church, icons fell to the floor, broken glass dropped from the windows. The doors tore from their hinges, and a numberless host of monsters flew into God's church. A terrible noise of wings and scratching claws filled the whole church. Everything flew and rushed about, seeking the philosopher everywhere. (191)

[Вихорь поднялся по церкви, попадали на землю иконы, полетели сверху вниз разбитые стекла окошек. Двери сорвались с петель, и несметная сила чудовищ влетела в божью церковь. Страшный шум от крыл и от царапанья когтей наполнил всю церковь. Все летало и носилось, ища повсюду философа.] (I:190)

Julian Connolly has aptly noted the parallels between the fantastic transformations of the young beauty in "Viy" and in "Nevsky Prospect." In the Petersburg tale, the metamorphosis of Piskarev's divinity into a streetwalker occurs in the brothel – "one of those heavens ... where woman ... turns into some strange, ambiguous being" (Gogol 255-6). Like the witch that puts a spell on Khoma to carry him off on a nocturnal flyover, the prostitute "bewitched and carried [the artist] off" (Connolly 90) on a nocturnal tour of Petersburg's demonic dream-double. But as Connolly observes, "In ["Viy"] however, the transformation which Khoma observed encompassed two realms – the human and the supernatural. [In "Nevsky Prospect"], in contrast, the entities of beautiful maiden and coarse prostitute both belong to the human realm" (90).

Gogol's diabolical forces begin their crossover into the human domain in "The Christmas Eve" ("Noch pered Rozhdestvom"), the longest story of the *Evenings* cycle in which the demonic for the first time leaves the Ukrainian landscape of fairytales to enter the big city. The tale takes place on one of Gogol's typical pitch-dark (*khot' glaz vikoli*) nights. A petty devil steals the moon to avenge himself on the local blacksmith Vakula, the first of Gogol's artists, who takes up the brush to paint a church mural depicting St. Peter expelling the devil from hell. A series of demonic ocular deceptions and amorous misidentifications in the dark village leave Vakula flying on the back of the petty devil from Ukraine to St. Petersburg on a personal visit to the Russian czarina. The exotic tale offers Gogol's first literary portrait of the imperial capital. Flying over the city, the smith suddenly sees Petersburg "all ablaze" (*ves' v ogne*) with lights. The petty devil lands on one of the largest avenues of Petersburg and turning into a horse leaves the young Cossack in the middle of street:

My God! The clatter, the thunder, the glitter; four-story walls loomed on both sides; the clatter of horses' hooves and the rumble of wheels sounded like thunder and echoed on four sides; houses grew as if rising from the ground at every step: bridges trembled; carriages flew by, cabbies and postillions shouted; snow swished under a thousand sleds flying on all sides; passers-by pressed against and huddled under houses studded with lamps, and their huge shadows flitted over the walls, their heads reaching the chimneys and roofs. The blacksmith looked about him in amazement. It seemed to him that the houses turned their countless eyes at him and stared. (52)

[Боже мой! стук, гром, блеск; по обеим сторонам громоздятся четырехэтажные стены; стук копыт коня, звук колеса отзывались громом и отдавались с четырех сторон; дома росли и будто подымались из земли на каждом шагу; мосты дрожали; кареты летали; извозчики, фореиторы кричали; снег свистел под тысячью летящих со всех сторон саней; пешеходы жались и теснились под домами, унизанными площадками, и огромные тени их мелькали по стенам, досягая головою труб и крыш. С изумлением оглядывался кузнец на все стороны. Ему казалось, что все дома устремили на него свои бесчисленные огненные очи и глядели.] (I:134)

Gogol uses the city as yet another source of the stunning ocular effects he has relied on throughout the story. The image of the capital is rendered through the same recurring motifs associated with the demonic vision; yet in Petersburg, Gogol no longer enlists the help of supernatural forces. The petty demon who earlier stole the moon now lets the city itself exercise its dark allure on the young villager. Presented through the gaze of a fictional observer who has escaped from the fantastic universe to Nevsky Prospect, the avenue undergoes its first fragmentation: a depiction of vortex-like imagery nearly identical to “Nevsky Prospect.” The scene of Vakula’s encounter with the city exists on the seams between the fantastic and the real. It demonstrates a reciprocal alignment between the recursive fictional atmosphere that the writer perpetually recreates in his otherworldly settings and the ambience of a real place that proves to be more bewitching than his most exotic fictions.

As in “The Christmas Eve,” Gogol’s Petersburg in “Nevsky Prospect” is based on fantastic visual effects that the author transposes from the supernatural to the everyday. The night now enshrouds a mirage-like avenue, not an enchanted forest. The candles and moonlight are replaced by the streetlamps. The empty fields have become dark squares – like the one on which Akaky Akakievich meets his robbers in the “Overcoat” (1842). No longer a Christian Cossack warrior, the writer’s bewitched seer has become a sensitive solitary artist. And the devil – on whose back Vakula flies into Petersburg – morphs into the very principle of deception of the capital’s ostentatious social façades and demeanors that hide the grotesque, doll-like vacuity of its residents.

But unlike the earlier Ukrainian tales, in “Nevsky Prospect” the fantastic motifs associated with deceptive vision are evoked by Gogol to convey a very different kind of subjective experience. The tale’s beholder in the city no longer encounters the otherworldly directly. In the capital, the fantastic resides nowhere but in the realm of interiority, lying dormant until aroused by the city’s uncanny illumination. It may be the devil who lights the streetlamps on Gogol’s prospect, but it is the solitary artist who himself projects his deceptions from the distance of his estrangement.

The divorce of the spectator from the urban community – in both Poe’s and Gogol’s stories – transforms the gaze of their heroes into a *lanterna magica* that suffuses what it illuminates with otherworldly, transcendental connotations. For both heroes, the passersby they pursue are no more than screens on which they transpose their motley, subjective associations, and enthralling illusions. Under the spectral light of the lamps, both turn those whom they stalk into divine or demonic apparitions, self-creations that become harbingers of a different metaphysical order standing in dramatic opposition to

the daily fair of metropolitan crowds. In an uncanny encounter with an urbanite whose appearance entices with a promise of another universe, each character peers into a fissure in the drab fabric of familiar urban life. Transcendentally homeless in the modern age that Georg Lukács has called that of “shattered totality,” Poe’s and Gogol’s city heroes are not historically situated *flâneurs*, but stalkers sent by their writers into what Burton Pike has called the “word-city” – the literary double of the real place – a realm where fictional observers can still glimpse a vision of totality through imagination alone.

Chapter 3

Cité Pleine de Rêves

The previous chapters analyzed the relationship between spectatorship and urban treatment in literary texts of authors whose city fictions transplanted Romantic forms of visuality and modes of conveying the self from bucolic settings and fantastic Gothic environments to the modern metropolis. Shifting into the second half of the nineteenth century, this chapter explores the relationship between spectatorship and urban treatment in the lyrical works of Charles Baudelaire – a poet who made city watching one of the central themes of much of his oeuvre. My goal is to demonstrate a salient continuity between Baudelaire’s poet-beholder and the Romantic figure of the visionary seer whose development was explored earlier in these pages. Investigating the evolution of Romantic “aesthetics of the eye” in Baudelaire, the chapter offers a new reading of the role of the spectator in the poet’s work by examining the multifarious, and at times contradictory, modes of seeing the city in Baudelaire’s work against the poet’s reoccurring presentations of fantastic dream visions and descriptions of natural landscapes. Underscoring Baudelaire’s indebtedness to the Romantic model of urban treatment, and particularly to Poe, this study explores what is radically novel about the lyrical spectator in Paris of the Second Empire – his status as a redeemer of the quotidian who seeks “universal communion” with the social ruins and flotsam of the city.

The figure of the urban onlooker in Baudelaire’s lyrical prose and verse has been widely explored within the framework of Walter Benjamin’s concept of the *flâneur* to

underscore the “symptomatic” relationship between the French poet’s mode of articulating urban experience and the radical historical, political, and material transformations of his age. In his introduction to a recent collection of Benjamin’s essays on Baudelaire, Michael W. Jennings draws attention to the deterministic relationship between seeing and writing the city posited by the German scholar:

Walter Benjamin’s essays on Charles Baudelaire from the 1930s accomplished nothing less than a wholesale reinvention of the great French poet as the representative writer of urban capitalist modernity. Before Benjamin’s radical reorientation of our image of the poet, Baudelaire had usually been considered in purely aesthetic terms – as a late Romantic or as a forerunner of the French Symbolists. For Benjamin, however, Baudelaire’s greatness consisted precisely in his *representativeness*: in the manner in which his poetry – often against its express intent – laid open the structure and mechanism of his age. (1)

To lay “open the structure and mechanism” of Baudelaire’s age, Benjamin considered the poet’s lyrical canon “in conjunction with key categories of modernity and especially of the technologized cultural production that is characteristic of urban commodity capitalism” (Jinnings 7). In the dizzying theoretical montage of “Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” and in his later essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Benjamin locates Baudelaire’s poet-beholder among the wider societal forms of production and exchange of his era: the emerging processes of commodification; the growing density of the urban masses and the disquieting experience of the crowds; the psychological effect of metropolitan “shock” on the sensorium of the walker; Baron Haussmann’s large-scale

urban re-planning of Paris; the allure and “phantasmagoria” of consumption and display of Parisian arcades as well as the revolutionary politics of the “bohème” during and after the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe. Juxtaposing his discussions of the poet against Karl Marx’s theorizations of commodity capitalism, Benjamin presents images of Baudelaire and his age “torn from their ‘natural’ or ‘original’ context and integrated into a text based on the principles of montage” (Jennings 12).

While Benjamin himself never explicitly connected the figure of the *flâneur* with the ambling city poet of Baudelaire, more recent investigators have made the term nearly synonymous with Baudelaire. In line with Benjamin’s central assumptions, investigators of the motif of urban spectatorship in the poet’s works usually advocate a reading of Baudelaire’s metropolitan treatment “against its express intent” while using the figure of the *flâneur* as a critical shorthand for the symptomatic relationship between the historical city, the onlooker, and the artistic expression of his urban experience.

Thus, in an introduction to the influential collection of critical essays on the *flâneur*, Keith Tester, for instance, argues that “*flanerie* is one of the main narrative devices of the [Baudelaire’s] Paris Spleen collection” (1). John Rignall discusses in his study of urban spectatorship “Baudelaire’s use of the *flâneur* persona” (9). James Werner claims that the Baudelaire’s works “address the practice and methodology of *flânerie*” (2). Katherine Golsan finds parallels between the “new aesthetics” (166) of the *flâneur* in Baudelaire and the painter Edouard Manet. Tracing the fortunes and transformations the *flâneur* in *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson sees the defining lineaments of the “artist-*flâneur*” both in Honoré de Balzac’s omniscient narrators and in Baudelaire’s melancholy Parisian prowler.

Although many such *flâneur*-centered accounts have revealed interesting connections between Baudelaire's works and the historical period of his literary production, commentators who heavily rely on Benjamin's concept overlook the pivotal role that spectatorship plays in Baudelaire's works as a whole: from his dream visions and painterly natural landscapes (where the figure of the onlooker is nearly ubiquitous) to his famous Parisian lyrical works. To uncover the relationship in Baudelaire between seeing and writing the metropolis, it is important to examine first how the poet utilizes the figure of the beholder independently of the urban environment, where the influence of Romantic forms of perception is most palpable.

The Dream and the Painting

Baudelaire is one of the most keenly visual poets of the nineteenth century. His universe is profoundly eye-centered. The "chaste" azure of his vast skies. The pastels of his autumns. The rich, deep blue of his immense seascapes. The crimson and gold of his sunsets. The warm radiance of lamps, of eyes, of dark surfaces, and of the stars themselves. The enchanting prisms, kaleidoscopes, and colored panes playing with webs and patterns of pure luminescence. The unreal light of his twilights. The rays of the sun and the sulfurous pallor of the moon – and always the passing bright clouds. Light weaves its majestic designs in Baudelaire's verse from morning to nighttime. It enchants and dazzles: all is colorful and brilliant when the poet evokes the ideal. Light comes in crystalline pools of glowing amber-like luminance; it shines through the darkness; it emanates and reflects. Its rays shimmer on every facade: on gems, on precious metals, on the lover's skin, on sheets of water, on pupils, and the banks of mist. Through much of

his lyrical verse and prose, the poet presents himself again and again in the act of visual contemplation – a beholder enraptured by the world of light and shadows that puts him in a state of repose and reverie, of intoxication, and child-like acuteness of the senses.

When not walking the streets of Paris, Baudelaire's poet encounters two kinds of spectacles – the fantastic dreamscape and what the poet and art historian Yves Bonnefoy has called “pure painting” – both of which, as I will soon show, find their way into his urban treatment. Let me start with the first of the two.

In the prose poem “La Chambre double (The Double Room),” published in *Le Spleen de Paris*, the poet observes a dream chamber in a rapturous state of self-forgetting and intoxication:

A room that is like a dream, a truly spiritual room, where the stagnant atmosphere is nebulously tinted pink and blue.

Here the soul takes a bath of indolence, scented with all the aromatic perfume of desire and regret. There is about it something crepuscular, bluish shot with rose; a voluptuous dream in an eclipse.

Every piece of furniture is of an elongated form, languid and prostrate, and seems to be dreaming; endowed, one would say, with a somnambular existence like minerals and vegetables. The hangings speak a silent language like flowers, skies and setting suns.

No artistic abominations on the walls. Definite, positive art is blasphemy compared to dream and the unanalyzed impression. Here all is bathed in harmony's own adequate and delicious obscurity. [...] Muslin in

diaphanous masses rains over the window and, over the bed, spreads in snowy cataracts. [...]

To what good demon am I indebted for this encompassing atmosphere of mystery, silence, perfume and peace? O bliss! What we wont to call life, even in its happiest moments of expansion, has nothing in common with this supreme life which I am now experiencing, and which I relish minute by minute, second by second.

No! there are no more minutes, there are no more seconds! Time has disappeared; it is Eternity that reigns, an eternity of bliss! (5-6)

[Une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement spirituelle, où l'atmosphère stagnante est légèrement teintée de rose et de bleu.

L'âme y prend un bain de paresse, aromatisé par le regret et le désir. - C'est quelque chose de crépusculaire, de bleuâtre et de rosâtre; un rêve de volupté pendant une éclipse.

Les meubles ont des formes allongées, prostrées, alanguies. Les meubles ont l'air de rêver; on les dirait doués d'une vie somnambulique, comme le végétal et le minéral. Les étoffes parlent une langue muette, comme les fleurs, comme les ciels, comme les soleils couchants.

Sur les murs nulle abomination artistique. Relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un blasphème. Ici, tout a la suffisante clarté et la délicieuse obscurité de l'harmonie. [...] La

mousseline pleut abondamment devant les fenêtres et devant le lit; elle s'épanche en cascades neigeuses. [...]

A quel démon bienveillant dois-je d'être ainsi entouré de mystère, de silence, de paix et de parfums? O béatitude! ce que nous nommons généralement la vie, même dans son expansion la plus heureuse, n'a rien de commun avec cette vie suprême dont j'ai maintenant connaissance et que je savoure minute par minute, seconde par seconde!

Non! il n'est plus de minutes, il n'est plus de secondes! Le temps a disparu; c'est l'Eternité qui règne, une éternité de délices!]

In the passage, the beholder experiences what Erich Auerbach has memorably called a state of “sensuous artificiality” (163) – a dreamscape where clock-time trades places with eternity, where the oppressive banality of everyday life is removed through “absolute artifice,” where materiality vanishes and gives way to sensory synesthesia, to the ecstatic mental states of oblivion and self-forgetting that perpetually figure in Baudelaire’s works. It is a harmonious dream vision of the “absolute Somewhere-Else” (Auerbach 163) at the center of which are the gleaming eyes – “black stars compelling curiosity and wonder” – of the poet’s beloved. This is the realm of ecstasy and timelessness, of what Georges Poulet has described in his *Studies in Human Time* as “unification of moments, hours, and epochs by the profound experience of the harmony that exists between all the states of the *self*” (138).

Yet against this luminous vision, the other antithetical chamber suddenly appears before the poet in the second half of “La Chambre double” when he awakens to the familiar and drab actuality. “Horrors! I remember! Yes, I remember! this filthy hole, this

abode of eternal boredom is truly mine” (6). [“Horreur! je me souviens! je me souviens! Oui! ce taudis, ce séjour de l'éternel ennui, est bien le mien.”] This is the room of self-torment and disenchantment, of dilapidated furniture and stale tobacco smoke, of dusty windows and “Memories, Regrets, Spasms, Fears, Agonies, Nightmares, Nerves, and Rages,” a realm where time “has resumed his brutal tyranny” (7) – a place that evokes anguish and despair in the poet whose gaze passes over its painfully trivial sights as he realizes that he is once again “damned” to everyday existence.

In the verse analog of “La Chambre double” – the poem “Rêve Parisien (Parisian Dream)” from *Les Fleurs du mal* – the dreamscape before the lyric beholder is presented in more acutely visual terms. The poet has just awoken and recalls the fantastic dream-world where “all is for the eye and nothing for the ear” [“tout pour l'oeil, rien pour les oreilles!”].

There were indescribable stones
And magic waves; there were
Enormous glaciers bedazzled
By everything they reflected!
[...]
Architect of my fairyland,
Whenever it pleased me I made
A vanquished ocean flow
Into a tunnel of jewels;
And all, even the color black,
Seemed polished, bright, iridescent,

Liquid enchased its own glory
In the crystallized rays of light. (343-5)

[C'étaient des pierres inouïes
Et des flots magiques, c'étaient
D'immenses glaces éblouies
Par tout ce qu'elles reflétaient!

[...]

Architecte de mes féeries,
Je faisais, à ma volonté,
Sous un tunnel de pierreries
Passer un océan dompté;
Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;
Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire
Dans le rayon cristallisé.]

In the realm of dreams, Baudelaire's beholder becomes an "architect of [his] own fairyland" ["architecte de ... féeries"], a creator of bewitching conceits arising in the mind alone, of brilliant hues, dazzling luminous optical effects staged with mirrors, prisms, glass, gems, and crystals. As in "La Chambre double," in the second part of the poem the spectator's vision of a hallucinatory sensory paradise shatters in disenchantment as he feels the return of the "curse of all [his] cares" and hears the strokes of the room's clock.

Opening my eyes full of flames
I saw my miserable room
And felt the cursed blade of care
Sink deep into my heart again;
The clock with its death-like accent
Was brutally striking noon;
The sky was pouring down its gloom
Upon the dismal, torpid world. (345)

[En rouvrant mes yeux pleins de flamme
J'ai vu l'horreur de mon taudis,
Et senti, rentrant dans mon âme,
La pointe des soucis maudits;
La pendule aux accents funèbres
Sonnait brutalement midi,
Et le ciel versait des ténèbres
Sur le triste monde engourdi.]

As Jean Prevost notes in his survey of Baudelairian themes, “the dream which has been voluntarily caused by the dreamer and to which he submits must be followed by a desolate awakening, a bleak and frozen return to earth” (172).¹

¹ The symbolic contrast between the waking and the dream worlds in Baudelaire is reminiscent to the Romantic antithesis between the real and the ideal in the dream sequences of Nikolai Gogol’s “Nevsky Prospect.” The hero Piskarev also pursues in his dreams paradisiacal visions of divine beauty only to awake to the “dingy disorder” and “repulsive reality” of his room. Yet unlike Piskarev, Baudelaire’s poet is no idealist. He knows that his artificial hallucinatory paradise is the highest possible freedom he can attain and that it would be in vain to turn to actuality in search of the ideal. Unlike Gogol’s narrator who

Unlike the dreamscape where the beholder is able to paint his own sensations, the waking world is colorless and unappealing, like the transparent windowpanes that arouse the ire of the poet in “Le Mauvais vitrier (The Bad Glazier)” in which the speaker throws a flower pot at a glass vendor for failing to bring with him tinted window panes that could “make life beautiful” (14). By contrast, Baudelaire’s typical dreamscapes are realms bathed in light, color, and movement that the poet observes in a state of timeless beatitude and sensory voluptuousness. Here, for instance, is the description of the country of Cocagne from the prose poem “L’Invitation au voyage” – a dreamy [“rêveur”] paradise where one “goes to prolong the hours in the infinity of sensations” [“allonger les heures par l’infini des sensations”]:

On shining panels or on darkly rich and gilded leathers, discreet paintings repose, as deep, calm and devout as the souls of the painters who depict them. Sunsets throw their glowing colors on the walls of dining-room and drawing-room, sifting softly through lovely hangings or intricate high windows with mullioned panes. All the furniture is immense, fantastic, strange, armed with locks and secrets like all civilized souls. Mirrors, metals, fabrics, pottery, and works of the goldsmith’s art play a mute mysterious symphony for the eye, and every corner, every crack, every drawer and curtain’s fold breathes forth a curious perfume... (32-3)

denounces the demonic powers of deception of Nevsky Prospect where “the devil himself lights the streetlamps,” the poet celebrates the principle of deceit that he calls “the good demon.” Describing the enchanting image of his beloved under the streetlamps in “L’Amour du mensonges (The Love of Lies),” the poet writes: “But is it not enough that you are a semblance/ To gladden a heart that flees from the truth?/ What matter your obtuseness or your indifference?/ Mask or ornament, hail! I adore your beauty.” (333).

[Sur des panneaux luisants, ou sur des cuirs dorés et d'une richesse sombre, vivent discrètement des peintures béates, calmes et profondes, comme les âmes des artistes qui les créèrent. Les soleils couchants, qui colorent si richement la salle à manger ou le salon, sont tamisés par de belles étoffes ou par ces hautes fenêtres ouvragées que le plomb divise en nombreux compartiments. Les meubles sont vastes, curieux, bizarres, armés de serrures et de secrets comme des âmes raffinées. Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoffes, l'orfèvrerie et la faïence y jouent pour les yeux une symphonie muette et mystérieuse; et de toutes choses, de tous les coins, des fissures des tiroirs et des plis des étoffes s'échappe un parfum singulier...]

In the dream-world the poet often experiences an artificial synesthesia of sensations: scents become visualized and perceived as hues as in the magical park of “Le Fou et la Vénus (The Venus and the Motley Fool),” a place like the country of Cocagne where reigns a “universal ecstasy of things” [“l'extase universelle des choses”]:

It is as though an ever more luminous light kept making each object glitter with an ever more dazzling splendor; as though the frenzied flowers were trying to rival the azure of the sky by the intensity of their colors, as though the heat, making the perfumes visible, were drawing them up to the sun like smoke. (10)

[On dirait qu'une lumière toujours croissante fait de plus en plus étinceler les objets; que les fleurs excitées brûlent du désir de rivaliser avec l'azur

du ciel par l'énergie de leurs couleurs, et que la chaleur, rendant visibles
les parfums, les fait monter vers l'astre comme des fumées.]

Almost all of Baudelaire's dream visions rely on the recurring ocular motif of pure luminosity, of dazzling glimmers, of lusters, and of bewitching illumination that often emanates from within the object. The very symbol of the poet's high calling – the mystic crown described in the poem “Bénédiction” – is made of “nothing but pure light” [pure lumière]:

Drawn from the hearth of the essential rays,
To which our mortal eyes, when burning bright,
Are but the tarnished mirrors that they glaze.

[Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs,
Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière,
Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs!]

Yet Baudelaire's beholder is not only trying to escape actuality through the artifice of dream perception. In many of his lyrical works, we see the poet's gaze transforming the everyday into an enchanting painting as he bears witness to the beauty of the quotidian, which the beholder strips of all that does not dazzle the senses – a mode of seeing the world that allows the poet to escape his own anguished interiority and oppressive sense of time during his waking hours. One of the most illustrative examples of such “pure painting” is the prose poem “La Belle Dorothée”:

The sun overwhelms the city with its perpendicular and fulminating
rays; the sand is blinding and the sea glitters. [...]

Meanwhile Dorothea, strong and proud as the sun, walks along the deserted street, the only living thing at this hour under the blue, a shining black spot in the sunlight.

She walks, swaying gently from such a slender waist set on such generous hips! Her pale pink dress of clinging silk makes a lovely contrast with the darkness of her skin, and molds accurately her long bust, the curve of her back and her pointed breasts.

A red parasol, shading her from the sun, rouges her dusky face with its blood-red glow. The weight of the enormous pile of hair that is almost blue, pulls back her delicate head and give her an indolently triumphant air. And the heavy ear-rings keep chattering secrets in her pretty ears.

(50)

[Le soleil accable la ville de sa lumière droite et terrible; le sable est éblouissant et la mer miroite. [...]

Cependant Dorothee, forte et fiere comme le soleil, s'avance dans la rue deserte, seule vivante à cette heure sous l'immense azur, et faisant sur la lumière une tache éclatante et noire.

Elle s'avance, balançant mollement son torse si mince sur ses hanches si larges. Sa robe de soie collante, d'un ton clair et rose, tranche vivement sur les ténèbres de sa peau et moule exactement sa taille longue, son dos creux et sa gorge pointue.

Son ombrelle rouge, tamisant la lumière, projette sur son visage sombre

le fard sanglant de ses reflets.

Le poids de son énorme chevelure presque bleue tire en arrière sa tête délicate et lui donne un air triomphant et paresseux. De lourdes pendeloques gazouillent secrètement à ses mignonnes oreilles.]

In an insightful study of vision in Baudelaire, Yves Bonnefoy argues that “as inclined as Baudelaire might be to a painting that transcends sensation, that aims at the Ideal, that dedicates itself to the image and to the cult of images, it so happens [...] that he let himself be caught up in certain texts by what is immediate, what is simply itself, in sensorial perception without for once seeking further” (88). “La Belle Dorothee” aims only to delight the eyes. It is a painter’s hymn to the actual, but the actual where only the magical patina of the visible has been allowed to remain – a reality denuded of materiality – the pure brilliance of perceivable surfaces and hues experienced in a state of vivid wakefulness. The blinding glitter of the sun on the sand and the sea, the play of colors – the blue sky and the bluish tint of Dorothea’s hair, the red parasol, the reddish glow of her skin, the paleness of her dress – the reference to size relations (the figure of Dorothea is “a shining black spot”), the mention of contrasting tones, all these purely pictorial details indicate that before us is a work of visual art set to language – a picture reminiscent in its vibrant movement and rich smears of bright color to the works of the French Impressionists who would shock the art world just a few years after the publication of *Le Spleen de Paris*.²

² The drive towards “pure painting” in Baudelaire is not surprising. The poet was trained in the visual arts and was a reputed art critic of the Salon exhibitions. Many of Baudelaire’s essays are dedicated to the works of painters: Constantin Guys, Eugene Delacroix, the French caricaturists, etc. In his poem “Les Phares,” Baudelaire celebrates the plastic arts and dedicates a stanza to each of his favorite painters from Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to Rubens and Goya, and finally to his favorite artist: Delacroix. Two of Baudelaire’s poems are lyrical evocations of famous visual works of art: “Trois epigraphes” and “Une martyre.”

While “La Belle Dorothée” is set in an exotic South, in a number of Baudelaire’s texts the artist-beholder is transfixed by the spectacle of the natural world. Without an easel or canvas, the poet observes vast landscapes and like a painter *en plein air* positions himself before reality’s spectacles from which he extracts a glimpse of that ecstatic state experienced only in dreams. In such poems Baudelaire’s spectator beholds glimmering seaside scenes or turns his gaze to the clouds – the one true love to which confesses the speaker of “L’étranger (The Stranger),” and which the beholder watches from his window in the prose poem “La Soupe et les nuages (The Soup and the Clouds)” as he loses himself in their “phantasmagoria.”

My dear little mad beloved was serving my dinner, and I was looking out of the open dining-room window contemplating those moving architectural marvels that God constructs out of mist, edifices of the impalpable. And as I looked I was saying to myself: “All those phantasmagoria are almost as beautiful as my beloved’s beautiful eyes, as the green eyes of my mad monstrous little beloved.” (91)

[Ma petite folle bien-aimée me donnait à dîner, et par la fenêtre ouverte de la salle à manger je contemplais les mouvantes architectures que Dieu fait avec les vapeurs, les merveilleuses constructions de l'impalpable. Et je me disais, à travers ma contemplation: "- Toutes ces fantasmagories sont presque aussi belles que les yeux de ma belle bien-aimée, la petite folle monstrueuse aux yeux verts."]

In “Le Port (Sea-Ports)” Baudelaire presents an impressionistically rendered seascape observed from a pier.

The wide expanse of the sky, the mobile clouds, the ever changing colors of the sea, the flashing beams of the light-houses form a prism marvelously designed to gladden, without every tiring the eye. The ships with their long slim lines and complicated rigging that so gracefully ride the swells, serve to keep alive in the soul a taste for rhythm and beauty.

(84)

[L'ampleur du ciel, l'architecture mobile des nuages, les colorations changeantes de la mer, le scintillement des phares, sont un prisme merveilleusement propre à amuser les yeux sans jamais les lasser. Les formes élancées des navires, au grément compliqué, auxquels la houle imprime des oscillations harmonieuses, servent à entretenir dans l'âme le goût du rythme et de la beauté.]

The poet returns to a similar landscape in “Le confiteur de l’artiste (The Artist’s Confiteur).” Both are presented as verbal pictures consisting of colors, lines, and atmospheric perspective.

What bliss to plunge the eyes into the immensity of sky and sea!
Solitude, silence, incomparable chastity of the blue! a tiny sail shivering on the horizon, imitating by its littleness and loneliness my irremediable existence, monotonous melody of the wave, all these things think through

me or I through them (for in the grandeur of reverie the ego is quickly lost!) (3)

[Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer! Solitude, silence, incomparable chasteté de l'azur! une petite voile frissonnante à l'horizon, et qui par sa petitesse et son isolement imite mon irrémédiable existence, mélodie monotone de la houle, toutes ces choses pensent par moi, ou je pense par elles (car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le moi se perd vite!)]

In observing the natural world, the poet is seeking the same “bliss” and “pleasure” of self-forgetting, of losing the ego “in the grandeur of reverie,” of reaching out towards infinity and eternity of his dream visions, a state of heightened perception vividly evoked in Poulet’s analysis of Baudelaire’s poetic temporality:

Thanks to the intensity of this perception that has become childlike once more, nature resumes its radiant aspect of former times. It again becomes spiritualized, even supernatural. All its secondary qualities, tonality, sonority, limpidity, vibrancy, take on a sharper and deeper import. The hyperacuity of the senses “gives all tints a resonance.” Each sensation in the field of consciousness appears stronger, more alive, more distinct, as if a greater margin bordered it and detached it from other sensations. (265)

No longer in a state of dream or hallucination, the spectator continues to escape the chains of the self and of ordinary time by finding what is enchanting in the immediate. Just as in his dreams, the poet continues to be an “architect” of his sensations in the

waking world through a painterly vision that excludes all superfluous elements: the inessential, the painful, the forlorn. Yet as in Baudelaire's dreamscapes, reality never fails to intrude on the spectator's phantasmagoria as it rudely awakes the poet from his painterly reverie. In "La Soupe et les nuages," it is the lover herself who violently returns the speaker from his beatific state back to the mundane world of routine. With a "terrible blow of a fist" she shouts at the "cloud-monger" to get away from the window and eat his soup – a vehement return to materiality after a relentless attempt to escape it in contemplation.

Both modes of spectatorship outside the city – the dreamscape and pure painting – emphatically liken the poet to the figure of the Romantic visionary whose development was traced in the earlier chapters. The themes of transcendence and timelessness; the idea of "correspondences" and of creative coalescence of the seer and the seen in the sensory act; the use of the onlooker as the central hero and of human perception as a major theme for lyrical exploration; the concept of phantasmagoria; the motif of dream as a counterpoint to reality; the altered states of consciousness; as well as the acute attention to ocular effects – all of these point to the fact that Baudelaire's visual idiom continues the well-rehearsed Romantic forms of visibility.³ Particularly striking is the debt that Baudelaire's visual motifs owe to his encounter with the works of Edgar Allan Poe, whose prose and poetry Baudelaire translated throughout his literary career and helped to make popular in France. The poet Paul Valéry has remarked that Baudelaire would have

³ Tracing analogies between Baudelaire's dualism between the "naturel" and the "surnaturel" worlds and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's critical and aesthetic theories that Baudelaire would have known through Poe, M.H. Abrams writes in *Correspondent Breeze*: "one cannot read them without being reminded of Coleridge's exposition of the role of the creative imagination. Indeed Baudelaire's description of the creative power of imagination is based on Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination, together with his parallel between the divine and the poetic creativity..." (115).

been “merely a rival to Gautier or an excellent Parisian artist had his mental curiosity not led him to the discovery of a new intellectual world in the works of Edgar Allan Poe” (8). Baudelaire discovered Poe when he was twenty-six and translated his tales and essays during the last twenty years of his life. Between 1848 when Baudelaire published his translation of “Mesmeric Revelation” and his death in 1867, he put together five volumes of Poe’s translated fictions, penned two articles on the American writer, and wrote a number of literary prefaces to his works (Vines 107). Patrick F. Quinn has offered the following passage from Baudelaire’s personal correspondence describing the poet’s first encounter with Poe’s writings:

In 1846 or 1847 I became acquainted with certain fragments by Edgar Poe. I felt a singular excitement. Since his complete works were not collected in one volume until after his death, I took the trouble of looking up Americans who were living in Paris so that I might borrow files of the magazines which Poe had edited. And then – believe me or not as you like – I found poems and stories which I had thought about, but in a confused, vague, and disordered way, and which Poe had been able to treat perfectly. (70)

Analyzing Poe’s influence on Baudelaire, Quinn reveals a number of common themes and motifs: morbid obsessions with death; the role of the demonic; the significance of dark psychological states and synaesthesia; the image of the sea-voyage; the role of dreams and altered mental states, as well as strong affinities between the

aesthetic theories of the writers. To the long list of important thematic correspondences,⁴ one can also add a direct *visual* affinity between them: the heightened attention to the act of perception, the ocular effects of illumination and color, and the dream-like mode of seeing of their beholders.

The “phosphorous radiance” in Baudelaire’s “Les Bienfaits de la lune (The Moon’s Favors)” or the “sulphurous splendor” in “Les Tentations (The Temptations)” is the same bizarre type of illumination the French author would have encountered in Poe’s maelstroms, demonic pits, and dark Gothic chambers. The ubiquitous luminous eyes of Baudelaire’s poetry – the eyes of lovers, of cats, of the poor, of artists, of demons, and of angels – shine with the haunting ocular light typical of Poe’s doubles and deranged heroes. Baudelaire’s idea of the dream chamber is a restaging of Poe’s phantasmagoric rooms with their uncanny hypnagogic atmosphere and arabesque furnishings, which Baudelaire often borrows down to the draperies. The crepuscular interiors of “La Chambre double” and in “L’Invitation au voyage” where “muslin in diaphanous masses rains over the window and over the bed” (5) [“ La mousseline pleut abondamment devant les fenêtres et devant le lit”] with “darkly rich and gilded leathers” are not only evocative of Poe’s fantastic Gothic chambers of “Ligeia” and “The Assignation,” but directly recall his 1840 essay “The Philosophy of Furniture.” Dismissing American “republican” tastes in interior design, Poe describes his ideal room, which bears striking resemblance to his own fictional fantastic interiors. Glowing with reddish and golden hues, Poe decorates his room with “curtains of an exceedingly rich crimson silk, fringed with a deep network of gold, and lined with silver tissue,” “rich gildwork,” (386) and “walls... prepared with a

⁴ For a detailed account of the influences of Poe on Baudelaire see also W. T. Bandy’s article “Baudelaire and Poe.” (*Texas Quarterly* 1 1958): p28-35 as well as Lois Davis Vines’ essay “Charles Baudelaire” in *Poe Abroad: Influence, Reputation, Affinities*. (U of Iowa P, 1999.) p165-70.

glossy paper of a silver gray tint, spotted with small Arabesque devices of a fainter hue of the prevalent crimson” (387). Relying on Poe’s details, Baudelaire writes that paintings in his dream room “are blissful, calm and profound” [béates, calmes et profondes/] Poe describes the paintings of his ideal chamber as “warm, but dark. There are no ‘brilliant effects.’ *Repose* speaks in all” (387).

Like Poe’s spectatorial protagonists, Baudelaire’s poet-beholder, unlike the *flâneur*, is never merely content with seeing alone: he is an observer straining to glimpse the eternal, an idea which Baudelaire would have come across in Poe’s well-known essay “The Poetic Principle” (1848) that discusses the relationship between beauty and eternity:

Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to eternity alone. (The Fall 505)

Yet the difference between Baudelaire’s poet and Poe’s mesmerized beholders of arabesque abstractions underscores the degree to which the French author was able to overcome the influence of Romanticism in his own works. Poe’s solitary characters are far removed from actuality. They are sequestered inside dark fantasies, in self-enclosed creations designed to enchant and terrify their inhabitants who find themselves standing on the very cusp of the supernatural. His visionaries occupy a universe far removed from our own. Baudelaire’s lyrical poet is condemned to the here and now, to the ordinary from which he can never permanently escape. Unable to leave the quotidian behind, the spectator must fabricate the ideal from within the real as he searches for ephemeral pockets of timelessness in time itself.

The Poet of Modern Life

When we turn our attention to Baudelaire's city poems, we see the same essential problematic embodied in his urban visions: the need to transcend the self and find intoxication and enchantment in the ordinary. All of Baudelaire's metropolitan poems hinge on the dichotomy between the waking world of ordinary time, where the fetters of a self-tormented ego are inescapable, and the dream-world of lotus-eating, timelessness, and child-like acuteness of the senses. His urban visions always situate themselves in relationship to this pivotal antithesis: either enacting imaginative flights away from the drab and sordid actuality or unflinchingly moving towards it in search of redemption.

At one end of this symbolic opposition – in the realm of pure fantasy – one finds the two city poems “Rêve parisien” and “Les Sept Vieillards (The Seven Old Men)” of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Here the poet-beholder enjoys the same state of dream perception we examined earlier. In “Rêve parisien” the speaker's hallucination of an ideal city during his reverie is essentially a reworking of Thomas De Quincey's opium eater's visions of “architectural dreams” (79) analyzed in Chapter 1. De Quincey's Romantic hero is “painting... upon the darkness, all sorts of phantoms” (75). Baudelaire's poet compares himself to “a painter proud of his genius” [“peintre fier de mon genie”]. In a state of visionary delirium, De Quincey confesses that he “beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as was never yet beheld by the waking eye” (79). Baudelaire observes a “Babel of arcades and stairways” that he describes as a “palace infinite,/Full of basins and of cascades,” a realm that “no mortal ever saw” [tel que jamais mortel n'en vit].

In the poem “Les sept vieillards,” Baudelaire offers another image of Paris as an uncanny Romantic fantasy: “a city full of dreams” [“cité pleine de rêves”], a visionary

capital whose Gothic imagery is a restaging of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." Paris – by way of Poe's London – becomes a realm where "specters in broad day accost the passerby" ["le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant"] and "mysteries flow like sap" ["Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves"]. Walking through the squalid streets of the city enshrouded in the yellow fog imported from "The Man of the Crowd," the speaker encounters a bizarre old man whose terrifying appearance – evil eyes, Judas' beard, and a gait "as if he were crushing the dead under his shoes" – terrifies the observer. Multiplying Poe's old wanderer sevenfold to elevate the uncanny effect, the poet confesses: "Vainly my reason tried to take the helm" ["Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre"] – as if echoing the London storyteller, whose bizarre meeting with the wanderer transcends the hero's rational comprehension.

Yet such a dramatic escape into the fantastic is rare for Baudelaire's urban presentations. Straddling the boundary between the hypnagogic and the real, a number of Baudelaire's city poems combine his dream-like and the painterly modes of seeing. A foremost example of this fusion is the poem "Paysage (Landscape)" that opens the "Tableaux parisiens" section of *Les Fleurs du mal*.

I would, to compose my eclogues chastely,
Lie down close to the sky like an astrologer,
And, near the church towers, listen while I dream
To their solemn anthems borne to me by the wind.
My chin cupped in both hands, high up in my garret
I shall see the workshops where they chatter and sing,

The chimneys, the belfries, those masts of the city,
And the skies that make one dream of eternity.

It is sweet, through the mist, to see the stars
Appear in the heavens, the lamps in the windows,
The streams of smoke rise in the firmament
And the moon spread out her pale enchantment.
I shall see the springtimes, the summers, the autumns;
And when winter comes with its monotonous snow,
I shall close all the shutters and draw all the drapes
So I can build at night my fairy palaces.
Then I shall dream of pale blue horizons, gardens,
Fountains weeping into alabaster basins,
Of kisses, of birds singing morning and evening,
And of all that is most childlike in the Idyl.
Riot, storming vainly at my window,
Will not make me raise my head from my desk,
For I shall be plunged in the voluptuousness
Of evoking the Springtime with my will alone,
Of drawing forth a sun from my heart, and making
Of my burning thoughts a warm atmosphere. (277-9)

[Je veux, pour composer chastement mes églogues,
Coucher auprès du ciel, comme les astrologues,
Et, voisin des clochers écouter en rêvant
Leurs hymnes solennels emportés par le vent.
Les deux mains au menton, du haut de ma mansarde,
Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde;
Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,
Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité.
Il est doux, à travers les brumes, de voir naître
L'étoile dans l'azur, la lampe à la fenêtre
Les fleuves de charbon monter au firmament
Et la lune verser son pâle enchantement.
Je verrai les printemps, les étés, les automnes;
Et quand viendra l'hiver aux neiges monotones,
Je fermerai partout portières et volets
Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais.
Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres,
Des jardins, des jets d'eau pleurant dans les albâtres,
Des baisers, des oiseaux chantant soir et matin,
Et tout ce que l'Idylle a de plus enfantin.
L'Emeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre;
Car je serai plongé dans cette volupté

D'évoquer le Printemps avec ma volonté,
De tirer un soleil de mon coeur, et de faire
De mes pensers brûlants une tiède atmosphère.]

The poet first encounters the city through the veil of dreams that mingle with his aural impressions. But as he looks outside the window, his gaze turns the vast skyline into a painting reminiscent of James McNeill Whistler that depicts with broad colorful strokes an urban landscape of roof chimneys, belfries, and streams of smoke rising towards the moonlight and the stars.⁵ As the critic Rosemary Lloyd points out in her study of Baudelaire, the poem “insists on the visual suggestions already set in train by the use of the term tableaux (paintings) in the section title” (152). The poet’s gaze slowly moves upwards from the workshops – the mundane world of routine – to the sky, a symbol of Baudelaire’s beloved eternity (“rêver d'éternité”). The mist becomes another enchanting veil through the prism of which the onlooker takes in the view of the nocturnal city draped in darkness and speckled with the glow of lamps. Yet no sooner does the poet transform the metropolis into a painterly vision, the second stanza returns us back to the realm of dreams and the imagination. Closing himself from actuality and turning his garret into another dream chamber, the visionary poet orchestrates his own imaginary paradise like the “architect” of “Rêve Parisien”: a world of the same “pale blue horizons” and sunny Idyll that he beholds in “L’Invitation au voyage,” which now he perceives only in his mind’s eye in the act of literary creation.

⁵ Baudelaire knew of Whistler’s early works and was one of the first critics to recognize the talent of the young British artist. In a review of 1862, the poet described Whistler’s engraving as “subtle, as alert as improvisation and inspiration, representing the banks of the Thames; a wonderful jumble of rigging, yardarms, ropes; a chaotic amalgam of fog, furnaces, and corkscrew fumes; the profound and complex poetry of a vast city.” (qtd. in Rosemary Lloyd 154)

Noting the use of the word “eclogue” in “Paysage” in his commentary on Baudelaire’s “pastoral” treatment of urban modernity, the critic Marshall Berman aptly observes that in such presentations “all the social and spiritual dissonances of Parisian life have been cleaned off...” (137). This excision of dissonance is central to the painterly mode of observing the city that Baudelaire’s poet usually enacts while positioning himself at a physical remove from the city – precisely what William Wordsworth’s visionary beholder does in “Westminster Bridge” as he observes the sleeping London at sunrise. Watching the darkness settle over Paris from his balcony in “Le crépuscule du soir (Evening Twilight),” the poet is not interested in the squalid “ruins” of humanity down below whose “discordant cries [are] transformed by distance into a desolate harmony” (44) [cris discordants, que l'espace transforme en une lugubre harmonie]. The scene of the prose poem is staged “through the transparent clouds of the evening” (44) [à travers les nues transparentes du soir] that neutralize with their “twilight tints” the threatening aspects of the real city. Smoking his pipe while “contemplating the peace of the immense valley bristling with houses” (44), the poet sees a disturbing foil to his serene painterly vision – a “black mad-house perched on the mountain” from which the confused, terrible cries of madmen reach his ears: a symbolic place signifying all that is nightmarish about the city, an emblem of awakening, self-remembrance, and despair. Yet its distant sinister presence is allayed by the crepuscular atmosphere of the scene that combines both the dream and the painterly motifs.

O night! O refreshing darkness! To me you are the signal for an inner
feast, my deliverer from anguish! In the solitude of the plain, in the stony

labyrinths of the metropolis, scintillation of stars, bright bursts of city lights, you are the fireworks of my goddess Liberty!

Twilight, how sweet you are, how tender! The rosy glow lingering on the horizon like the last agony of day conquered by victorious night; the flame of the candelabra making dull red splashes against the sunset's dying glory; the heavy draperies that some unseen hand draws out of the depth of the East – it all seems to imitate those complex sentiments that at life's most solemn moments war with each other in man's heart. (45)

[O nuit! ô rafraîchissantes ténèbres! vous êtes pour moi le signal d'une fête intérieure, vous êtes la délivrance d'une angoisse! Dans la solitude des plaines, dans les labyrinthes pierreux d'une capitale, scintillement des étoiles, explosion des lanternes, vous êtes le feu d'artifice de la déesse Liberté!

Crépuscule, comme vous êtes doux et tendre! Les lueurs roses qui traînent encore à l'horizon comme l'agonie du jour sous l'oppression victorieuse de sa nuit, les feux des candélabres qui font des taches d'un rouge opaque sur les dernières gloires du couchant, les lourdes draperies qu'une main invisible attire des profondeurs de l'Orient, imitent tous les sentiments compliqués qui luttent dans le cœur de l'homme aux heures solennelles de la vie.]

The twilight of the evening dematerializes “the labyrinths of the metropolis” and transmutes them into a yet another dream interior replete with the “heavy draperies” drawn over the evening sky where “the agony of day” has been temporarily soothed by those perceptions and “complex sentiments” that dazzle the poet’s senses. The dissonance of the tortured world epitomized by the black madhouse on the mountain has been harmonized into a vision of a city observed through the tinted prisms of literary artifice: a world of beautiful twilights, of the tranquility of the night, a city where the enchanting light of gaslamps struggle against the colors of the setting sun, a vision of reality observed from a room patterned on Poe’s fictions.

Yet against this portrait of Paris as a painterly dream stand those great urban poems of Baudelaire where the writer encounters a very different type of cityscape. Here the movement always runs contrary to that of his dream-bound depictions. These poems take up as their material and inspiration the dejected and the squalid, the human bric-à-brac of the city, the other half of urban modernity: the oppressed and lonely marginals that the lyrical spectator spots in the crowds, in parks, or on empty streets. Here we see a view of Paris that is seemingly antithetical to Baudelaire’s phantasmagoric visions of excised, sensory artificiality – the other end of the spectrum of the dream/waking dichotomy. The passersby upon whom the poet chances are the city’s poor, its prostitutes and its orphans, the old and the blind, the mad and the sick: the wreckage and ruins of the metropolis – “Ruins! my family! Oh, kindred minds!” [“Ruines! ma famille! ô cerveaux congénères!”]. This is the maze of solitude where the forgotten old shuffle on the windy streets and the invalids cry at night on their hospital beds. Here are the sad clowns and uprooted exiles, stray animals and straying madmen, destitute widows, and old beggars:

the flotsam of everyday metropolitan life. In such poems, the prowler leaves his garret to roam Parisian pavements in search of communion with the undesirables and the undesired. The poet presents himself rambling on the boulevards, sitting in cafés, entering fairs, dance halls, and cabarets, and deliberately seeking out other city dwellers whose suffering, solitude, and melancholy resembles his own. Like a street photographer strolling with a camera to capture the fleeting seconds of city life, the poet loiters in the city to bear witness to the ever-changing actuality and bleak melancholy of Parisian existence.

Yet if the spectator is no longer seeking to enchant himself through exotic self-created visions or placid painterly tableaux, he brings to the oppressive maelstrom of the city the same longing for self-forgetting and eternity that irradiates all of his works. Encountering what is base, decrepit, and forlorn, the poet's gaze imposes the same secret patina on the crowded streets that he brought to bear on the fantastic luminous architecture of his dreams, his twilights, and impressionistic landscapes: a yearning to transcend actuality by becoming "an architect of his own fairyland." In the realm of tortured wakefulness – the other side of Baudelaire's antithesis – the poet in the city imports his child-like perception from the magical dreamscapes to bleak, painful urban sights to retrieve an anesthetized construct, an "other" Paris fabricated in the same smelter of intoxicated consciousness from which he extracted the luminous alloys of his exotic reveries. Deliberately seeking out what is troubling and sordid, the poet vitalizes and transfigures oppressive actuality on his peregrinations. The disturbing becomes enchanting, the alienating now reveals to the poet glimpses of the eternal. Resorting to yet another magical artifice, Baudelaire's poet of desolate streets orchestrates a different

kind of dream – the dream of “universal communion” that induces in him a sensory excitation of his reveries.

Unlike the autobiographical heroes of Wordsworth and De Quincey or the fictional protagonists of Poe and Gogol stalking the wholly Other through dark, bizarre urban landscapes, Baudelaire’s urban prowler forges new intimacies with anonymous strangers whom he chances to glimpse on the sidewalks: a communion the he enacts in imagination alone. Descending to the streets from his balcony, the poet finds kinship with the capital’s marginalized inhabitants across an exilic mental remove from which he stages his private enchantments without physical contact or a glance returned. As the artist’s consciousness becomes saturated with the anonymous lives of others on the streets, the gulf that separates him from the urban community is filled with a surrogate bond – a communion of the self with its own countless reflections in others.

Baudelaire theorized this encounter between the city and the onlooker in search of universal communion and sensory excitation in his programmatic 1863 essay *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (*The Painter of Modern Life*). Celebrating the works of the contemporary French visual artist Constantin Guys, Baudelaire underscores the link between what he calls “modernity,” urban observation, and art. The poet begins his essay on Guys by positing a two-part definition of beauty pivotal to his understanding of what is modern. Beauty for Baudelaire “is made of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions” (3) [“Le beau est fait d’un élément éternel, invariable, dont la quantité est excessivement difficile à déterminer, et d’un élément relatif, circonstanciel,

qui sera, si l'on veut, tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion"]. For the poet, only a unique type of artist is able to capture such contradictory kind of beauty in the modern age: an urban spectator who is a "painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains" (5) ["il est le peintre de la circonstance et de tout ce qu'elle suggère d'éternel"].

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be a the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. [...] The lover of life makes the whole world his family... [...] He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself... (9)

[La foule est son domaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c'est d'épouser la foule. Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Etre hors de chez soi, et pourtant se

sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartiaux, que la langue ne peut que maladroitement définir.]

The poet's famous lyrical association of the painter of modern life with the *flâneur* has led many Benjamin-influenced commentators to equate Baudelaire himself with the Parisian figure. Yet to posit an equal sign between the poet and the dandified stroller is to read the passage out of context of the essay itself. Baudelaire is struggling to find an apt analogy for the modern artist and confesses that he is only able to “clumsily define” [“maladroitement définir”] his essential characteristics. He calls Guys a “philosopher” but a few pages later says that he cannot bestow on him such a title because his “love of the visible” arouses in the painter “a certain repugnance of the things that form the impalpable kingdom of the metaphysician” (9) [“une certaine répugnance de celles qui forment le royaume impalpable du metaphysician”]. Baudelaire declares Guys a “dandy” but questions the applicability of the term a few lines later because “the dandy aspires to insensitivity, and it is in this that Monsieur G., dominated as he is by an insatiable passion – for seeing and feeling – parts company decisively with dandyism” (9) [“le dandy aspire à l’insensibilité, et c’est par là que M. G., qui est dominé, lui, par une passion insatiable, celle de voir et de sentir, se détache violemment du dandysme”]. The same fate befalls Baudelaire’s *flâneur* – having used the term twice in the essay, the poet no sooner retracts it and confesses that the painter of modern life “has an aim loftier than that of a mere *flâneur*” [“a un but plus élevé que celui d’un pur flâneur”]:

And so away he goes, hurrying, searching. But searching for what? Be very sure that this man, such as I have depicted him – this solitary, gifted with active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human dessert – has an aim loftier than that of a mere *flâneur*, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call “modernity”; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind. He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory. (12)

[Ainsi il va, il court, il cherche. Que cherche-t-il? A coup sûr, cet homme, tel que je l’ai dépeint, ce solitaire doué d’une imagination active, toujours voyageant à travers le grand désert d’hommes, a un but plus élevé que celui d’un pur flâneur, un but plus général, autre que le plaisir fugitif de la circonstance. Il cherche ce quelque chose qu’on nous permettra d’appeler la modernité; car il ne se présente pas de meilleur mot pour exprimer l’idée en question. Il s’agit, pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu’elle peut contenir de poétique dans l’historique, de tirer l’éternel du transitoire.]

Unwilling to ascribe to the modern artist the status of a “mere *flâneur*,” a privileged, amused walker luxuriating in the “fugitive pleasure of circumstance” [“le plaisir fugitif de la circonstance”], the poet compares the painter of modern life to a rag-picker: an urban wanderer who gathers subjective mental impressions of the flotsam of urbanicity to gain a glimpse of that which the artist is never sure belongs to the city or merely to the

obsessive projections of his own “active imagination.” No longer boasting epistemological control over the metropolis as had done the *flâneur*, the painter seeks in the midst of oppressive and stifling actuality its most powerful antidotes – “infinity” and “eternity” – terms that continuously reappear throughout Baudelaire’s lyrical canon. He watches the city not to classify and dissect its crowds as might a physiognomist, but to extract “the eternal from the transitory,” to create a “phantasmagoria ... distilled from nature.” Returning home from his amblings, the artist begins to capture his impressions on paper:

And the external world is reborn [...], natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator. The phantasmagoria has been distilled from nature. All that raw material with which the memory has loaded itself are put in order, ranged and harmonized, and undergo that forced idealization which is the result of a childlike perceptiveness – that is to say, a perceptiveness acute and magical by reason of its innocence. (11)

[Et les choses renaissent [...], naturelles et plus que naturelles, belles et plus que belles, singulières et douées d’une vie enthousiaste comme l’âme de l’auteur. La fantasmagorie a été extraite de la nature. Tous les matériaux dont la mémoire s’est encombrée se classent, se rangent, s’harmonisent et subissent cette idéalisation forcée qui est le résultat d’une perception enfantine, c’est-à-dire d’une perception aiguë, magique à force d’ingénuité!]

From his encounters with the city, Baudelaire's observer, whom the poet calls "a man-child" ["un homme-enfant"], retrieves what he himself has "loaded" into the objects of his observation – "childlike perceptiveness" ["perception enfantine"], the same vibrant, ecstatic mode of seeing – that the poet enjoys in his dreams, in images of the exotic South, in contemplation of the changing colors of the sea and the sky, in the vistas of passing clouds, and in the intoxicating bustling sights of Parisian streets.

The pleasure and excitation of the "homme-enfant" in the city, oppressive and banal in its routines, is the pleasure of making actuality the poet's plaything. Its existential horrors are neutralized by an active imagination that adopts the same dream-like perception to become "one flesh" with others, to enter their lives like a specter "in search of a body":

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses. Like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man's personality. For him alone everything is vacant...

The solitary and thoughtful stroller finds a singular intoxication in this universal communion. The man who loves to lose himself in the crowd enjoys feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box and a slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of. He adopts as his own all the occupations, all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers. (20)

[Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun. Pour lui seul, tout est vacant; et si de certaines places paraissent lui êtres fermées, c'est qu'à ses yeux elles ne valent pas la peine d'être visitées.

Le promeneur solitaire et pensif tire une singulière ivresse de cette universelle communion. Celui-là qui épouse facilement la foule connaît des jouissances fiévreuses, dont seront éternellement privé l'égoïste, fermé comme un coffre, et le paresseux, interné comme un mollusque. Il adopte comme siennes toutes les professions, toutes les joies et toutes les misères que la circonstance lui présente.]

In the waking world, Baudelaire's spectator continues to distill his intoxication from the concentrated pulse of metropolitan life. From the distance of his estrangement, the fleeting images of passersby arrange themselves into an ever-shifting "kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness" ["un kaléidoscope doué de conscience"], an internal montage of the present moment and private recollections, of the visible and the intangible, of the empirical and the immaterial – a pure distillate that is "universal life" ["vie universelle"] itself. Taking in the sight of countless passersby and experiencing a state of "drunkenness," the anguished walker "people[s] his solitude" to become in reality an architect of his own conceits who builds a new city at every instant by superimposing upon the real one his own enchantments.

An exemplary illustration of such projected communion is the prose poem “Les Fenêtres (Windows)” in which the poet contemplates a lonely woman whom he sees through an apartment window across the street:

Looking from outside into an open window one never sees as much as when one looks through a closed window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more pregnant, more insidious, more dazzling than a window lighted by a single candle. What one can see out in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes on behind a window pane. In the black and luminous square life lives, life dreams, life suffers.

Across the ocean of roofs I can see a middle-aged woman, her face already lined, who is forever bending over something and who never goes out. Out of her face, her dress and her gestures, out of practically nothing at all, I have made this woman’s story, or rather legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself and weep. [...]

And I go to bed proud to have lived and suffered in someone besides myself.

Perhaps you will say “Are you sure that your story is the real one?” But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am? (77)

[Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus

éblouissant qu'une fenêtre éclairée d'une chandelle. Ce qu'on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre.

Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie.

Par-delà des vagues de toits, j'aperçois une femme mûre, ridée déjà, pauvre, toujours penchée sur quelque chose, et qui ne sort jamais. Avec son visage, avec son vêtement, avec son geste, avec presque rien, j'ai refait l'histoire de cette femme, ou plutôt sa légende, et quelquefois je me la raconte à moi-même en pleurant. [...]

Et je me couche, fier d'avoir vécu et souffert dans d'autres que moi-même.

Peut-être me direz-vous: "Es-tu sûr que cette légende soit la vraie?"

Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?]

Unlike a *flâneur* whose decoding, taxonomic gaze seeks out legible minutia, the *poète* thrives on the scarcity of details that a curtained window pane offers to his imagination. It is the unseen that allows Baudelaire's dreamer to reduce the familiar world of others into a symbolic realm where "life lives, life dreams, life suffers" ["vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie."] As in most of Baudelaire's poems, there is no interaction in "Les Fenêtres" between the one who looks and the one being looked at. The dramatic situation is emotionally unilateral: it is a purely solipsistic encounter. The less the observer knows about the aging woman, the more he is enthralled, the more room is left for his fantasy to insert itself into the few empirical impressions which for him mean something provided they resonate with secret significance. The intimacy of his self-created vision brings

tears to the eyes of the voyeur who knows that the one he cries over is as much the lonely woman in the adjacent building as it is his own “legend” – a refraction of himself in the life of another. Observing the woman “across the ocean of roofs” from perhaps the same window the shutters of which he drew shut in “Paysage” to “build at night ... fairy palaces” [“pour bâtir dans la nuit ... féériques palais”] – exotic dreams of pale blue horizons, gardens, and fountains – the artist no longer shies away from visible signs of desolation, but sees, in the words of Rosemary Lloyd, a “dross that his alchemy turns into great art” (154). The sight of a fellow lonely soul might have left the poet indifferent, but mediated through a “legend” – a projected dream infused into a few observed details – her image becomes vital since it helps him “to live, to feel that I am, and what I am” [à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis].

It would be too simple to say that what he sees is a mere projection. While the poet confesses that he has imagined the life of the woman, it is impossible to pry fiction from fact. The poet is not seeing a demonic fantasy as does the narrator of Poe’s tale nor is he creating an idealized vision as does the painter Piskarev in Gogol’s “Nevsky Prospect.” The image of another solitary tenant transforms into that of the human condition itself – of the lonely existence of another mingled with private recollections of the seer that allow him to transcend his own.

In his classic essay on Charles Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot suggests that the defining feature of the French poet’s urban aesthetics “is not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity* – presenting it as it is, yet making it represent something more than itself” (377). Bringing the drive towards self-transcendence from the dream realm and painterly

landscape to the big city, Baudelaire's beholder is able to effect this creative elevation of the ordinary by relentlessly seeking ways to extract from the fugitive and the banal the same enthrallment and pleasure of child-like perception that informs all of his spectatorial encounters.

The search for communion with the anguished and the oppressed in the poem "Les Petites Vieilles (The Little Old Ladies)" transmutes a familiar sight of the frail and dispossessed old women lost in the big city into a symbol of loss, fragility, and displacement by offering new metaphorical frames through which to perceive them:

In the sinuous folds of the old capitals,
Where all, even horror, becomes pleasant,
I watch, obedient to my fatal whims,
For singular creatures, decrepit and charming.
These disjointed monsters were women long ago,
Eponine or Lais! Monsters, hunch-backed, broken
Or distorted, let us love them! they still have souls.
Clothed in tattered petticoats and flimsy dresses
[...]
They trot exactly like marionettes;
They drag themselves along like wounded animals,
Or dance, against their will, poor little bells
Pulled constantly by a heartless Demon! Broken
Though they are, they have eyes as piercing as gimlets,
That shine like those holes in which water sleeps at night;

They have the divine eyes of little girls

Who are amazed and laugh at everything that gleams... (301-3)

[Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales,

Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,

Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,

Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants.

Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes,

Eponine ou Laïs! Monstres brisés, bossus

Ou tordus, aimons-les! ce sont encor des âmes.

Sous des jupons troués et sous de froids tissus

[...]

Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes;

Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés,

Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnettes

Où se pend un Démon sans pitié! Tout cassés

Qu'ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille,

Luisants comme ces trous où l'eau dort dans la nuit;

Ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille

Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit.]

The poet is continually struggling to effect a metamorphosis – to find the enchanting in the oppressive, to dream his way into the “decrepit.” The poem rests on the dichotomy between what is visible – “the disjoined monsters” and “feeble specters” creeping

through the squalid streets – and what is projected or imagined – visions of their youth, of their joys and sorrows, of their “divine eyes” [“les yeux divins”] of the “souls” that open before the poet’s gaze a passage into eternity. In its twenty-one stanzas, the spectator of “Les Petites Vieilles” attempts to penetrate into the inner lives of those whom he confesses he often follows on the streets, to become them, to assume their pain, to attest to their hidden selves, to the joys and sufferings they experienced as children, wives, and mothers, to gain that mystical joy of communion that the self-tortured poet perpetually seeks:

But I, I watch you tenderly from a distance;
My anxious eyes are fixed on your uncertain steps,
As if I were your own father; how wonderful!
I taste unknown to you clandestine pleasures:
I see your untried passions come into full bloom;
I live your vanished days, gloomy or filled with light;
My heart multiplied enjoys all of your vices!
My soul is resplendent with all of your virtues! (307)

[Mais moi, moi qui de loin tendrement vous surveille,
L'oeil inquiet, fixé sur vos pas incertains,
Tout comme si j'étais votre père, ô merveille!
Je goûte à votre insu des plaisirs clandestins:
Je vois s'épanouir vos passions novices;
Sombres ou lumineux, je vis vos jours perdus;

Mon coeur multiplié jouit de tous vos vices!

Mon âme respandit de toutes vos vertus!]

The “clandestine pleasure” [“plaisirs clandestins”] of following a single passersby and projecting her “legend” are the same ones the poet enjoys in the faceless crowd that induces in him “feverish delights” [“jouissances fiévreuses”] unknown to the “egoist.”

The search for intimacy and self-forgetting leads Baudelaire’s poet in “Les Aveugles (Blind Men)” to follow the blind as he contemplates their “frightful” facades until he enters into “the boundless darkness” of their inner experience: another instance of a “horror” that through projection becomes “pleasant.” In the prose poem “Les Veuves (Widows),” the prowler, who is “irresistibly drawn towards everything that is feeble, destitute, orphaned, and forlorn” (22) [“irrésistiblement entraînés vers tout ce qui est faible, ruiné, contristé, orphelin”] observes poverty-stricken widows “who are forced to be niggardly with their sorrow” yet in whom he is able to see more dignity and nobility in than in their well-off counterparts. In “Le Vieux Saltimbanque (The Old Clown),” the spectator is “obsessed by the sight” of a pitiful old clown – “a ruin of a man” – in whom the poet sees a metaphor of a writer “degraded by poverty and the ingratitude of the public” [“ And in “A une mendiante rousse (To an Auburn-haired Beggar-Maid), the beholder extols the beauty of a young mendicant whom his imagination decks out in regal attire and transforms into a young noblewoman enjoying the attention of courtiers and poets.

Yet along with these narratives of spectatorial encounters with the city’s insulted and the injured, there are also poems in which the gaze of the prowler is a purely mental one – where the ghost-stroller observes Paris in his mind’s eye – merging with the

collective consciousness of the city's marginals as he contemplates entire sections of Parisian humanity. The most striking of these urban visions is "Le Crépuscule du Matin (Morning Twilight)" in *Les Fleurs du mal*. Here all the modes of seeing in Baudelaire's oeuvre – the dreamscape, the pure painting, and the search for "universal life" – are integrated into a single dream-like sequence presented from a perspective of a roving ghostly eye moving between the interior and the street, between the young and the dying, between the debauched returning home and the destitute warming themselves by the fire:

They were sounding reveille in the barracks' yards,
And the morning wind was blowing on the lanterns.
It was the hour when swarms of harmful dreams
Make the sun-tanned adolescents toss in their beds;
When, like a bloody eye that twitches and rolls,
The lamp makes a red splash against the light of day;
When the soul within the heavy, fretful body
Imitates the struggle of the lamp and the sun.
Like a tear-stained face being dried by the breeze,
The air is full of the shudders of things that flee,
And man is tired of writing and woman of making love.
Here and there the houses were beginning to smoke.
The ladies of pleasure, with eyelids yellow-green
And mouths open, were sleeping their stupefied sleep;
The beggar-women, their breasts hanging thin and cold,
Were blowing on their fires, blowing on their fingers.

It was the hour when amid poverty and cold
The pains of women in labor grow more cruel;
The cock's crow in the distance tore the foggy air
Like a sob stifled by a bloody froth;
The buildings were enveloped in a sea of mist,
And in the charity-wards, the dying
Hiccuffed their death-sobs at uneven intervals.
The rakes were going home, exhausted by their work.
The dawn, shivering in her green and rose garment,
Was moving slowly along the deserted Seine,
And somber Paris, the industrious old man,
Was rubbing his eyes and gathering up his tools. (347-9)

[La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes,
Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes.
C'était l'heure où l'essaim des rêves malfaisants
Tord sur leurs oreillers les bruns adolescents;
Où, comme un oeil sanglant qui palpite et qui bouge,
La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge;
Où l'âme, sous le poids du corps revêche et lourd,
Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour.
Comme un visage en pleurs que les brises essuient,

L'air est plein du frisson des choses qui s'enfuient,
Et l'homme est las d'écrire et la femme d'aimer.
Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.
Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,
Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide;
Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,
Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur leurs doigts.
C'était l'heure où parmi le froid et la lésine
S'aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine;
Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux
Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,
Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices
Poussaient leur dernier râle en hoquets inégaux.
Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.
L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.]

The poet's imagination takes flight to embarks on a dream journey through early-morning Paris. It enters barracks and brothels, bedrooms and hospitals. It watches the painterly effects of the lamps struggling against the light of dawn and sees the colors of the sunrise playing on the surface of the Seine. It describes Parisians wrapped in slumber and

dreams. No longer bound by physical laws, the wandering consciousness of the poet stages a reverie the elements of which have been garnered from actuality.

Becoming “one flesh” with the city, with its anguish, oppression, and sludge, the dream-prowler in the final poem of “Tableaux parisiens” extracts a new kind of eternity from the concrete – an urban moment pregnant with an infinity of longings, sufferings, and perspectives. Like the magical country of Cocagne, the city has been “transformed by dream, corrected, remodeled and adorned.” The dross of Paris has been refashioned according to orderly dramatic juxtapositions: the reveille in the barracks is presented against the carefree sleep of adolescents (whose voluptuous sun-tanned bodies are evocative of the poet’s paradisiacal visions of the South); the physical afflictions of beggar-women on the streets and of women in labor contrast with the oblivious sleep of ladies of pleasure; artificial illumination is presented against the light of dawn; the soul struggles against the fetters of the body. All exists as an innuendo – it is a city of “things that flee” caught in a moment between sleeping and waking, dying and being reborn, between pleasure and pain, between the chamber of dreams and the chamber of afflictions.

Chapter 4

The Mind and Montage

In the painting “The Young Man at His Window” (1875), Gustave Caillebotte – one of the lesser known artists of French Impressionism – depicts a frozen moment in the life of Paris. Dressed in a smart black suit, a young man stands by a large open window of his apartment and looks out on a sunny Parisian street quietly winding up the canvas away from his gaze then gracefully turning and disappearing behind the corner of a building. The onlooker stands with his back towards the viewer, watching the narrow street on which nothing extraordinary happens. Two horse-drawn coaches are moving in the direction where the street makes a turn: one coach is just below, the other is coming from the far right. At the center of the composition, a woman in a long dress is about to cross the street. Across an empty square, a few pedestrians are rendered as monochromatic smears. Glimmering in the sun, adjacent buildings reveal their bright facades. Tightly cropped like a photograph, the scene presents a partial view of every detail that is either occluded by another object or cut off by the frame.

Caillebotte’s suspended Parisian moment is astonishingly uneventful: a collection of banal simultaneous events, a multiplicity of solidified movements that epitomize modern urban existence. The street scene the young man observes lacks the crowded vitality of other iconic Impressionist works: the flashy cabarets and dance halls, picturesque outdoor gatherings, the bustle of train stations, or colorful regattas. Decades before photographic exposure times could catch up with the fast pace of city life, Caillebotte’s urban landscape captures the unfolding structure of the present itself – an

instant wedged between two kinds of durations: the objective clock-time that impels all the movements on the street and the subjective temporality of the perceiver which inheres in the painted scene – in the armchair, the scarlet rug, the open sash of the window reflecting the sky, in the buildings bathed in the sun’s rays, and in the placid streetscape down below. Remove the young man from the work and you destroy its effect. His presence imparts secret life to the world of facts. The floor, the balustrade, the cornices, the closed windows of other buildings, the pavement, and the sidewalks arrive to the viewer through the prism of a furtive interiority that lends its vitality to the spectacle.

Compare Caillebotte’s work with that of Caspar David Friedrich’s famous Romantic landscape “The Wanderer Above the Mists” (1818), which likewise relies on the figure of the spectator for its aesthetic effect. Standing in a dark overcoat with his back to the viewer on a group of rocks, Friedrich’s Byronic wanderer is casting an eye on a luminous sea of fog from which rise rugged cliffs while in the distance hazy mountains gently slope towards the plains. Looking at the fantastic play of light and colors, the Romantic visionary is transfixed in a moment of sublime contemplation. For him, the natural landscape on which he casts his contemplative gaze is no more than a veneer behind which he intuits another ineffable transcendental order. The wanderer perceives the sensible world as a cluster of symbols pointing to the unseen and the Absolute. More than half a century later, Caillebotte’s young man stands before a landscape devoid of all transcendental connotations. The Romantic bifurcation that separated appearance from timeless essence, the ideal and the actual, phenomena from the noumena has collapsed. All that remains is pure actuality, an urban moment stripped of its symbolic sheathing. For Caillebotte’s spectator, the visible evokes nothing beyond what *is*.

The painting epitomizes a new relationship between the modern subject and the sensible world, a relationship that the twentieth-century phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty would later describe as a single circular system in which the world and the subject “flow into each other” as part of the same intertwined epistemological unity.¹ Inscribing the viewer into the frozen structure of the present, “The Young Man at His Window” anticipates one of the central themes of the coming modernist era that begins to emerge toward the last decades of the nineteenth century and marks the future direction not only of the visual arts, but of modern philosophy and literature: a movement towards facticity, a return “back to things themselves” (*zu den Sachen selbst*) in their immediacy as they manifest themselves to the observer in the moment of sensuous presence.

In early twentieth-century philosophy, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger would theorize the unfolding moment as a site where the modern subject – bombarded by an overabundance of sensory stimuli and alienated from his immediate pre-reflexive experience – can be salvaged.² No longer the Romantic spectator seeking the Absolute and the sublime in the act of sensory perception – the Wordsworthian union of the mind and the universe – the modern observer seeks the fleeting “sensation of being present inside the present” (Charney 282), of entering the instant of his subjective duration.

Bergson has theorized this relationship between immediate perception and the onlooker in his magnum opus *Time and Free Will* (1891) as well as his later

¹ The *fin-de-siècle* philosopher and psychologist Ernst Mach would express this relationship as follows: There is no gulf between the psychological and the physical, no “within” and “without”... There are only elements of one kind which according to the moment of their observation are “within” or “without.” (qtd. in McFarlane 84)

² For an exploration of the philosophical valences of the present, see Leo Charney’s essay “In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity.”

philosophical writings. Distending the atomistic single instant into an unbroken stream of consciousness, Bergson maintained that subjective experience is nothing but *durée*. Arguing that human psychic life cannot be grasped through analytical concepts, the French thinker believed that the subject could experience himself directly through the faculty of intuition. In his celebrated essay “Introduction to Metaphysics” (1903), Bergson challenges positivist concepts of the self to show that “absolute knowledge” is possible by transcending concepts and “entering into” the free-flowing flux of one’s inner life. His essay offers a slew of analogies for the fluid nature of subjective duration of the psyche – an unfolding coil, a continual rolling of thread on a ball as well as an elastic band compressed to a single point and then stretched to form an ever-elongating line:

Let us, then, rather, imagine an infinitely small elastic body, contracted, if it were possible, to a mathematical point. Let this be drawn out gradually in such a manner that from the point comes a constantly lengthening line. Let us fix our attention not on the line as a line, but on the action by which it is traced. [...] Finally, let us free ourselves from the space which underlies the movement in order to consider only the movement itself, the act of tension or extension; in short, pure mobility. We shall have this time a more faithful image of the development of our self in duration.

(Introduction 14)

Fusing time and the subject into a living temporal stream, an entity that cannot be grasped using spatial categories, Bergson calls on his readers to adopt a “sympathetic” mode of seeing and experience phenomena “directly.” Stating that metaphysics “is a science that claims to dispense with symbols,” with any meditating concepts and

representations, Bergson suggests that there is one object of knowledge that human beings always perceive in a purely intuitive manner: the mental subjective “flux” of consciousness with its own unique and changing sense of temporality. To enter *durée*, Bergson’s subjective observer endeavors to experience “the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible” (Introduction 7).

Like Bergson, Martin Heidegger would conceptualize in his monumental *Being and Time* (1927) the present moment as a place where the living temporality of the subject could be redeemed, where the breach between prereflexive feelings and consciousness could be mended. For Heidegger, modern man is falling into “lostness”; for the modern subject, the present is always “leaping away.” By contrast, authentic Dasein involves a felt relationship with the present and one’s inner duration. Sensual presence becomes an antidote to modernity’s estrangement and fragmentation. This state involves the *Augenblick* – “the moment of vision” in which the perceiver experiences an ecstatic connectedness with the now.

But it was not only early twentieth-century philosophy that strived to explore the new metaphysics of actuality, to investigate subjective experience manifesting in the present moment to the observer. No other artistic medium was better equipped to answer Bergson’s call for the exploration of “the self in duration” than modernist literature of the first quarter of the twentieth century.³ The need to draw back the veil between the familiar everyday self and the flux of consciousness unfolding at each moment impels

³ Anticipating a revolution in modern fiction in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson writes: “Now, if some bold novelist, tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego, shows us under this appearance of logic a fundamental absurdity, under the juxtaposition of simple states an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves.” (qtd. in Gillies 103)

modernist writers to seek out new experimental narrative forms. Less than two decades after the publication of Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, in her ground-breaking essay "Modern Fiction," Virginia Woolf would urge contemporary writers to put the instants of everyday life under literature's microscope:

The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; [...]

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.

(150)

In a radical break with a four-hundred-year-old tradition of the European novel, modernist writers like Woolf, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and William Faulkner dramatically condense the genre's temporal scope to create prose fiction that jettisons its traditional reliance on plot in order to explore the fleeting moments of "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day." Their novels treat the world of banal everyday acts like the choreography of setting one's breakfast, examining a shop-window, buying flowers, opening a letter, running errands, experiencing dyspepsia, or talking to oneself in the privacy of one's head. By slowing down the unfolding of narrative time – no longer in a hurry to get from one plot-driven event to the next – the modernist novel would shake the quotidian universe out of the ruts of habitual perception while investigating the moment-by-moment unfolding of subjective duration, in order, as

Anne Fernihough puts it, to “render as closely as possible the chaos of the inner life and the raw, unfinished quality of our thoughts and impressions” (66).

The city, with its onslaught of constantly changing impressions, distractions, and sensations, becomes the central stage for the exploration of the present moment in modern fiction: a place where the instant exists invisible, lost to ordinary reified perception until it is isolated through artistic representation. To dilate and prolong the transient, fleeting instants of urban life, the early-twentieth-century novel would deploy a new kind of spectator who could recuperate the sensual immediacy of each moment and tear down the veil between the familiar self and the myriad mental events that constitute its experience. Striving to “record the atoms as they fall upon the mind,” modern writers like Woolf, Joyce, Andrei Bely, and Alfred Döblin adopt spectatorial protagonists who could lend their sensorium, physicality, and private interior language to the metropolis at every moment. Not experiencing bizarre mental states or delirious hypnagogic awareness like the street wanderers of De Quincey, Gogol, and Poe, the sensations and thoughts that the new modern peripatetic heroes bring to the city are quotidian trains of associations, of ordinary psychological and physiological reactions, of memories, of desires, aversions, and longings that rapidly flicker through fleeting moments of apprehension.

With the mind of the urban walker transforming from the Romantic phantasmagoric projector of the fantastic into a ceaseless flux of disorganized, heterogeneous mental events, the spectator takes on the function of a roving camera-eye continuously registering immediate impressions of city life. No longer bewitched by the mysterious and the bizarre, modern urban wanderers turn their attention to the “elastic” now.

Capturing the uncommonness of the commonplace, the gaze of the “cinematographic” spectator continuously stages the literary effect of *ostranenie*, of defamiliarization, a term coined by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky who maintained that contemporary life is reified in the process of habituation and only through art can it be experienced in its living immediacy without the schematic abstraction of everyday concepts. In his manifesto “Art as Technique” (*Iskustvo kak priem*), Shklovsky would write:

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war. ... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (12)

Revitalizing and de-automatizing “the sensations of things as they are perceived,” the new modern hero ambles from one present moment into the next to discover and reveal the *artfulness* of mundane urban experiences, which his or her stream of consciousness wrenches out of habitual perception and arranges into ever new patterns of literary montage.

This chapter explores the new cinematographic function of the city spectator and his relationship with the metropolitan now in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The monumental

modernist work in which the word “eye” in both singular and plural occurs nearly 450 times pays unprecedented attention to human perception and the physical nature of sight. Joyce scrupulously tracks the movements of the many pairs of eyes of Bloomsday as they open, squint, blink, shut, run across, follow, speak, turn, brighten, moisten, glaze, dance, peep, peer, and burn into the soul of other Dubliners of June 16, 1904. Few works of literary fiction provide such a plethora of accompanying epithets for the ocular organs; the eyes of *Ulysses* – to offer only a modest sampler – can be *mobile*, *tearwashed*, *oyster*, *unsteady*, *seacold*, *willing*, *soft*, *mocking*, *thinking*, *secret*, *darkrimmed*, *myopic*, *sloppy*, *Galilean*, *shameclosing* or *gipsylike*. Compound neologisms like “womaneyes,” “ferretheaded,” and “foxyeyes” also abound throughout the novel’s eighteen episodes. Optical devices that revolutionized human perception like glasses, binoculars, telescopes, microscopes, kaleidoscopes, mutoscopes, kinetoscopes, cameras, daguerreotypes, snapshots, and magnesium flashlight photographs are just a few of the many long-established and recently invented optical contraptions and technologies of vision scattered throughout Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Baron, 691).

If *Ulysses* attends to vision with such scrupulousness, it is because its main ambulatory protagonists – Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom – in a number of the novel’s episodes are relegated to spectatorial positions in Joyce’s metropolitan universe. In such chapters as “Proteus,” “Calypso,” “Lotus-Eaters,” “Lestrygonians,” and “Wandering Rocks,” the heroes become peripatetic observers who avoid direct interactions with the rest of the city. Other Dubliners chatter and mingle their way through *Ulysses* on the streets of the Irish capital: but not Stephen and Bloom. Stephen is jeered at by his apparent friend Buck Mulligan and is perceived as a curious eccentric by

his compatriots. His poems have not been accepted into the forthcoming anthology of young Irish writers, and his critical views are never accepted by the librarians and scholars of Dublin's literary establishment. Similarly, Bloom is shunned or kept at a polite distance by fellow Irishmen who never fail to let him know, subtly or overtly, that he is not of their ilk. The Wandering Jew of *Ulysses*, Bloom is marginalized in a city where, as Robert Alter points out, mass anonymity and anomie were hardly a socio-historical fact: a capital that in 1904 was still a provincial backwater whose denizens could hardly cover a block without stopping to exchange the day's gossip with an acquaintance (Alter 125).

Estranged from Dublin's close-knit community, Stephen-Hamlet and Bloom-Odysseus often seek states of authentic presence in solitary observation on the margins of the wider social order. For Stephen and Bloom, who are physically displaced from their homes and are actively prolonging their return, urban spectatorship becomes a way of buying time through ceaseless peripatetic peregrinations in space.⁴ Only in the privacy of their perceiving interiorities do both heroes find the intimate mind-words they are unable to exchange with others – the stream of consciousness that buoys and sustains them as they navigate through Joyce's Dublin.

Unlike the spectatorial heroes of Poe's and Gogol's city tales who lust after the otherworldly and the Ideal, Joyce's urban wanderers are stalkers of the here and now, of the ordinary and the commonplace that discloses itself to their consciousness at every instant. What distinguishes both heroes of *Ulysses* from physiognomist-*flâneurs* or Romantic visionaries is the new function that the act of city looking now acquires in the

⁴ For more on the role of urban walking in *Ulysses*, see Peter Barta's *Bely, Joyce, Döblin: Peripatetics in the City Novel*.

novel. Neither seeking to read the city like *flâneurs* nor experiencing glimpses of the supernatural on the sidewalks as had done urban Romantic visionaries, Joyce's modern wanderers embody a new relationship between city watching and city writing. Because Joyce has liquefied the self of his protagonists into a continuous stream of consciousness, each hero becomes a co-author of the novel and stages in his own mind a different kind of literary montage, combing the visible present instants and private mental associations into new expressive unities. The writer now uses the spectator to re-write actuality at every moment, to salvage the now from "lostness" by reentering it vicariously through the thought-stream of his heroes.

To understand how Joyce's urban walkers recuperate the present moment through mental articulation, it is important to differentiate the living flow of thought and awareness, which is always multidimensional – consisting of myriad simultaneously impinging sensations and non-verbal mental events – and the fictional stream of consciousness simulated through the linear medium of language. Discussing how Joyce reconstructs visual perception using the novel's interior monologue technique, Erwin Steinberg writes in *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in Ulysses*:

[Joyce] cannot, of course, present the perceptions as they actually appear in the consciousness simultaneously, because of the additive nature of language. Jamming together visual perceptions by presenting them one immediately after another with no punctuation between is as close to simultaneity as he can come.⁵ (52)

⁵ Steinberg offers the following example of this stringing together of multiple subjective images into a single sentence from "Lestrygonians" describing Bloom's ocular field: "With a keep quiet relief, his eyes took note: this is street here middle of the day Bob Doran's bottle shoulders."

The necessity to string bundles of images and subjective sensations that are perceived at once into a sequentially ordered inner monologue delegates to Joyce's heroes a unique narrative function: each offers a clipped reportage from the subconscious that make his gaze akin to a camera lens fragmenting the present into a succession of filmic frames.⁶ Continuously talking through what they see, the protagonists of *Ulysses* set their fictional perceptual experiences to the syntax and cadence of their inner speech. As the two central wanderers of *Ulysses* verbalize their present-moment experiences on their odysseys through the Irish capital, the relationship between their private subjectivities and the metropolis that they observe becomes powerfully interlinked. Because the mind-streams of Stephen and Bloom function as sites of assembly for the novel's many forms of montage, the treatment of the metropolitan now becomes contingent upon the different intellects, longings, and temperaments of its two unlike perceivers who defamiliarize the present in a manner unique to their skein of thoughts and associations, moods, and speech patterns.

In examining the relationship between subjectivity, spectatorship, and the urban present in *Ulysses*, my analysis is indebted to Ruth Perlmutter's helpful outline of the oppositions between the manner in which Bloom and Stephen apprehend their environment. Associating Stephen's gaze with "metaphor" and Bloom's with "metonymy," Perlmutter notes: "Bloom wants to penetrate to the center of things that

⁶ More than a decade before the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Henri Bergson in *Creative Evolution* would already formulate the analogy between a language-based reconception of the multidimensional, simultaneous, and unbroken nature of mental *duree* and a filmic sequence produced by a movie camera:

We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristic of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside of us. (306)

exist. Stephen is resigned to the ineluctable separation of reality from the self” (487). Bloom’s stream of consciousness reveals the present moment as an unmediated facticity: it vitalizes it by plunging the reader into a pool of physical sensations and visceral energies that his mind experiences at every instant. Embodying every second of Joyce’s creation with all of its pleasures and pains while talking through what he sees, Bloom acts as the central camera-lens of *Ulysses*, attending to its fictional instants with the raptness of a voyeur. In contrast, Stephen’s bookish, philosophically bent mind perpetually uses the immediate as a diving-board to leap into metaphysical speculation or reworks it into powerful, impromptu poetic images. Revealed through the dense web of rarefied allusions, the concrete images of Stephen’s present-moment surroundings appear less as Bloom’s continuous cinematic sequence, but instead a collection of discreet photographic snapshots.

Stephen is introduced in the opening of the *Ulysses* as a “watcher,” a hero whose very first action in the book is that of looking. Ascending from the stairhead of the Martello Tower, the young artist casts a morose gaze at Buck Mulligan who parodies a Catholic Mass by lifting a shaving bowl aloft like a chalice and intoning the introit:

Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untensured hair, grained and hued like pale oak. (1.13:16)⁷

⁷ All references to *Ulysses* are to the Gabler edition cited with the episode number and line number(s).

As in most scenes of the first “Telemachus” episode, Stephen’s perceptions are presented from an omniscient third-person perspective. The reader has yet to move inside the protagonist’s internal flow of thoughts that Joyce gradually introduces into his novel. Without placing the reader inside Stephen’s mind, the impersonal narrator subtly articulates the defining characteristic of Stephen’s perceptual experience: the “cold” psychological remove of one who sees anatomically, without empathy or emotional involvement. When the young artist detachedly surveys the greenish waters of Dublin Bay from the tower’s gun rest, the third-person narrative would again highlight in purely visual terms Stephen’s sense of spiritual separation from the immediate:

Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the fraying edge of his shiny black coatsleeve. Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown grave-clothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting. (1.110)

The artist’s aloof perception is mirrored by his partly occluded and claustrophobic ocular field that switches from an extreme close-up of the cuff’s edge to a long shot of the bay’s dull horizon: “Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea...” His partially blocked

point of view imparts on the scene feelings of entrapment and isolation: a sense of perceptual alienation of the onlooker that Alan Spiegel has memorably called “ocular loneliness”⁸ (242). But the passage also indirectly reveals the more active side of Stephen’s engagements with the now of actuality: the powerful protean intellect of a poet who de-habituates the present instants in the first “Telemachiad” part of the novel. Coupling external perceptions of the sea with the haunting memories of his mother’s sickroom, Stephen’s gaze stages a metaphor through a juxtaposition – a montage of the present-moment image of the bay with its “dull green mass of liquid” spliced with a memory of a bowl of china filled with the dying woman’s green bile.

But the full force of Stephen’s poetic intellect is revealed in the third “Proteus” episode that allows the reader for the first time to slip into the hero’s stream of thoughts. As Perlmutter observes, in “Proteus” Stephen becomes “his own novelist”: a self writing the self in the present moment of apprehension. Wandering late in the morning on the beach of Sandymount strand, Stephen-as-spectator coins with each stride the elusive and erudite mind-words of a poet seeking to understand the meaning of his own life and destiny. Striving to transmute the present from which he is estranged through poetic and intellectual flights of imagination, Stephen’s theologically and literary trained mind reworks the transient immediate data of his senses into knotted philosophical ruminations on the relationship of sight to the material world:

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought
through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and

⁸ Analyzing the correspondences between *Ulysses* and cinema, Alan Spiegel argues that “a very special kind of estrangement . . . manifests itself in Joyce’s characteristic coldness of vision; a kind of spiritual separateness that begins with a passive, affectless eye and will never permit the observer a total rapport with his visual field” (242).

seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust:
coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he
was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking
his sponce against them, sure. Go easy. Bald he was and a millionaire,
maestro di color che sanno. Limit of the diaphane in. Why in?
Diaphane, adaiphane. If you can put your five fingers through it is a gate,
if not a door. (3.1:4.)

In his analysis of the passage, Louise Hornby notes that the sequence of subjective images (“seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot”) offered by the hero’s interior monologue is more reminiscent of a photographic collage – “limited segments of space and time” (58) – than of a continuous filmic progression. The photographic quality of a dozen or more separate sights that Stephen would note during his hour-long ramblings (beach flotsam, waves, rocks and sand, passing midwives, the antics of a dog, the interactions between a gypsy couple, the flow of his urine over a rock) is accentuated through long sequences of intellectual speculation, flashbacks, and poetic figurations that separate each concrete image to create the static effect of discreet pictures. Stephen himself directly hints at the snapshot-like nature of his perception later in the episode: “Flat I see, then think distance, near, far, flat I see, east, back. Ah, see now! Falls back suddenly frozen in stereoscope. Click does the trick.” (3.418-420)

Stephen’s protean mind recuperates the present moment by either integrating it into a highly dense tissue of philosophical and literary allusions or by transfiguring it extemporaneously into poetic imagery. Unable to escape the “ineluctable” separation of the self and the world, Stephen reshapes the observed rust-hued flotsam in the thirteen

sentences of the above passage into a mesh of complex abstractions that allude in dizzying shorthand to Aristotle's treatise on perception *De Sensu et Sensibili* (by way of Dante's *Inferno*), Jakob Boehme's *The Signature of All Things*, Bishop George Berkeley's idealist concepts of sight as well as to its famous materialist refutation by Dr. Samuel Johnson. Tying the commonplace instants of Bloomsday to a millennium and a half of Aristotelian intellectual thought, Stephen's mind defamiliarizes the moment by ascribing to it metaphysical implications.

The next image that Stephen would contemplate while walking over the crackling shells is that of two midwives coming down from Leahy's terrace toward the beach.

They came down the steps from Leahy's terrace prudently,
Frauenzimmer: and down the shelving shore flabbily, their splayed feet sinking in the silted sand. Like me, like Algy, coming down to our mighty mother. Number one swung lourdily her midwife's bag, the other's gamp poked in the beach. From the liberties, out for the day. Mrs Florence MacCabe, relict of the late Patk MacCabe, deeply lamented, of Bride Street. One of her sisterhood lugged me squealing into life. Creation from nothing. What has she in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your *omphalos*. Hello! Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.

Spouse and helpmate of Adam Kadmon: Heva, naked Eve. She had no navel. Gaze. Belly without blemish, bulging big, a buckler of taut vellum,

no, whiteheaped corn, orient and immortal, standing from everlasting to everlasting. Womb of sin. (3.29:47)

His sophisticated train of associations leaves the present-moment view of the midwives and, leaping into the heavens, takes Stephen's mind all the way back to the creation of Adam and Eve. The sequence of mental steps that he traces from the now to the most distant Biblical past is elicited by the sight of a bag carried by a midwife, which the artist imagines contains the umbilical cord of a misbirth. Reflecting on the navel cord, Stephen pictures a network of cords connecting humanity to the source of all life: "cable of all flesh." The thought of navels turns his mind to the navel-gazing of monks who emulate the gods by focusing on the "omphalos." Soaring with the monks heavenward, Stephen pictures a celestial telephone system through which he places a call to Edenville ("Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.") The mental jump to Adam and Eve is now a simple one as Stephen reflects that the stomachs of the first man and woman were without navels since both were created, not born. The paragraph closes with the notion of Original Sin, but in the next one, Stephen's guilt-haunted mind will continue the concatenation of associations by returning to the image of his dead mother: "a ghostwoman" from whom he was "wombed in sin." Only after reflecting on God's ("the coupler's") will, the theological concept of consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, and Arius' heresy would Stephen's mind once more alight back to the here and now to note the beach's breakers. Yet upon its return to the present, his active intellect no sooner transforms the immediate into a metaphor: the tidal crests shapeshift into "whitemaned seahorses, champing, brightwindbridled, the steeds of Mananaan" (3:55-7).

After the “Proteus” episode, the reader would no longer enjoy access to Stephen’s stream of consciousness until the afternoon episode of the “Wandering Rocks” in which the young man is once again presented as an observer. Walking the city streets, Stephen treats the present-moment sights of Dublin in the same way he has registered the morning views of the bay walking on the strand:

Stephen Dedalus watched through the webbed window the lapidary's fingers prove a timedulled chain. Dust webbed the window and the showtrays. Dust darkened the toiling fingers with their vulture nails. Dust slept on dull coils of bronze and silver, lozenges of cinnabar, on rubies, leprous and winedark stones.

Born all in the dark wormy earth, cold specks of fire, evil, lights shining in the darkness. Where fallen archangels flung the stars of their brows. Muddy swinesnouts, hands, root and root, gripe and wrest them.

She dances in a foul gloom where gum burns with garlic. A sailorman, rustbearded, sips from a beaker rum and eyes her. A long and seafed silent rut. She dances, capers, wagging her sowish haunches and her hips, on her gross belly flapping a ruby egg.

Old Russell with a smeared shammy rag burnished again his gem, turned it and held it at the point of his Moses' beard. Grandfather ape gloating on a stolen hoard.

And you who wrest old images from the burial earth? The brainsick words of sophists: Antisthenes. A lore of drugs. Orient and immortal wheat standing from everlasting to everlasting. (10.800-811)

On Fleet Street Stephen looks at the window of Thomas Russell's lapidary shop where he sees its owner polishing precious stones. His gaze once more metaphorically transmutes the visible: the lapidary's finger nails become vulture's "talons" while he himself turns into a "Grandfather ape." In a single moment of city watching, the gems, the earth where they are "born," the archangels, memories of a naked woman dancing before a sailor, the gem-like words of sophists and poets – all get interconnected in the artist's consciousness. Leapfrogging across the steppingstones of associated literary and theological references, Stephen's mind turns into a workshop for the continuous machining of poetically condensed ideas for which external imagery of the present instant supplies ever-new raw materials.

Unlike Stephen-the-son, Bloom-the-father takes great pleasure in keeping an ever-watchful, voyeuristic eye on every instant of Joyce's "sunnywinking" urban creation. With a lucky potato and a bar of lemon soap for his traveling companions, throughout the course of *Ulysses* the wandering advertising canvasser covers over eighteen miles on foot, carriage, and tram to bear witness to each unfolding moment of Joyce's long day (Nicholson vii). His gaze moves and pans through the lanes, squares, and quays of Dublin to observe its whirling kaleidoscope of passersby and bystanders, its luxurious shopping windows and its grimy pubs, its afternoon bustle of trams, horses, and lorries, and the morning stillness of its quiet pre-breakfast streets. "Clearly I can see today," thinks Bloom to himself as he ogles, gawks, and gapes at the women of the Irish capital, blots the sun with his finger to recall the technical meaning of the term "parallax," and tests his vision by observing the city's clocks.

Bloom's joyful attentiveness to the shifting textures of city life, his ceaseless courting of the corporeal delights of the senses, makes him an ideal spectator of Joyce's instants. Not soaring into ethereal realms of Stephen's lofty allusions, Bloom's practical mind stays bound to the immediate and the concrete as it responds directly to the passing sights of the capital. His curiosity, warmth of feeling, and sensual delectation of every moment assure him a role of the central hero of *Ulysses*.

Unlike the aloof, trained consciousness of Stephen that leaps across logically connected ideas and thinks metaphorically, Bloom's warmer, less sophisticated mind freeassociates loosely around the visible on his peripatetic passings. Anchored in the present, his thoughtstream continuously registers the changing stimuli of Dublin's life. The wandering hero's first sally onto the streets in "Calypso" to buy a pork kidney for breakfast at Dlugacz's illustrates well this point:

He crossed to the bright side, avoiding the loose cellarflap of number seventyfive. The sun was nearing the steeple of George's church. Be a warm day I fancy. Specially in these black clothes feel it more. Black conducts, reflects (refracts is it?) the heat. But I couldn't go in that light suit. Make a picnic of it. His eyelids sank quietly often as he walked in happy warmth. Boland's breadvan delivering with trays our daily but she prefers yesterday's loaves turnovers crisp crowns hot. Makes you feel young. (4.77:83)

As Bloom walks on the sunny side of Eccles Street, the flow of his thoughts finds its original source far upstream of the rational intellect. It is the sensations of the sun's "happy warmth" through a black suit that discharges Bloom's mind to the day's weather,

to his scientific musings on the conduction of heat, and to thoughts of Paddy Dignam's funeral that he would attend later this morning.

Bloom's consciousness organizes the city radically differently from Stephen's: he names the passing locales and familiar faces, considers the practical aspects of the objects before his view, and launches on short excursions of associations – only to return the reader quickly to the unfolding present-moment events when the next spectacle reveals itself to his sight.

Throughout Bloom-centered episodes like “Calypso,” “Lotus-Eaters,” and “Lestrygonians,” the hero's scopophilic mind provides ongoing mental commentary to the locales he is passing. Walking by Larry O'Rourke's pub in “Calypso,” for instance, and reflecting on its commercial success, Bloom converts his immediate perceptions into continuous sequences of verbal imagery:

He approached Larry O'Rourke's. From the cellar grating floated up the flabby gush of porter. Through the open doorway the bar squirted out whiffs of ginger, teadust, biscuitmush. [...]

Baldhead over the blind. Cute old codger. No use canvassing him for an ad. Still he knows his own business best. There he is, sure enough, my bold Larry, leaning against the sugarbin in his shirtsleeves watching the aproned curate swab up with mop and bucket. (U 4.105:110.)

As Bloom nears the pub, his truncated mind-words register his surroundings metonymically, rather than metaphorically as does Stephen: “Baldhead over the blind. Cute old codger.” Never describing in detail what he sees, Bloom's thoughts *point* to the fictional present (“M'Auley's *down there*” or “*There he is*, sure enough, my bold

Larry...”). His consciousness transcribes the visible as if Joyce’s fictional day had an intrinsic, palpable reality that required little elaboration.⁹

Unlike the cold, snapshot-like gaze of Stephen, Bloom’s sympathetic consciousness attends to the visible with an optical acuity of a continuously operating cinematic apparatus recording the passing streets and quays of Dublin one “cityful” at a time. The presentation of Dublin’s fictional instants through Bloom’s interior musings creates what the Soviet cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein has called the “almost physiological palpability” (qtd. in DiBattista 225) of *Ulysses*: a sense of total physical presence of its narrated actions.¹⁰ The filmic, metonymic quality of his perception is dramatically revealed in a long scene from “Lotus Eaters” in which Bloom talks to his acquaintance M’Coy while simultaneously trying to keep an eye on an attractive, well-heeled woman standing across the street in front of the Grosvenor Hotel:

Mr Bloom gazed across the road at the outsider drawn up before the door of the Grosvenor. The porter hoisted the valise up on the well. She stood still, waiting, while the man, husband, brother, like her, searched his pockets for change. Stylish kind of coat with that roll collar, warm for a day like this, looks like blanketcloth. Careless stand of her with her hands in those patch pockets. Like that haughty creature at the polo match. [...]
Drawing back his head and gazing far from beneath his veiled eyelids he saw the bright fawn skin shine in the glare, the braided drums. [...]

⁹ Analyzing *Ulysses* in his celebrated biography of Joyce, Richard Ellmann notes that the writer “introduces much material which he does not intend to explain, so that his book, like life, gives the impression of having many threads that one cannot follow” (366).

¹⁰ As Hugh Kenner points out, the effect of palpable facticity of *Ulysses* is staged by including in the narrative only that to which Bloom’s awareness is privy at each moment. Kenner notes that Joyce’s multiple narrators in the novel adopt the attitude that “the reader should not be told what no one present would think worth an act of attention” (31).

Off to the country: Broadstone probably. High brown boots with laces
dangling. Wellturned foot. What is he foostering over that change for?

Sees me looking. Eye out for other fellow always. [...]

He moved a little to the side of M'Coy's talking head. Getting up in a
minute. [...]

— *What's wrong with him?* he said. *He's dead*, he said. And, faith, he
filled up. *Is it Paddy Dignam?* I said. I couldn't believe it when I heard it. I
was with him no later than Friday last or Thursday was it in the Arch. *Yes*,
he said. *He's gone. He died on Monday, poor fellow.*

Watch! Watch! Silk flash rich stockings white. Watch!

A heavy tramcar honking its gong slewed between.

Lost it. Curse your noisy pugnose. Feels locked out of it. [...]

— Yes, yes, Mr Bloom said after a dull sigh. Another gone.

— One of the best, M'Coy said.

The tram passed. They drove off towards the Loop Line bridge, her rich
gloved hand on the steel grip. Flicker, flicker: the laceflare of her hat in
the sun: flicker, flick. (5.98-140)

Bloom's perceptual field in the passage is subdivided into three planes: the alluring figure
of the woman across the street, M'Coy's "talking head" right before him, as well as the
closest possible object of his sight: his lowered or "vailed" eyelids. His "long sight" in
the scene acts as a narrative equivalent of a camera's deep focus that renders objects
sharply in the background and the foreground. The hero's gaze cinematically zooms in
on the various details of the woman's attire and figure: her rolled collar, the shine of her

gloves, her brown boots, her stockings, the protective glance of her husband. Trying to keep the woman within his ocular field, Bloom moves his head to look past M' Coy as if recomposing her through a viewfinder. Phrases like "Watch! Watch! Silk flash rich stockings white, Watch," or "her rich gloved hand on the steel grip," or "the laceflare of her hat in the sun" build a montage-like sequence of close-up frames as if his eyes were recording a "flick" – a movie to which Bloom's mind provides an ongoing voiceover.¹¹

It is interesting to compare Bloom's spectatorial encounter with an anonymous female passerby with similar literary moments in post-Romantic texts examined in previous chapters. What Bloom shares with such city spectators as Gogol's painter Piskarev chasing a divine vision through the czarist capital or as Charles Baudelaire's vagrant poet encountering a passing Parisian woman in the poem "A la Passante (To the Passerby)" is a sense of a profound mental remove between the observer and the object of his contemplation. All three – Bloom, Piskarev, and Baudelaire's lyrical poet – "feel locked out of it." Alienated and marginalized in the metropolis, the Jewish canvasser in early-twentieth-century Dublin, the Romantic painter of nineteenth-century St. Petersburg, and Baudelaire's city prowler of mid-nineteenth-century Paris find moments of authenticity in perception alone.

Yet unlike Gogol's idealistic artist hallucinating the sublime or the poet searching for universal communion with the "non-self" amid the grime and sludge of the city, Bloom is not granted (nor does he seek) egress from the mundane. He does not strive to dream his way out of the ineluctable modality of the visible. The possibility of a search

¹¹ Pointing out that the scene is Joyce's "formal evocation of the muse of cinema," Maria DiBattista aptly suggests in her essay "This is Not a Movie: *Ulysses* and Cinema" that "the lights flickering over [the woman's] laceflare hat, recalls the flickering light of a movie image" (230).

for transcendence on the streets is as abstract and foreign a notion for Bloom as the concept of “metempsychosis” that he recalls earlier at breakfast. Unlike the visionary seers and monomaniacal dreamers haunted by glimpses of the otherworldly, Joyce’s hero is not a seeker after the sublime: the pub-lined streets of the Hibernian capital never whisper him promises of the transcendent beyond the habitual world of the senses. If *Ulysses* records the phenomenal with hyper-precision, it happily leaves the noumenal to the gassy Platonist scholars whom Stephen Dedalus staunchly debates at the National Library.

The phenomenological camera-like gaze of both Joyce’s spectatorial heroes is a product of the modern *Weltbild*. Their stream of consciousness forges connections with the city not by seeking intimacy in the crowds through leaps of imagination or by superimposing the fantastic onto the everyday but by seeking communion with the urban universe directly through language itself: each compensates for the dearth of social ties with a surplus of private mind-poetry lavished on the capital at every instant. Like the mind of T.S. Eliot’s poet that “is constantly amalgamating disparate experience...[into] ... new wholes” (Eliot 247), the thought-streams of Bloom and Stephen become sites for the creative reassembly of the trivial into aesthetically significant unities that recuperate for the reader the “artfulness” of the ordinary ether through extemporaneous poetic transfiguration (Stephen) or through continuous verbalizing of immediate sense experience (Bloom). Both phenomenological spectators recover the texture of each urban moment from the “lostness” of habitual urban perception.

Yet if Bloom and Stephen are no longer wandering in the city-as-phantsmagoria of Romantic visionaries, the hyper-realistic city that they perceive is perhaps the most

“mind-forged” of all the urban literary terrains examined in these pages: a capital created by its self-exiled author with a map, a ruler, and a stopwatch at hand (Budgen 121). The present moments that each hero perpetually discovers and defamiliarizes on his day-long odyssey through Dublin are encounters with the instants of a city of memory. Bloom’s peregrinations through the metropolitan now, as Karen R. Lawrence reminds us in her study, are “nostalgic journeys through a Dublin already vanished” (25), itineraries that “commemorate a home perpetually desired but already lost” (24). Re-experiencing the vanished pre-Home Rule Irish capital vicariously through the senses of his wandering hero, Joyce offers a portrait of his native city more evanescent than the phantom-haunted urban landscapes of the Romantics: a city that emerges and disappears with Bloom’s every stride – “cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too” (8.484-5) – a capital of *nostos* as fleeting as the instant of the present moment itself.

Conclusion

When Don Quixote set out onto the plains of La Mancha to replicate the chivalrous deeds of medieval knights-errant at the dawn of the modern era, his misadventures bore witness to a new chasm between the sphere of deeds and the world of interiority: a gulf forever separating the subjective from the objective which hitherto has not been explored in narratives of heroic exploits. Astride his hack Rocinante, Quixote became a comic symbol of the misalignment between the self and the external order. In the era of gunpowder, of rising Absolutism, and the blossoming of the bureaucratic nation-state, Quixote's lance morphs into an emblem of the inadequacy of outer actions to satisfy the needs of the spirit in the modern world.

It is in light of Cervantes' discovery of the schism dividing the inner and the outer that we must view the figure of the spectator in Western literature as he emerges during the neo-Classical era. The observer is the first literary hero to renounce physical action and adopt the act of looking as the only meaningful deed. The pursuit of love and the pursuit of glory in battle become supplanted for the onlooker by the pursuit of spectacles. For the beholder of fledgling urban modernity – for whom the knight's lance gives way to the stroller's cane – the eye becomes the only isthmus between subjectivity and the outer world. That is why non-engagement is the shared trait of all the characters analyzed in these pages: from the satirical “Mr. Spectator” of Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele in early eighteenth-century London, to Baudelaire's poet in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, to James Joyce's Leopold Bloom in early twentieth-century Dublin. From the observer's first appearance in urban sketches, adventure for the new

urban hero becomes the adventure of the eye. Yet while the beholder in city texts no longer asserts his will through heroic deeds, he is never passive. His gaze longs to forge a bridge between the solitary ego amid the churning, chaotic vortex of anonymous crowds and the bituminous city. From the neo-Classical era through modernism, the spectator brings ever-new strategies and lenses to mend the widening distance between himself and the bustling metropolitan maelstrom as he (and later, also she) continuously discovers new segments of urban experience on his journeys. He is active because he carries a representational function. Whether a narrative persona, a lyrical speaker, or a fictional protagonist, the observer articulates the city through his own historical and psychological vantage.

In the case of the figure of the physiognomist-*flâneur*, whom I examined in the first chapter – a documentarian of the streets who appears in city sketches of the seventeenth-century London and continues to develop well into the first half of the nineteenth – the mental distance between the observer and the city is still well masked. His stance of privileged detachment, comfortable belonging, and claims to unparalleled urban knowledge are inscribed into his urban representations. The peripatetic physiognomist of the city, who catalogs its social facades and satirizes its follies, is still on gentlemanly terms with the great European capitals. His keen satirist's eye transforms the streets he observes on his peregrinations into lively, entertaining tableaux, such as those of John Gay's "Trivia: or the Art of Walking the Streets of London" or, later, Charles Dickens' *The Sketches by Boz*. The sense of estrangement of the seer in the physiognomist's descriptions is neutralized by a set of interpretive procedures of a naturalist who seeks to classify the species and sub-species of urban dwellers. His

taxonomic mode of vision, which refashions the metropolis into a panorama of amusing, ambling stereotypes, still hides the psychological divide of the perceiver from others.

Contrary to the physiognomic way of “reading” the city, Romantic accounts of urban life underscore the chasm between the observing Subject and the city. The visionary poet of William Wordsworth finds the metropolis inhospitable. The British capital for the Romantic wanderer of *The Prelude*, who comes from England’s pastoral provinces, is a site of “blank confusion” (VII.696) and “anarchy and din/ Barbarian and infernal” (VII.660-1). Yet the poet brings to London a way of seeing that he has imported to its streets from rural bucolic settings. In “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge,” his Romantic pastoral vision naturalizes the man-made order and allays his sense of separateness in the urban universe. In *The Prelude* the poet’s derealized mental landscape inflects the streetscape into a haunting conundrum. Not offering familiar, legible metropolitan tapestries of the physiognomist, Wordsworth’s Romantic observer reveals how the mind and the city can braid themselves into a bizarre urban phantasmagoria impossible to locate on the map.

In later Romantic texts, such as Edgar Allan Poe’s tale “The Man of the Crowd,” or Nikolai Gogol’s novella “Nevsky Prospect,” the fictional spectator attempts to mend the gap between the subjective and the objective through mental projections. The hero-observer becomes a seeker after the Absolute, the intimations of which he superimposes onto the dark lanes of the spectral, gas-lit nocturnal cityscape. Under the ghostly brilliance of the street lamps, the heroes of both tales turn those whom they stalk into divine or demonic apparitions, self-creations that become harbingers of a different metaphysical order, standing in dramatic opposition to the daily fair of metropolitan

crowds. In both stories, as in Wordsworth's poem, the solitary observer attempts to transcend his forlornness by dreaming his way out of drab actuality. The big city – which is always potentially threatening– now transforms into an enchanting double: a shadow terrain that is the creation of the mind trying to bridge the distance of its estrangement with strange hallucinatory projections. If alienation uncouples the walker from any sense of identification with other pedestrians, he fills the chasm between the solitary self and the urban community with a bizarre, uncanny, hypnagogic visions.

The transposition of Romantic themes, atmospheric devices, and visual motifs as a way of mending the gap between the lonesome walker and the city is also evident in the urban encounters of Baudelaire's lyric poet with Parisian streets. The city prowler brings to the boulevards the same longing for eternity and infinity that he experiences in his poems about artificial paradises and dream rooms. Importing the prism through which he observes the Ideal in his painterly non-urban tableaux to Paris, the city poet continuously finds "the eternal in the transient" as he meets the flotsam, ruins, and sludge of the city. Encountering what is base, decrepit, and uprooted, the spectator's gaze imposes a secret patina on the crowded streets that he brings to bear on the fantastic luminous architecture of his dreams, his twilights, and impressionistic landscapes: a yearning to transcend actuality by becoming "an architect of his own fairyland." In the realm of tortured wakefulness, the poet in the city transposes his child-like perception from the magical dreamscapes to bleak, painful urban sights to retrieve an anesthetized construct, an "other" Paris fabricated in the same smelter of intoxicated consciousness from which he extracted the luminous alloys of his exotic dreams.

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the divide between the inner and the outer in the city is no longer bridged by its observing heroes, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, through projections of the timeless and the Absolute. Instead, on their day-long journeys through the Hibernian metropolis, both spectators assuage their estrangement from the rest of Dublin by exploring the city's ceaselessly changing present moments. Their stream of consciousness forges connections with the capital not by seeking intimacy in the crowds through leaps of imagination or by superimposing the fantastic onto the everyday but by seeking communion with the urban universe directly through language itself: each compensates for the dearth of social ties with a surplus of private mind-poetry lavished on the capital at every instant.

From the neo-Classical era through modernism, the spectator has offered new strategies for making the city habitable – ways of excising his estrangement by subjectivizing the urban terrain on his ceaseless wanderings. Renouncing engagement with others, the onlooker brings to the metropolis a secret agenda, a longing to rejoin the parting spheres of the inner and outer in the act of seeing. In an attempt to find a home in metaphysical exile on the sidewalks, the spectator offers new forms of organizing the experience of urban life. During the age of Enlightenment, the popular mode of urban representation becomes the orderly, comprehensive panorama of social types. The Romantic observer registers the city as a haunted phantasmagoria, a spectral realm of ghostly optical effects that hint at the presence of the transcendental. The modernist walker transforms the early twentieth-century European capital into a rapidly shifting montage of fleeting mental images reminiscent of a filmic sequence. Yet regardless of the radically changing historical and artistic eras, the observer as literary hero, from his

emergence in early modern city sketches to his later appearances on the streets of the twentieth century, has continued his search for the elusive shadow cityscape lurking under the grime and glamour of everyday metropolitan experience – for the city of the mind.

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