

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The City and French Poetry 1867-1886  
Coppée, Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

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by

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### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In the course of this thesis frequent references have been necessary to the complete editions of the works of the poets involved. The editions used and their abbreviations in the thesis are listed below.

The Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1864-1869 (Lemerre, 1870), Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1869-1874 (Lemerre, 1875), Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1874-1878 (Lemerre, 1879), Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1878-1886 (Lemerre, 1887), Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1886-1890 (Lemerre, 1891) and Oeuvres de François Coppée. Poésies, 1890-1905 (Lemerre, 1907) have been shortened to Poésies, 1864-1869, Poésies, 1869-1874, Poésies, 1874-1878, Poésies, 1878-1886, Poésies, 1886-1890 and Poésies, 1890-1905 respectively.

Charles Cros Tristan Corbière Oeuvres complètes, édition établie par Louis Forestier et Pierre-Olivier Walzer, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, 1970) has been shortened to Cros, O.C.

Paul Verlaine Oeuvres poétiques complètes, texte établi et annoté par Y.G. Le Dantec, édition révisée, complétée et présentée par Jacques Borel, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, 1962) has been shortened to Verlaine, O.C. poétiques.

Paul Verlaine Oeuvres en prose complètes, texte établi présenté et annoté par Jacques Borel, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, 1972) has been shortened to Verlaine, O.C. en prose.

Lautréamont Germain Nouveau Oeuvres complètes, édition établie et présentée par P.O. Walzer, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, 1970) has been shortened to Nouveau, O.C. Finally Rimbaud Oeuvres complètes, édition présentée par Antoine Adam, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, 1972) has been shortened to Rimbaud, O.C.



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### INTRODUCTION

As Pierre Citron shows in his La Poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire, the French capital has played a role in the inspiration of men of letters since as early as the fourteenth century and the ballads of Eustache Deschamps.<sup>1</sup> By the nineteenth century, however, and the full advent of the industrial revolution and the greater urbanisation which this brought about, what were previously often only sporadic references to the city, became more numerous and the urban theme emerged in a newly consolidated form. M. Citron selects 1830 as the year which gave the decisive 'coup de baguette',<sup>2</sup> arguing that this date marked a particular flowering of works set in the metropolis and with urban subjects. Though at this stage in Paris' history, a large proportion of influential literary works were written in prose, a concept of Paris as a 'poetic' environment and of its captivating variety as a kind of 'poésie' was also developing. Balzac, for instance, while excelling in panoramic visions of the city evoking its social intricacy, was also alive to the poetic possibilities of this same environment. This

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Citron, La Poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1961), pp.25-9.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Citron, 'Le Mythe poétique de Paris jusqu'à Baudelaire', L'Information littéraire XIV 2 (1962), 47-54 (p.49).

point is borne out in his short story Ferragus where he claims,

Mais, ô Paris! qui n'a pas admiré tes sombres  
paysages, tes échappées de lumière, tes  
culs-de-sac profonds et silencieux; qui n'a  
pas entendu tes murmures, entre minuit et deux  
heures du matin, ne connaît encore rien de ta  
vraie poésie, ni de tes bizarres et larges contrastes.<sup>3</sup>

The way was thus partially prepared for Baudelaire's famous and stirring declaration on the subject of poetry and the city voiced in the Salon of 1846: 'la vie parisienne est féconde en sujets poétiques et merveilleux' <sup>4</sup> and also for Verlaine's allusion to Paris as a supreme 'thème poétique' in his 1865 article on Baudelaire.<sup>5</sup>

If by the middle of the nineteenth century, Parisian literary life revealed a growing obsession with the capital itself as Gautier re-affirmed in 1851 by accusing Paris of being 'enivré de lui-même' and of having 'le nez contre le miroir, comme un myope qui se rase dans l'idée de faire son portrait ressemblant',<sup>6</sup> it would be wrong to assume that the constant interest accorded to the urban theme was always to a positive end. Baudelaire himself found Paris to be a malevolent as well as a magical environment, where 'l'horreur tourne aux enchantements'.<sup>7</sup> Other writers ran more forcefully counter to the stream of thought which recognised in Paris an original source of subject matter and imagery. In 1842, Arsène Houssaye lamented the coming of industrialised urban society and argued for the incompatibility of modern life and poetry in his article entitled 'De la poésie, de la vapeur et du paysage':

En gravissant la montagne, si le poète  
écoute les rumeurs de la vallée, il

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<sup>3</sup> Honoré de Balzac, La Comédie humaine, texte établi par Marcel Bouteron (Paris, Gallimard, 1952), Vol. V, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois (Paris, Gallimard, 1975-6), Vol. I, p.359. This edition of Baudelaire in its two volumes will be referred to subsequently as Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I and Vol. II.

<sup>5</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. en prose, pp.599-662.

<sup>6</sup> Théophile Gautier, 'Paris futur', Le Pays 20 December 1851.

<sup>7</sup> 'Les Petites vieilles', Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.89.

n'entendra plus le sublime concert de la  
 création [...] le poète entendra le bruit  
 des messageries, le cri des postillons  
 les couplets de vaudevilles qu'on chante  
 en chœur dans les fabriques. Le poète  
 flétrira dans ce mauvais pays, comme la  
 fleur dans le désert.<sup>8</sup>

Houssaye's early scepticism was backed up by Leconte de Lisle twenty years later when the latter reaffirmed the superiority of true Art over 'des préoccupations contemporaines' and insisted on the poet's detachment from the 'vulgaire' as represented by the urban 'bruit des locomotives' and the 'hurlement de la Bourse'.<sup>9</sup> Such a constant fascination with, yet such contrasting attitudes of approbation and criticism as were displayed towards the city in French literature from 1830 to the early 1860s, were reflected in turn after Baudelaire's death in the works of the five poets selected for this study: François Coppée, Charles Cros, Paul Verlaine, Germain Nouveau and Arthur Rimbaud.

The choice of these particular poets included in the thesis was dictated by key patterns of similarities and differences marking these five writers among the possibilities available. Firstly, all five enjoyed a common life in the French capital roughly in the years before and after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1. On the other hand, however, only Coppée was actually a Parisian by birth, Cros being born in Fabrezan (Aude), Verlaine in Metz, Nouveau in Pourrières (Var) and Rimbaud in Charleville. Secondly, all five enjoyed a roughly contemporary flowering of their poetic genius. Coppée's Intimités belong to 1868, Verlaine's Poèmes saturniens (including 'Nocturne parisien' and 'Croquis parisien') to 1867. Rimbaud exploded onto the Parisian scene in 1871 and composed his 'Orgie parisienne', Nouveau arrived probably in the following year and composed his 'Fantaisies parisiennes', while Cros' first collection, with the poems which were to become his 'Fantaisies en prose', appeared

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<sup>8</sup> Arsène Houssaye, 'De la poésie, de la vapeur et du paysage', L'Artiste 3<sup>ième</sup> Série, Tome 1 (1842), 98-101 (p.101).

<sup>9</sup> Leconte de Lisle in 'Béranger', Le Nain jaune 13 August 1864. Quoted by E.M. Grant in French Poetry and Modern Industry (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), p.137.

in 1873. After this common début the poets' subsequent artistic and personal lives were conversely very different. Coppée, for example, earned overnight success with his 1869 play Le Passant and swiftly became an establishment figure in the literary world which tended to set him apart from his generation. Cros' talents extended from poetry into the field of experimental science which brought him into contact with a wide variety of Parisians before his premature death in 1888. Verlaine probably most successfully adapted himself to changing circumstances, enjoying a close relationship with each of the four poets in turn and developing from a member of Paris' literary bohemia in the 1860s to a legend in the Latin Quarter towards the end of the century. Rimbaud and Nouveau both opted out of Western society without having achieved general acclaim in their lifetime, the former to a dubious trading existence in the East, the latter to a life as a mendicant hermit in his native Midi. Thirdly and most significantly, in terms of the relation between poetry and the city displayed in their writings, the influence of Baudelaire, the 'roi des poètes' is evidenced or acknowledged in the works of all five poets. Verlaine effected undoubtedly the greatest tribute to Baudelaire in his 1865 article on the poet, Rimbaud followed suit in the so-called 'Lettre du voyant', Cros, in Baudelairean works such as 'L'Heure froide', Nouveau in 'Les Grands boulevards' and Coppée in his short story 'Paris' from Longues et brèves. This group of poets can thus be set in a literary tradition established by the original 'génie parisien'.<sup>10</sup>

The chronology of the thesis was decided upon to correspond with the dates of Baudelaire's death (1867) and that of the Symbolist Manifesto (1886). 1867 was chosen because that generation of poets which rose out of obscurity around and after this date (by which time the effect of the second edition of Les Fleurs du Mal had percolated through the literary world) had a different perspective on the city as an environment and as a potential poetic theme from that of previous generations. In a social and geographical sense, Haussmann's development of the capital had drawn their attention to older parts of the city which were disappearing and which could be preserved through poetry, and to new aspects of urban décor

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<sup>10</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.603.

equally worthy of celebration. In an artistic sense, the enlarged 'Tableaux parisiens' section of the 1861 Les Fleurs du Mal and the gradual publication of the Petits poèmes en prose from 1862-9, had alerted them to the existence of intimate and symbolic links between the city and the individual poet, ('mise à nu d'une âme dans une grande ville, mise à nu de l'âme d'une grande ville')<sup>11</sup> and to the full potential of the environment as a modernist theme. The change of attitude which occurred after Baudelaire's death rather than earlier is clearly shown in a comparison of the contributions included in Le Parnasse contemporain of 1866 and that of 1869. The former edition was still largely dominated by a Parnassian attitude of detached refinement; it included works with an exotic setting and an oriental subject matter such as Leconte de Lisle's 'Le Rêve du jaguar' and 'Le Coeur de Hjalmar' and Catulle Mendès' 'Le Mystère du lotus' and 'L'Enfant Krishna'. Those Baudelaire poems selected ~~were not~~ <sup>taken from</sup> the 'Tableaux parisiens' while those of Coppée relied on the theme of ennui rather than that of the city. The edition of 1869 betrayed a considerable change of emphasis with a collection of Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs published, a Méral poem entitled 'La Ville', a 'Sonnet parisien' by Gabriel Marc and an Eugène Manuel poem entitled 'Le Spectre' which offered a scathing attack on prostitution in the city.

1886 in its turn also marked a particular point in the course of literary history being the date of the Symbolist Manifesto. Though on one level the manifesto merely crystallised in polemic form poetic theories dating back to Baudelaire's 'Correspondances' and therefore was not revolutionary, on another level its call for the discovery of the 'affinités secrètes' and 'ésotériques'<sup>12</sup> of aspects of existence was symptomatic of a renewed interest in the symbolic aspects of Baudelaire's poetry to the detriment of its urban importance. 1886 also had personal significance on the time-scale of the five individuals concerned. Rimbaud, for example, had abandoned European life and literature over five years previously, Nouveau had written his last important city pieces, the Petits tableaux parisiens, in 1882 and Verlaine had completed his, the prose pieces belonging to Mémoires d'un veuf. Charles Cros was a sick man who would die two years later. Only Coppée was still making

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<sup>11</sup> Albert Thibaudet, Intérieurs (Paris, Plon, 1924), p.7.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Moréas in the 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', Le Figaro 18 September 1886.

regular contributions as a city poet in the late 1880s, though it could be argued that by this point his poetry had lost the original charm and freshness it had displayed in earlier years. When all is said and done on the question of dates, it must be admitted that a certain amount of leeway has been allowed in relation to the two decades chosen. However justifiable particular years may be in some respects, in the final analysis they often come to represent too restrictive a set of guidelines. Verlaine's 1865 article on Baudelaire is a noticeable example of a key text which falls outside the catchment area of the thesis yet is too important to be ignored. The same point could be made of some of Coppée's later verse composed after 1886.

Finally those central notions of the city and poetry which feature in the title of the thesis also deserve some clarification. The thesis could almost have been entitled 'Paris and Poetry' if it had not been for rare poems by Rimbaud and Verlaine which touch on Brussels and London and for the 'Villes' series of the Illuminations which, in view of their author's deliberately vague title, it was felt would have been unfair to restrict to a specifically Parisian study. So the general term 'city' was held to be preferable. In a geographical sense, therefore, 'city' has been used to refer to the three great metropoli of Paris, London and Brussels. Charleroi has however been included by virtue of its status as an industrial centre, whereas Charleville and Arras (considered to be provincial towns rather than cities by the poets who refer to them) occur for the contrast they offer to the three European capitals mentioned. As regards defining a city poem by its content and subject matter, attention has been paid not merely to poems where a verifiable and authentic city scene is portrayed, complete with use of proper names, local colour and recognisable physical details, since it is evidently possible for the city to pervade a poem without the words 'ville' or 'Paris' occurring. Works describing clearly urban experiences, such as those of alienation and transient love, works written from a particular viewpoint which reveals the 'transformation de la sensibilité résultant de la vie citadine'<sup>13</sup> and works concerned with vague urban notions such as

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<sup>13</sup> France Joxe, 'Ville et modernité dans Les Fleurs du Mal', Europe 45 (April-June 1967), 139-162 (p.148).

Parisianism or noctambulism all find a place beside the more descriptive pieces considered. A strict definition of a city poet was not considered essential at this stage of the study since the proportion as well as the calibre of city-poetry in the works of each writer varies so much and renders generalizations impossible. To guard against an unbalanced view of the five figures they have thus been considered less as city poets from the outset but rather as poets who lived and worked in cities and who were inevitably inspired, consciously or unconsciously by their surroundings. The term 'poetry' refers both to poems in verse and prose and on certain occasions has been extended to embrace journalistic pieces on the boundary of prose poetry and poetic prose such as Nouveau's Petits tableaux parisiens. This has allowed necessary attention to be given to a selection of relatively little-studied works in both genres, such as Verlaine's prose Mémoires d'un veuf, for example, which have been frequently ignored in favour of his poetry in verse and in particular to two Rimbaud verse poems, namely 'Bruxelles' and 'Est-elle aimée?', which have often been neglected in favour of his prose Illuminations.

In a general sense the city in the nineteenth century offered a virtually inexhaustible theme 'lourde d'une masse poétique'.<sup>14</sup> Visually it was a kaleidoscope, offering a captivating and varied spectacle to the sensitive observer. Physically it was a labyrinth, formed of buildings and décor which could suggest a vital human presence on occasions, but also, in moments of depression, could be fraught with symbols of loneliness and reminders of mortality. Beyond the traditional salutation of the city as a centre of civilisation or the rhetorical condemnation of the urban environment as corrupt and corrupting, the city theme was endowed with a personal dimension to be discovered and explored by each individual poet. The discovery and exploration of the city theme by Coppée, Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud in the two decades following Baudelaire's death, is the subject of the thesis in hand. Attention will thus be given to illustrating the full variety of these poets' reliance on the city theme in terms of their personal choice of subject matter and use of poetic techniques. Detailed reference will be made to individual texts. The thesis will also endeavour to isolate the individuality of each poet in the sphere of city poetry and to point to those specific

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<sup>14</sup>Luc Duret and Bruno Hongre, Paris et les poètes (Toulouse, Centre régional de documentation pédagogique, 1969), p.1.



factors, (social, political, artistic and so on) determining their originality. A chapter will be reserved for each poet, with frequent cross-references to his four contemporaries, (and to Baudelaire) as is necessitated by a study of this kind. Detailed assessments of the poets' individual contributions to the city theme are to be given at the end of each chapter while a wider assessment of their worth in a tradition of urban literature will be reserved for the general conclusion. Two appendixes have permitted comments on a series of parodies of Coppée's urban dizains by Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau, Rimbaud and by a group of their less illustrious contemporaries and a listing of supplementary parodies of Coppée which featured neither in the Album zutique nor in the Dixains réalistes. It is hoped through this additional information to highlight contemporary attitudes to the one poet of the five acclaimed as a city poet in his own lifetime and to offer more than a limited twentieth-century view of a fascinating period of French poetic life.

## CHAPTER 1

### FRANCOIS COPPEE: A POET OF URBAN NOSTALGIA

Although often criticised for banality and lack of imagination François Coppée was in one respect exceptional among the group of five poets chosen for inclusion in this study. Only he, by virtue of his parentage and place of birth, qualifies to be described as a true Parisian. This is a point appreciated by his contemporaries, critics and poets alike, and by Coppée himself. Adolphe de Lescure has described Coppée as being 'marqué du sceau d'une origine parisienne sans alliage',<sup>1</sup> while Jean Richepin, speaking at the ceremony of inauguration of Coppée's monument in Paris in 1910, emphasised his 'qualité de poète purement parisien'.<sup>2</sup> Coppée makes the following observation on himself in a collection of reminiscences published towards the end of his literary life:

Je suis un Parisien pur sang, né à Paris de parents parisiens, élevé à Paris; j'ai semé sur ses pavés tous mes rêves, j'y récolte tous mes souvenirs. Je n'aime pas seulement Paris comme la plus belle ville du monde, mais comme mon cher pays natal, et je me plais à noter ses divers aspects, comme un amant grave dans sa mémoire les différentes physionomies qu'a revêtues à ses yeux une maîtresse bien-aimée.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Adolphe de Lescure, François Coppée (Paris, Lemerre, 1889), p.4.

2 From the speech of Jean Richepin in Inauguration du monument élevé à la mémoire de François Coppée à Paris le 5 juin 1910 sur la place St François Xavier (Paris, Firmin Didot, 1910).

3 François Coppée, Souvenirs d'un Parisien (Paris, Lemerre, 1910), pp.258-9.

In addition to indicating at this early stage some of the key aspects of Coppée's city poetry (use of memory, pleasure in the variety of the capital for example) which will be considered in depth later, this comment underlines Coppée's pride in his heredity and native city and genuine love for the same.

Coppée's unique standing as a pure bred Parisian naturally affects his attitude to the city, in his case to the city of Paris. From the outset he approaches the subject in a different state of mind from the poet attracted to the capital as a social or literary centre from which he is able to retreat back into the less demanding environment of the province at will. Paris constituted for Coppée not just a literary but a complete personal environment intricately bound up with memories of childhood and as important a factor as parental influence in the shaping of his present character. The real Parisian, as opposed to the 'homme qui vit à Paris',<sup>4</sup> for whom the capital is simply a temporary attraction, will in Coppée's words be obliged to love Paris 'comme une patrie' because

C'est là que l'attachent les invisibles chaînes du  
cœur, et s'il est forcé de s'éloigner pour un peu  
de temps, il éprouvera, comme Mme de Staël, la  
nostalgie de son cher ruisseau de la rue du Bac.<sup>5</sup>

Coppée's relationship with the city is therefore not that of an intellectual observer or one which has grown in attachment through the years but one that is innate and emotional, assured by 'les invisibles chaînes du cœur'. As the poet himself reinforces the point in a later nouvelle,

Le vrai Parisien [...] aime son Paris de cœur et  
d'instinct, comme le Breton aime ses genêts, le  
Bourguignon ses coteaux plantés de vignes, le Nor-  
mand ses profonds herbages, le Provençal ses olivet-  
tes, le Béarnais sa montagne verte et ensoleillée.<sup>6</sup>

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4 From 'Deuxième Causerie faite en 1879 dans la salle des conférences du Boulevard des Capucines', reproduced in Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.165.

5 Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.166.

6 From 'Paris' in the collection Longues et brèves (Paris, Lemerre, 1894), p.225.

This close, inborn relationship between the nascent poet and his native environment makes for a particularly sympathetic and authentic response to Paris and its inhabitants in the mature writer.<sup>7</sup> It is not literary affectation which makes Coppée affirm,

C'est vrai, j'aime Paris d'une amitié malsaine;  
J'ai partout le regret des vieux bords de la Seine,  
(Promenades et intérieurs X)

or

Les humbles, les vaincus résignés de la vie  
Restent mes préférés toujours.  
('Le Roman de Jeanne')

He is speaking rather a personal truth. Similarly on account of his contented Parisian upbringing Coppée's poetic development did not set him up against the environment in which he was born, as did Rimbaud's, nor did he contrive to reject it in any way. Moreover despite his childhood experience being limited to the urban setting Coppée rarely undertook to explore beyond it in later life or to seek his inspiration from alternative spheres.<sup>8</sup>

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7 If the 'communion intime d'esprit et de coeur' (Georges Druilhet, Un Poète français. François Coppée (Paris, Lemerre, 1902), p.71) existing between himself and Paris had the effect of disposing Coppée from the outset more kindly to his subject (often the Parisian public at the turn of the decade 1869-70) one might argue the reverse; that his subject also warmed to Coppée as they recognised in his poetry areas of their capital city and portraits of their fellow inhabitants with which they could identify. The intimate link between the poet and his city did not just represent a one way flow therefore but a dual movement of appreciation and celebration. Appreciation and celebration of Paris and its people by the poet followed by a reciprocal appreciation and celebration of Coppée by supporters of his poetry.

8 A possible exception to this in the early poems is 'Bénédiction' from Poèmes modernes which is set in Spain during a military campaign. The work had a phenomenal success at the time of its composition (1869) as a recitation piece and was considered too well-known to merit quotation by Lescure in his 1889 volume François Coppée.

His parochialism in terms of subject matter may be interpreted as indicative of a lack of ambition, (Coppée certainly, perhaps fortunately did not aspire to great heights)<sup>9</sup> but its positive aspect is that the poet's interest was almost permanently focused on what he knew and loved best. His sincerity in the majority of poems cannot therefore be questioned. Finally reinforcing the criteria dictated by personal taste and upbringing, Coppée also discovered early in his career that Paris' life was in tune with the rhythm of his own poetic imagination. Writing in a letter to his family from St-Gratien in 1869 he speaks of 'la torpeur de la campagne, qui dompte si vite les Parisiens et les rend incapables de toute énergie intellectuelle'.<sup>10</sup> If country life stultified his inventiveness, city life excited it, so it is natural that he should have chosen it as the corner stone for his poetry.

Though rapidly convinced in his choice of the city as a theme on account of his sentimental attachment to it and because of the incentive offered to his imagination by the varied stimuli of the 'ville aux contrastes étranges',<sup>11</sup> it would be wrong to assume that Coppée operated no system of selection in dealing with the different aspects of the theme (city scenery, city inhabitants for example). As he arrived at his choice of theme for strictly personal reasons so he concentrates on those particular aspects of that theme which have significance for him personally either because of the memories of the past infused in them or because of meditations on the present or hopes for the future which they inspire. In the already quoted 'Deuxième Causerie' of 1879 Coppée makes a protracted comparison between the rural and urban individual and states categorically the superiority of 'sentiments' and 'souvenirs anciens [...] que le poète y rattache'<sup>12</sup> as inspirational material for the latter, over the bare physical details of a scene:

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9 Coppée gives a modest appreciation of his own poetry in his speech of acceptance to the Académie Française on 18 December 1884. As opposed to the powerful tones of Victor de Laprade whose seat Coppée was taking, Coppée likens his own works to 'la petite chanson du bouvreuil en cage sur une fenêtre de faubourg'. (Discours de réception à l'Académie Française, prononcé le 18 décembre 1884 (Paris, Lemerre, 1914).

10 François Coppée, Lettres à sa mère et à sa soeur: 1862-1908, edited anonymously (Paris, Lemerre, 1914), p.27.

11 From 'Trois ans après' in Dans la Prière et dans la Lutte (Paris, Lemerre, 1906).

12 Henri Schoen, François Coppée, l'homme et le poète (Paris, Lemerre, 1906), p.40.

Heureux celui qui habite la campagne à ce délicieux moment de la vie! C'est un lit de mousse sous les chênes; c'est le bord d'une petite rivière où bouillonne l'eau d'un moulin, c'est un chemin creux dans la vallée, c'est une prairie de fleurs et de papillons. [...] Mais l'enfant de Paris qui, toujours privé d'air libre et d'horizon, ne voit dans son passé lointain que des rues tortueuses et les quatre murs d'un collège, il faudra bien, s'il est poète, qu'il récolte les souvenirs semés au temps de sa jeunesse sur des chemins déparés et dans des maisons de plâtre, et qu'il sache faire tenir dans un couchant vert et rose, aperçu au bout d'un faubourg, toute la morbide mélancolie de l'automne, et dans une matinée de soleil près des lilas, au Luxembourg, toute la joie divine du printemps.<sup>13</sup>

To convey the comparatively easy task of the country dweller attempting to poeticise his environment Coppée employs images of softness, 'un lit de mousse' and protection, 'sous les chênes' and 'un chemin creux' to describe the natural world. He emphasises its harmonious activity in the image of the mill powered by the strength of a foaming river and points to its dazzling colour schemes, 'une prairie de fleurs et de papillons'. The city poses a greater challenge to the literary man being a harsh constrictive environment, 'privé d'air libre et d'horizon' in which the poet can feel lost ('rues tortueuses') or enclosed ('quatre murs d'un collège') if his own imagination is not capable of drawing the maximum from the simple, everyday scenes and experiences he is offered. Considered in relation to the memories which they evoke or 'relevé par un sentiment délicat',<sup>14</sup> however, city scenes and experiences can be heightened so that ultimately a watery city sunset glimpsed between the rooftops can become symbolic of autumnal melancholy, just as the blossoming of captive flowers in a Parisian park can be as powerful as the flourishes of springtime in nature.

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13 Quoted by Lescure, pp.6-7.

14 Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.159.

The links Coppée perceived between personal sentiment, especially memory, and his immediate surroundings henceforth dictated his choice of those specific areas of the capital to be portrayed in poetry.<sup>15</sup> Born in the rue St Maur, now rue St Germain, in 1842, Coppée lived in the vicinity of the Jardin du Luxembourg in the Quartier Latin until he was twenty and the family moved to Montmartre. His preference for his native Rive Gauche has been noted by Lescure who speaks of Coppée's 'Paris natal' as opposed to the 'Paris élégant', and was affirmed by Coppée himself in the nouvelle 'Paris'.

Je ne suis qu'un vieux flâneur de Paris, on  
le sait, un songe-creux qui choisit pour ses  
promenades solitaires les quartiers paisibles et  
les banlieues mélancoliques. Le bruit torrentiel  
des voitures sur les boulevards m'étourdit;  
le hurlement qui s'échappe du portique de la  
Bourse m'épouvante. [...] Au tumulte des grands  
boulevards je préfère l'extrême tranquillité  
de certaines rues de la rive gauche, où l'on  
entend chanter les serins en cage; et si magni-  
fique que soit l'avenue du Bois sous ses fron-  
daisons printanières, vous me rencontrerez  
plus volontiers dans les allées tournantes  
du vieux Jardin des Plantes.<sup>16</sup>

Primarily therefore many of Coppée's poems belong to the Left Bank and are set in and around the Jardin du Luxembourg<sup>17</sup> and the winding streets of the Quartier Latin<sup>18</sup> rather than in the Grands Boulevards.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere his

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15 The variety of characters used by Coppée are also affected by his personal feelings. This is a point to receive further detailed treatment later.

16 'Paris', p.208.

17 Such as 'Le Banc', (Poèmes modernes, 1869), 'Un Fils', (Les Humbles, 1872), Promenades et intérieurs XXII and XXXVI, (1869), 'Moreau à quatre mains' and 'Matin d'octobre', (Le Cahier rouge, 1874) and 'Au Jardin du Luxembourg', (Contes en vers et poésies diverses, 1886).

18 Such as 'Dans la rue', (Les Humbles, 1872), Promenades et intérieurs XXVIII, XXX and XXXVII, (1869), 'En Bateau-mouche', (Le Cahier rouge, 1874), 'Olivier', 1876, three 'contes parisiens': 'La Marchande de Journaux', 'Les Boucles d'oreilles' and 'Le Roman de Jeanne', (Contes en vers et poésies diverses, 1886) as well as 'Une Aumône', 'Le Bateau-mouche' and VIII of the 'Dixains', also in Contes en vers et poésies diverses.

19 Germain Nouveau on the other hand included a piece entitled 'Les Grands boulevards' in his Petits tableaux parisiens. It was first published in La Nouvelle Lune 4 February 1883.

subject is the 'terrains vagues',<sup>20</sup> of the banlieue<sup>21</sup> in contrast to the bustling commercial centres and aristocratic milieu of the Bois de Boulogne.<sup>22</sup>

The poem 'Ballade en l'Honneur de la Rive Gauche' published in 1890 towards the end of Coppée's career gives a clear explanation and illustration of the poet's preference for the Left Bank area and points to retrospective reasons for this preference which can be applied successfully to earlier poems.

Le Paris chic est sur la Rive Droite.  
Dieu! que d'hôtels loués pour de longs baux!  
Mais ces splendeurs n'ont rien que je convoite,  
Car j'y vois trop de gens qui font les beaux,  
Trop de boursiers, de juifs et de cabots.  
Je le sais bien, c'est là qu'on fait fortune.  
Pourtant ce luxe effréné m'importune;  
Et ma raison, pour lui tenir rigueur,  
N'a pas le sens commun, mais c'en est une:  
La Rive Gauche est du côté du cœur.

C'est la province avec sa vie étroite.  
On dort, la nuit. Ni cercles ni tripots.  
Le bouquineur y fouille dans la boîte;  
Mainte fenêtre a des roses en pots.  
O vieille France! ô coins de tout repos!  
Allez donc voir par un beau clair de lune,  
Quai Malaquais ou bien quai de Béthune,  
Couler la Seine où siffle un remorqueur...  
Mais cela vaut Venise et sa lagune!  
La Rive Gauche est du côté du cœur.

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20 The phrase is used by M. Cherbuliez, Directeur de l'Académie, on the occasion of Coppée's acceptance into the Académie Française. Discours prononcés dans la séance publique tenue par l'Académie Française pour la réception de M. François Coppée le 18 décembre 1884 (Paris, Lemerre, 1884), p.36.

21 Such as 'Adagio', (Le Reliquaire, 1867), 'Le Défilé', (Poèmes modernes, 1869), Intimités IX and X, (1868), 'Petits Bourgeois', (Les Humbles, 1872), 'En Faction', (Ecrit pendant le siège, 1870), and Promenades et intérieurs IV and VIII, (1869).

22 'Le Bois de Boulogne' is also the title of one of Nouveau's Petits tableaux parisiens.



Loin du théâtre à l'atmosphère moite,  
Des omnibus trainés par trois chevaux  
Et des jobards qu'à la Bourse on exploite,  
On trouve encore ici quelques cerveaux  
Sur de vieux airs rimant des vers nouveaux.  
Pour ces naïfs, de politique aucune;  
Et, fichtre! c'est une heureuse lacune.  
On rêve en paix, loin du Paris blagueur,  
Et l'on y vit chacun pour sa chacune.  
La Rive Gauche est du côté du coeur.

Envoi

On vous trompa, disgrâce assez commune.  
Passez les ponts, cher prince, sans rancune  
Ici l'amour fidèle est en vigueur.  
Ma blonde y loge; ayez-y votre brune  
La Rive Gauche est du côté du coeur.<sup>23</sup>

Here we are given a picture of Paris as a divided city on three levels. Literally and geographically it is split by the Seine. On a human level it is divided by the incompatible sentiments of its inhabitants and on a personal level for the poet it is divided by his contrasting attitudes to the different sectors of its population. The Right Bank enjoys material opulence by making the acquisition of money its main concern; yet for all its extravagance 'ce luxe effréné' the rich population of stockbrokers, bankers and moneylenders lack the emotional vitality of their compatriots on the Left Bank. The Rive Gauche on the other hand, is 'du côté du coeur' since its quiet provincial atmosphere (1.11) and the close contacts demanded by its everyday life favour sincerity and mutual consideration among its inhabitants. As well as recognizing in the Left Bank the friendliness, courtesy and simplicity Coppée considered characteristic of his native town he was irresistibly drawn towards this area and the banlieue on a personal level because of the persistence there of the physical stimuli, in terms of sights and sounds, necessary for the imaginative recreation of the Paris 'naïf et ingénu' of his childhood.<sup>24</sup> These two settings are thus repeatedly linked with the theme of memory which plays such a large part in Coppée's city poetry.

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<sup>23</sup> From Les Paroles sincères in Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.80-82.

<sup>24</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.260.

The special power and significance of Coppée's urban nostalgia is clearly demonstrated in a speech made by the poet in 1879 in the Salle des Conférences du Boulevard des Capucines. Speaking again of the 'vrai Parisien' he says,

Dans cette ville dont [...] il connaît tous  
les pavés, mille souvenirs l'attendent, dans  
ses promenades, au coin de tous les carrefours.<sup>25</sup>

Memories for Coppée are thus not just vague and insubstantial phantoms but are thought of in concrete terms, lounging on street corners like long lost friends waiting to accost the poet on his wanderings. Hence the vivid immediacy of the flashbacks brought by his flânerie which Coppée goes on to describe as almost Proustian in impact:

Une paisible rue du faubourg Saint-Germain,  
dont le silence est rarement troublé par le fracas  
d'un landau ou d'un coupé de maître, lui rappelle  
toute son enfance; il ne peut passer devant une certaine  
porte de cette rue sans se revoir tout petit sur sa chaise  
haute. Il ne s'arrête jamais devant les librairies en plein  
vent des Galeries de l'Odéon [...] sans se souvenir de  
l'époque où, ses cahiers de lycéen sous le bras, il faisait  
là de longues stations et lisait gratis les livres des  
poètes qu'il aimait déjà. Enfin il y a quelque part - il  
ne dira pas où - une petite fenêtre qu'il aperçoit en se  
promenant dans un certain jardin public, et qu'il ne peut  
regarder en automne, vers cinq heures du soir, quand le  
coucher du soleil y jette comme un reflet d'incendie, sans  
que son coeur se mette à palpiter, comme il le sentait  
battre, il y a longtemps, il y a bien longtemps, mais dans  
la même saison et à la même heure, alors qu'il accourait  
vers ce logis avec l'ivresse de la vingtième année, et que  
la petite fenêtre, alors encadrée de capucines, s'ouvrait  
tout à coup et laissait voir, parmi la verdure et les fleurs,  
une tête blonde qui souriait de loin.

The proper names mentioned here, Faubourg Saint-Germain, l'Odéon and 'un certain jardin public' (probably the Jardin du Luxembourg) localise the setting of Coppée's reminiscences again on the Left Bank in those 'coins retirés' and 'ruelles excentriques'<sup>26</sup> where he gathered his inspiration.

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Lescure, pp.16-17 .

<sup>26</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.60.

His use of the present scenes for recollection and recreation of the past through memory, his movement from 'spectacle extérieur' to 'spectacle intérieur'<sup>27</sup> apparent here, is also characteristic of his early city poetry as a whole.

'Adagio', a poem from Coppée's first published collection Le Reliquaire (1867) is a representative poem of memory and imagination.

- La rue était déserte et donnait sur les champs.  
Quand j'allais voir, l'été, les beaux soleils couchants  
Avec le rêve aimé qui partout m'accompagne,  
Je la suivais toujours pour gagner la campagne,  
5 Et j'avais remarqué que, dans une maison  
Qui fait l'angle et qui tient, ainsi qu'une prison,  
Fermée au vent du soir son étroite persienne,  
Toujours à la même heure, une musicienne  
Mystérieuse, et qui sans doute habitait là,  
10 Jouait l'adagio de la sonate en la.  
Le soleil se nuançait de vert tendre et de rose.  
La rue était déserte; et le flâneur morose  
Et triste, comme sont souvent les amoureux,  
Qui passait, l'oeil fixé sur les gazons poudreux,  
15 Toujours à la même heure, avait pris l'habitude  
D'entendre ce vieil air dans cette solitude.  
Le piano chantait sourd, doux, attendrissant,  
Rempli du souvenir douloureux de l'absent  
Et reprochant tout bas les anciennes extases.  
20 Et moi, je devinais des fleurs dans de grands vases,  
Des parfums, un profond et funèbre miroir,  
Un portrait d'homme à l'oeil fier, magnétique et noir,  
Des plis majestueux dans les tentures sombres,  
Une lampe d'argent, discrète, sous les ombres,  
25 Le vieux clavier s'offrant dans sa froide pâleur,  
Et, dans cette atmosphère émue, une douleur  
Epanouie au charme ineffable et physique  
Du silence, et de la fraîcheur, de la musique.  
Le piano chantait toujours plus bas, plus bas.  
30 Puis, un certain soir d'août, je ne l'entendis pas.

Depuis, je mène ailleurs mes promenades lentes.

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<sup>27</sup> The terms are those used by Lescure, p.190 .

Moi qui hais et qui fuis les foules turbulentes,  
Je regrette parfois ce vieux coin négligé.  
Mais la vieille ruelle a, dit-on, bien changé:

35 Les enfants d'alentour y vont jouer aux billes,  
Et d'autres pianos l'emplissent de quadrilles.<sup>28</sup>

Section 1, (lines 1-30 of the poem) written in the imperfect tense, form a nostalgic reminiscence on a past phase of the poet's life involving a series of evening meanderings in the outskirts of Paris. The geographical setting is the banlieue where town fades out into country (lines 1-4) while the temporal one, to reinforce the elegiac tone, is crépuscule, the mid-way stage between day and night, ('Le ciel se nuancait de vert tendre et de rose'). The poet's wanderings lead him to a house seemingly isolated in this half-world from behind whose shutters issues the sound of muted piano music. On one level the adagio serves to create a whole physical environment external to his own in the poet's mind. He imagines the pianist to be female, 'une musicienne mystérieuse', the room in which she is playing to be sparsely furnished and presided over by the gaze of a male portrait. On another level it conjures up emotional sensations causing the poet to speculate on a relationship between the 'musicienne' and the 'homme à l'oeil fier' and also to sense the pervasive memory of their affair in the house.

Le piano chantait sourd, doux, attendrissant,  
Rempli du souvenir douloureux de l'absent  
Et reprochant tout bas les anciennes extases.

Intensifying his involvement Coppée identifies with the protagonists in the unhappy love affair, he describes himself as 'triste, comme sont souvent les amoureux' and is suddenly aware of the pain and sadness communicated by the silent streets,

Et, dans cette atmosphère émue, une douleur  
Epanouie au charme ineffable et physique  
Du silence, de la fraîcheur, de la musique.

With the final couplet of section 1 the adagio fades and disappears, symbolic of the passing of the love affair or possibly of the death of the 'musicienne mystérieuse'. The poem's striking conclusion 'Je ne l'entendis pas' in the past definite and followed by a typographic space which provides a visual counterpart for the silence left by the disappearance of the music, successfully marks both the end of the imagined relationship and the poet's own abrupt return to present reality. Lines 31-36 form a postscript where Coppée still feels a vague attraction to the 'coin négligé' on account of the con-

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<sup>28</sup>From Le Reliquaire, Poésies 1864-1869, pp.12-13.

trast it offers to the noise and bustle of the city centre, but the area's unique personal value has clearly faded away with the musical stimulus to his imagination and memory.

A more intimate example of the nostalgic theme in Coppée's city poetry occurs in 'Olivier', a semi-autobiographical poem published by Lemerre in 1876. This lengthy work recounts the sentimental journey of a young poet who despite overnight success in the literary world and numerous brief love affairs still feels the need for some deeper experience to give meaning and direction to his life.<sup>29</sup> Characteristically, Coppée's point de départ is a Spring Sunday in Paris where his hero, perceiving the capital's gaiety to be at variance with his own disconsolate mood, decides on departure in search of his ideal. Whilst deciding the direction to take he is inspired by the melody of a childhood lullaby coming unexpectedly to mind and stimulating first a reflection on his dead mother and then the following series of reminiscences on his previous life in the country:

Quand soudain - la mémoire a de ces bons caprices -  
Il fredonna tout bas ce refrain des nourrices  
Qu'il entendait jadis, rythmé par le rouet  
De sa mère, du temps qu'à ses pieds il jouait  
Au soleil, sur le seuil de sa maison de veuve.  
Il se souvint alors de la pierre encore neuve  
Qui la couvre, parmi l'herbe épaisse qui croît,  
A côté de la vieille église de l'endroit,  
Et sur qui, vers le soir, l'ombre du clocher tombe.  
Il résolut d'aller pleurer sur cette tombe  
Et d'en orner de fleurs la simple croix de fer;  
Et, comme si ce fût un souvenir d'hier,  
Il revécut les temps lointains de son enfance.  
- Oui, c'est là qu'il irait. - Et, frémissant d'avance  
De plaisir, il avait sous les yeux le tableau  
Des sveltes peupliers qui se mirent dans l'eau  
En murmurant tout bas leur chanson familière,  
Et de la ville blanche au bord de la rivière.  
O l'enfance! O le seul et divin souvenir!  
Lac sans rides! Miroir que rien ne peut ternir!  
Olivier revoyait les plus minimes choses,  
La chaumière natale aux espaliers de roses,

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<sup>29</sup> Coppée's own reputation was made overnight with the first performance of Le Passant on January 14, 1869 with the young Sarah Bernhardt in the role of Zanetto.

Le vieux fusil, au mur par deux clous retenu,  
De ce père défunt qu'il n'avait jamais connu,  
Le grand lit qu'enfermait l'alcôve en boiseries,  
Le bahut de noyer aux assiettes fleuries,  
Et le grand potager derrière la maison  
Où, pour faire la soupe et selon la saison,  
Sa mère allait cueillir les choux-fleurs ou l'oseille;  
- Puis l'école, où parfois le tirait par l'oreille  
Le maître en pince-nez de fer, en bonnet noir,  
Et l'orme de la place où l'on dansait le soir  
Et qu'un jour de moisson avait frappé la foudre,  
Et l'enseigne où Jean-Bart près d'un baril de poudre  
Fume, pour indiquer le débit de tabac,  
Et le lavoir qui rit, et le vieux cul-de-sac  
Où l'on jouait sous la charrette abandonnée.<sup>30</sup>

Not only are the different scenes of home and school and his native village presented in visual clarity before him, the poplar trees are 'un tableau', his memory a 'lac sans rides' and a 'miroir que rien ne peut ternir' but the intensity of the recollection is such that Olivier re-experiences briefly the emotions of this past era, 'Il revécut les temps lointains de son enfance'. This gives him a premonition of pleasure to come and seals his decision to return to the scene of his youth. In the case of the fictional character the untarnished mirror-image of the past retained by memory is matched by present reality and Olivier is quickly accepted back into a rural life whose sights, sounds and characters are barely altered since his childhood. In reality however circumstances do change dramatically especially in the progress-conscious life of a city, hence the value of a poet's imagination in capturing the past. Baudelaire makes the point in 'Le Cygne' from the 'Tableaux parisiens' section of Les Fleurs du Mal, where he says 'Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville/Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel)'; while Coppée reinforces it and insists on the role of memory as a preserving medium in a personal flashback which follows Olivier's sequence of reminiscences to form part V of this poem:

Tenez, lecteur! - souvent tout seul, je me promène  
Au lieu qui fut jadis la barrière du Maine.  
C'est laid, surtout depuis le siège de Paris.  
On a planté d'affreux arbustes rabougris  
Sur ces longs boulevards où naguère des ormes

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<sup>30</sup> Poésies, 1874-1878, pp.14-15.

De deux cents ans croisaient leurs ramures énormes.  
Le mur d'octroi n'est plus; le quartier se bâtit.  
Mais c'est là que jadis, quand j'étais tout petit,  
Mon père me menait, enfant faible et malade,  
Par les couchants d'été, faire une promenade.

[...]

Tous deux nous allions voir  
Les longs troupeaux de boeufs marchant vers l'abattoir,  
Et quand mes petits pieds étaient assez solides,  
Nous poussions quelquefois jusques aux Invalides,  
Où, mêlés aux badauds descendus des faubourgs,  
Nous suivions la retraite et les petits tambours.<sup>31</sup>

Five years after the fall of Paris Coppée explores alone those areas of the Left Bank frequented on walks with his father as a small child. Those elements of the scene which have disappeared or been transformed through time are painstakingly reconstituted by the poet as he turns the clock back. The scrawny shrubs now lining the boulevards were once lofty elms (felled during the siege for timber); there was once a toll gate and far fewer houses. Long-vanished characteristic sights such as the procession of cattle going to the slaughter and the colourful parades of soldiers are re-evoked. As in Olivier's vision of the past but more intensely so, emotions as well as visual miniatures are kindled in the poem. Transformed into the 'enfant faible et malade' of his childhood Coppée is filled with a sense of love and respect for his long-dead father and his Christian virtues which persisted even in relative poverty.

- Eh bien, quand m'abandonne un instant l'énergie,  
Quand m'accable par trop le spleen décourageant,  
Je retourne, tout seul, à l'heure du couchant,  
Dans ce quartier paisible où me menait mon père;  
Et du cher souvenir toujours le charme opère.  
Je songe à ce qu'il fit, cet homme de devoir,  
Ce pauvre fier et pur, à ce qu'il dut avoir  
De résignation patiente et chrétienne  
Pour gagner notre pain, tâche quotidienne,  
Et se priver de tout, sans se plaindre jamais.  
- Au chagrin qui me frappe alors je me sou mets,  
Et je sens remonter à mes lèvres surprises  
Les prières qu'il m'a dans mon enfance apprises.

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<sup>31</sup> Poésies, 1874-1878, p. 18.

Je le revois, assez jeune encore, mais voué  
De mener des petits enfants à son côté;  
Et de nouveau je veux aimer, espérer, croire!...<sup>32</sup>

Appropriately encouraged by the religious terminology used to describe the saintly figure of his father, 'fier', 'pur', 'patient' and 'chrétien', Coppée senses a forgotten prayer come to his lips. As the lullaby in section IV provided a catalyst for Olivier so this prayer works for Coppée intensifying the physical and psychological actuality of past experience: 'Et de nouveau je veux aimer, espérer, croire!...' Although the final aspects of this poem (reminiscences of the poet's father and recreation of past emotion) are purely personal in character (Coppée in fact apologizes in subsequent lines for these diversions from his narrative) other elements, such as details of the surrounding scene for example, are of interest to the general reader and even to the social historian. The strengthening of rarefied personal reminiscences of Paris with memories relating more generally to the reconstruction of time past ensures that Coppée's city poetry is not merely a self-indulgent exercise but also aims to preserve for posterity a Paris that is already, or is soon to be changed beyond recognition. It is thus through a sense of duty that Coppée says of the 'enfant de Paris' in the conférence of 1879, 'il faudra bien, s'il est poète, qu'il récolte les souvenirs semés au temps de sa jeunesse'.<sup>33</sup>

A good example of Coppée's attempt to perpetuate a disappearing era is found in the poem 'En Faction' written during the siege of Paris. This work is doubly interesting as in drawing our attention to those areas previously frequented by himself which he feels are being destroyed for ever by the war, Coppée also perpetuates for future generations the frustrations of a Paris inhabitant during this troubled period of the city's history. The sheer fatigue of a man living a sealed existence, deprived of news from outside, with only the occasional walk around the fortifications or ride on the chemin de fer de ceinture at weekends to alleviate the boredom, is well conveyed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Poésies, 1874-1878, p.19.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted by Lescure, p. 7 .

<sup>34</sup>In his Tableaux de siège (Paris, Charpentier, 1871), Théophile Gautier expresses the pleasure given to him by this latter form of distraction:

En état de siège, lorsqu'on est hermétiquement bloqué,  
c'est une sensation agréable de prendre un billet de chemin  
de fer: [for the circular railway around Paris] on croit  
qu'on va partir; il semble qu'on soit libre! (p.62).



Sur le rempart, portant mon lourd fusil de guerre,  
Je vous revois, pays que j'explorais naguère,  
Montrouge, Gentilly, vieux hameaux oubliés  
Qui cachez vos toits bruns parmi les peupliers.  
5 Je respire, surpris, sombre ruisseau de Bièvre,  
Ta forte odeur de cuir et tes miasmes de fièvre.  
Je vous suis du regard, pauvres coteaux pelés,  
Tels encor que jadis je vous ai contemplés,  
Et, dans ce ciel connu, mon souvenir s'étonne  
10 De retrouver les tons exquis d'un soir d'automne;  
Et mes yeux sont mouillés des larmes de l'adieu.  
Car mon rêve a souvent erré dans ce milieu  
Que va bouleverser la dure loi du siècle.  
Jusqu'ici j'allongeais la chaîne de mon piège;  
15 Triste captif, ayant Paris pour ma prison,  
Longtemps ce fut ici pour moi tout l'horizon;  
Ici j'ai pris l'amour des couchants verts et roses;  
Penché dès le matin sur des papiers moroses,  
Dans une chambre où ma fantaisie étouffait,  
20 C'est ici que souvent, le soir, j'ai satisfait,  
A cette heure où la nuit monte au ciel et le gagne,  
Mon désir de lointain, d'air libre et de campagne.  
Me reprochera-t-on, dans cet affreux moment,  
Un regret pour ce coin misérable et charmant?  
25 Car il va disparaître à tout jamais. Sans doute,  
Les boulets vont couper les arbres de la route;  
Et l'humble cabaret où je me suis assis,  
Incendié déjà, fume au pied du glacis;  
Dans ce champ dépouillé, morne comme une tombe,  
30 Il croule, abandonné. Regardez. Une bombe  
A crevé ces vieux murs qui gênaient pour le tir;  
Et, tels que mon regret qui ne veut point partir,  
Se brûlant au vieux toit, quelques pigeons fidèles  
L'entourent, en criant, de leurs battement d'ailes.<sup>35</sup>

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35 From Ecrit pendant le siège in Poésies, 1869-1874, pp.82-84.

The geographical setting is once more the banlieue with the poet sitting on the ramparts of the city looking out towards the enigmatic environment of suburbia. Neither city nor country in peacetime, during the war the banlieue has become a forbidden no-man's-land. Like his fellow Parisian inhabitants Coppée is now literally trapped in the urban enclave, though at the same time as his body is imprisoned, his poetic imagination strives to see beyond to his past haven. Brief details of the familiar banlieue scene are discerned at a distance, rooftops nestling among the trees for example and others such as the distinctive smell of the river arrive independently as stimuli from afar. The abrupt realisation that the visible scene, possibly last seen at close range in springtime, has now taken on its autumnal colouring reminds the poet of time's relentless transformations and of his own comparative impotence before them.

Et, dans ce ciel connu, mon souvenir s'étonne  
De retrouver les tons exquis d'un soir d'automne;  
Et mes yeux sont mouillés des larmes de l'adieu.

At this point the increasingly nostalgic tone of the poem is reinforced by the combination of the three motifs of banlieue, autumn and crépuscule ('cette heure où la nuit monte au ciel et le gagne') representing half-way stages; consequently the sudden introduction of the vocabulary of war and destruction in lines 26-33 ('Incendie', 'bombe', 'tir') is rendered more striking in its effect. If the transformations of the seasons are inevitable in the natural world, Coppée implies the transformations of the man-made world wrought by bombs, cannonballs and fire are no less unavoidable in the present circumstances. They are simply less discriminatory in their effects on the area wherein he had previously satisfied his Parisian desire for 'lointain', 'air libre' and 'campagne'. Like the pigeons who refuse to relinquish the memory of a burnt-out house which was their home, Coppée feels it is his responsibility as a poet not to abandon the disappearing landscape before his eyes. 'En Faction' thus commemorates the threatened scene for himself and for future generations.<sup>36</sup>

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36 Coppée's sense of the need to preserve a Paris which was fast disappearing is reflected in two popular contemporary newspapers L'Illustration and Le Monde illustré which both in 1866 ran a series of articles entitled respectively 'Le Vieux Paris' and 'Paris qui s'en va'. As a prelude to this forthcoming series of short texts and engravings of well-known buildings to disappear under the mason's hammer, A. de Pontmartin drew his readers' attention to everyone's

A significant trait linking a large proportion of the poems discussed in connection with the theme of memory is their common use of the banlieue as a setting. Coppée's attachment to the banlieue reveals an attempt by the mature poet to find an equivalent in modern Paris for the quiet and provincial atmosphere of the Left Bank in his youth and also involves the implicit rejection of other areas and aspects of city life appreciated by his contemporaries. Coppée's sentimental attraction to the banlieue over and above that to any other part of Paris and the poems in which this preference is displayed represent probably the high points in his poetical career. Basically Coppée was attracted to the banlieue on account of its distinct difference from central Paris **to which, despite his preference to the contrary, he found himself confined.**<sup>37</sup> The monotonous routine of the working city certainly held no attractions for him as the prolific images of imprisonment employed in connection with this kind of urban environment reveal. In Promenades et intérieurs ll he is a 'prisonnier d'un bureau', in 'En l'Action' he is a 'triste captif ayant Paris pour ma prison' and in 'Le Musée de marine' (Les Humbles) 'forçat de Paris dès longtemps pris au piège'. At the beginning of section ll of 'Un Fils' (Les Humbles) we can sense the poet's heartfelt sympathy for a created character whose tedious existence reflects in part the poet's own experience of city life:

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responsibility to preserve through their imagination those portions of the city due to vanish:

A mesure que le vieux Paris s'efface et que le nouveau déploie ses merveilles il est naturel que l'imagination réagisse contre cette immense débâcle de toutes les poésies du passé. Il n'y a pas de cordeau pour le rêve, et la fantaisie refait à sa guise ce que le marteau démolit. Plus les boulevards s'allongent, plus les rues s'élargissent, plus les maisons s'alignent, plus leurs façades neuves rivalisent de monotonie et de blancheur, plus aussi les souvenirs et les songes, ces pâles oiseaux de nuit, viennent battre de l'aile à cette mince cloison qui sépare, dans notre cerveau, le monde des chimères du monde des réalités.

(L'Illustration 18 March 1865)

37 In the early stages of his career and certainly before the success of 'Le Passant' Coppée's personal income (and that of his family for his father had died in 1862) was dependent on his salary as a clerk in the Ministère de la Guerre.

Et le bon fils connut le spleen dans un bureau  
Le long regard d'envie à travers le carreau  
Sur le libre flâneur qui se promène et fume,

[...]

Le calembour stupide dont il faut qu'on rie,  
L'entretien très vulgaire avec le sentiment  
De chacun sur les chefs et sur l'avancement,  
Le travail monotone, ennuyeux et futile,  
Le dégoût de sentir qu'on est inutile,<sup>38</sup>

Often offsetting the constrictive atmosphere of an office is the escape afforded to the poet each evening by his walk home, a flânerie which almost inevitably takes him to the outskirts of the city and the banlieue. Coppée's banlieue represents a half-way house neither fully rural or urban but wherein the best attributes of both environments are readily accessible. His banlieues can be 'paisibles' or 'mélancoliques',<sup>39</sup> yet 'pleines d'enfance et de jeux',<sup>40</sup> composed of 'ruelles excentriques' and 'coins retirés',<sup>41</sup> or of 'champs en friche'.<sup>42</sup> Their infinite variety forms a further attraction for a poet repeatedly in search of a setting in tune with his own state of mind either happy or sad. In Promenades et intérieurs XII for example the banlieue has become the setting for an open-air ball and is conducive to 'les éclats de rire à pleine bouche' of the participants. In Intimités IX on the other hand its sad and deserted streets mirror the melancholic state of mind of the poet thankfully escaping from the unpleasant and bustling atmosphere of the city centre:

A Paris, en été, les soirs sont étouffants.  
Et moi, noir promeneur qu'évitent les enfants,  
Qui fuis la joie et fais, en flânant, bien des lieues,  
Je m'en vais, ces jours-là, vers les tristes banlieues.  
Je prends quelque ruelle où pousse le gazon  
Et dont un mur tournant est le seul horizon.  
Je me plais dans ces lieux déserts où le pied sonne,  
Où je suis presque sûr de ne croiser personne.

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<sup>38</sup> From 'Un Fils' in Les Humbles, Poésies, 1869-1874, p.26.

<sup>39</sup> 'Paris', p.208.

<sup>40</sup> Promenades et intérieurs III, Poésies, 1869-1874, p.103.

<sup>41</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, pp.59-60.

<sup>42</sup> Promenades et intérieurs IV, Poésies, 1869-1874, p.104.

Interestingly enough on this occasion the visit into the banlieue has a cathartic effect on the poet's emotions relaxing and rejuvenating him, changing weariness and despair into relative contentment. Where previously weighed down by sadness and stifled by the capital's humdrum life, Coppée is struck on his return merely by its rich, human variety and pictorial possibilities.

Et, quand s'allume au loin le premier réverbère,  
Je gagne la grand'rue, où je puis encor voir  
Des boutiquiers prenant le frais sur le trottoir,  
Tandis que, pour montrer un peu ses formes grasses,  
Avec son prétendu leur fille joue aux grâces.<sup>43</sup>

Following on from the banlieue's personal attraction for the poet and its variety of appeal, elsewhere it is revealed as a very fertile area for inspiration and for the workings of the poetic imagination. Frequently the theme in these poems is linked with other popular Coppée motifs contributing to the dramatic effect. These include images of deserted streets<sup>44</sup> emphasising the poet's solitude, that of the setting sun,<sup>45</sup> a popular romantic image and use of autumnal scenery with its associations of death and departure.<sup>46</sup> An early image conveying the awakening of the imagination in a banlieue setting occurs in poem III of the Promenades et intérieurs series. Here Coppée introduces the ancient device of the poet's muse to clarify his point:

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<sup>43</sup> Intimités IX in Poésies, 1864-1869, pp.109-110.

<sup>44</sup> Such as in 'Adagio', (Le Reliquaire) 'la rue était déserte et donnait sur les champs'; Promenades et intérieurs XXX, 'sur un trottoir désert du faubourg Saint-Germain' and Promenades et intérieurs XXXVIII, 'comme le champ de foire est désert'.

<sup>45</sup> Such as Promenades et intérieurs IV, 'pour regagner les maisons déjà loin/Dont le couchant vermeil fait flamboyer les vitres'; IX, 'on n'entend que le rythme inquiétant des pas./Le ciel est rouge; et c'est sinistre n'est-ce pas?'; XXXVI, 'l'allée est droite et longue, [...] / Tout au bout le soleil, large et rouge, se couche'; and XXII, 'voici le coucher du soleil./A l'occident plus clair court un sillon vermeil'.

<sup>46</sup> Such as Intimités VII, 'septembre au ciel léger taché de cerfs-volants/ Est favorable à la flânerie à pas lents' and Promenades et intérieurs XXXII, 'je suis très heureux à ma guise/Lorsque, dans le quartier que je sais, je puis voir/Un calme ciel d'octobre, à cinq heures du soir'.

C'est vrai, j'aime Paris d'une amitié malsaine;  
J'ai partout le regret des vieux bords de la Seine,  
Devant la vaste mer, devant les pics neigeux,  
Je rêve d'un faubourg plein d'enfance et de jeux,  
D'un coteau tout pelé, d'où ma muse s'applique  
A noter les tons fins d'un ciel mélancolique.<sup>47</sup>

In 'En Faction' also he speaks of the banlieue being the area where 'mon rêve a souvent erré' and again in 'Adagio' of 'le rêve aimé qui partout m'accompagne' following him along the 'rue déserte qui donnait sur les champs'. An intensified combination occurs in Intimités X where suggestions of horizon ('au loin') and use of the colour blue, often associated with the ideal, in 'pays bleu' and 'immensité bleue', underline the rêverie of the imagination contemplating the suburban scene. In this latter poem, probably the best ever written by Coppée, the fullest expression of the ideal existence offered by the banlieue and its deep value for the poet is revealed.<sup>48</sup> The poem begins on a haunting note of malaise and nostalgia characteristic of the Intimités in general but especially powerfully conveyed here:

Je suis un pâle enfant du vieux Paris, et j'ai  
Le regret des rêveurs qui n'ont pas voyagé.  
Au pays bleu mon âme en vain se réfugie,  
Elle n'a jamais pu perdre la nostalgie  
Des verts chemins qui vont là-bas, à l'horizon.

Despite Coppée's filial devotion to his native city expressed in these opening lines, the poet's sickly constitution still yearns after another existence perceived in his imagination but as yet inaccessible. This alternative life indicated in the 'verts chemins qui vont là-bas à l'horizon' has never been experienced by the poet, he is one of the 'rêveurs qui n'ont pas voyagé', but it has all the qualities of a lost paradise, emphasis being on forsaken opportunities ('Le regret') and the fruitless efforts ('en vain') to regain a state of grace. The poet's situation is not totally

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<sup>47</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.103. Apart from a brief precision in 'Petits bourgeois', Poésies, 1869-1874, p.31 where Coppée speaks of a house 'tout au bout du faubourg, près des champs' which suggests that the 'faubourg' is farther away from the city centre than the banlieue, Coppee uses the two terms as almost synonymous.

<sup>48</sup> This poem was published for the first time together with other Intimités in the satirical and literary revue Le Hanneton. Intimités X of the Lemerre collection was published as Intimités No VII in Le Hanneton of 17 October 1867. It can be found on pp.111-112 of Poésies, 1864-1869.

hopeless however for like a prisoner who strains at his cell window to glimpse the sunset and sunrise connecting him to a world where he once belonged, or like an exile who climbs a hill for a better view of a land from which he is excluded, Coppée can also attempt to approximate his ideal, in his case by escape from the town into the banlieue, the nearest materialisation in the real world of his 'pays défendu':

Comme un pauvre captif vieilli dans sa prison  
Se cramponne aux barreaux étroits de sa fenêtre  
Pour voir mourir le jour et pour le voir renaître,  
Ou comme un exilé, promeneur assidu,  
Regarde du coteau le pays défendu  
Se dérouler au loin sous l'immensité bleue,  
Ainsi je fuis la ville et cherche la banlieue.

In this environment, different from the capital itself, the poetic imagination can develop fully, spurred on as it is by wonderfully evocative stimuli: mist, clouds and other manifestations of the natural world viewed under the strange and subtle lighting of sunset:

Avec mon rêve heureux j'aime partir, marcher  
Dans la poussière, voir le soleil se coucher  
Parmi la brume d'or, derrière les vieux ormes,  
Contempler les couleurs splendides et les formes  
Des nuages baignés dans l'occident vermeil,  
Et, quand l'ombre succède à la mort du soleil,  
M'éloigner encor plus par quelque agreste rue  
Dont l'ornière rappelle un sillon de charrue,  
Gagner les champs pierreux, sans songer au départ;  
Et m'asseoir, les cheveux au vent, sur le rempart.

In response to the poetic and imaginative potential of the banlieue, in lines 13-18 Coppée's language becomes more stylised and elaborate in character. He speaks in periphrasis, 'mon rêve heureux', 'la mort du soleil' and employs rhetorical vocabulary, such as 'l'occident vermeil' as he is drawn with the dying rays of the sun out from the city towards the physical barrier separating his two worlds, 'le rempart' from where he is able to contemplate his dream. The subsequent section of the poem beginning 'Au loin' and typographically separated from the first part (lines 1-22), presents a complete and masterful statement by the poet of the qualities of the banlieue half-world:

Au loin, dans la lueur blême du crépuscule,  
L'amphithéâtre noir des collines recule,  
Et, tout au fond du val profond et solennel,  
Paris pousse à mes pieds son soupir éternel.  
Le sombre azur du ciel s'épaissit. Je commence  
A distinguer des bruits dans ce murmure immense,  
Et je puis, écoutant, rêveur et plein d'émoi,  
Le vent du soir froissant les herbes près de moi,  
Et, parmi le chaos des ombres débordantes,  
Le sifflet douloureux des machines stridentes,  
Ou l'aboïement d'un chien, ou le cri d'un enfant,  
Ou le sanglot d'un orgue au lointain s'étouffant,  
Ou le tintement clair d'une tardive enclume,  
Voir la nuit qui s'étoile et Paris qui s'allume.

In a complete fusion of natural and man-made factors, attributes of the natural landscape and those of the town, Coppée displays the accessible variety of his ideal environment. The imagery is theatrical with Paris, representing urban life, the focal point in a darkening arena created by the surrounding hills of the countryside. As light fades from the sky a mass of auditory stimuli replace the previously visible scene and fill the twilight with a confusion of individual sounds barely identifiable against the sighing breath of the personified city: the sound of wind in the grass, the piercing whistle of a train, the barking of a dog, a child's voice, the vague and muffled tones of a church organ and finally the distinct sound of a hammer on anvil (suggesting possibly the tolling of a bell) heralding the oncoming night. The image of the poem's closing line, 'la nuit qui s'étoile et Paris qui s'allume', provides a final succinct identification of the two worlds embraced by the banlieue as from his vantage point the poet observes the balanced spectacle of the stars in the night sky becoming apparent as their artificial counterparts, the city gas-lamps, begin to glow.<sup>49</sup>

So far it has become evident that Coppée, an 'enfant du vieux Paris', had a deep filial love for his native town. He was therefore more disposed

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<sup>49</sup> Interestingly enough it is a similar image in Charles Cros' parody of Coppée 'Fiat Lux' that raises this second poem above the level of banality. The last line of the poem reads 'Sans se douter -/Qu'il a diamanté, simple, la grande ville'. See Dixains réalistes par divers auteurs (Paris, Librairie de l'eau forte, 1876) and Appendix I.



towards sympathetic treatment of it at the outset. At the beginning of his career Coppée's poems traced the relationship between the poet and the city on an intimate and personal level. Titles of early collections are even indicative of the poet's preoccupation in this respect: Le Reliquaire (1867) suggesting what is sacred and private, Intimités (1868) what is personal and secret. Coppée's early urban poetry also tended towards the illustration of the link between memory and certain parts of the city, for example the Left Bank where he spent his childhood, but also revealed the unique attraction of other areas such as the banlieue because of the stimuli they offered to the poetic imagination. These compositions, written largely before Coppée's sudden rise out of obscurity in early 1869, though undoubtedly representing for the modern reader the height of his achievement, nevertheless constitute only a minute part of his total poetic output.<sup>50</sup> Overlapping with the early elegiac and personal material yet persisting in time far beyond it is a different category of poetry which might broadly be described as a poetry of social realism, taking for its subject matter the people of Paris, especially those belonging to the lower or unfortunate classes. It was largely on account of this kind of poetry that Coppée came to rank high among the most popular poets of his own lifetime. Ironically it is also because of this familiar, often facile verse that he has passed into the twentieth century with the reputation, not always wholly justified of a 'rimeur des émotions bourgeoises'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> After 1868 Coppée published 15 subsequent volumes of poetry (see bibliography for details), also numerous volumes of speeches, prose tales and between 1869 and 1895 twenty plays and dramatic works.

<sup>51</sup> The phrase, quoted by Armand Praviel in 'François Coppée, poète du cœur', Le Correspondant 307 (10 March 1927), pp.445-455, is employed by Maurice Levaillant in Le Figaro 12 February 1927:

François Coppée? Qui n'est-ce pas? Le petit épicier du Parnasse? L'aède des employés honnêtes et des banlieusards attendris? Le gavroche lyrique, toujours prêt à saluer des ouvriers en grève ou le régiment qui passe, le flâneur des fortifications; le rimeur des émotions bourgeoises.

A similarly rash and oversimplified comment can be found in Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson's book Verlaine, Prince of Poets (Chatto and Windus, 1958). On pages 121-2 Coppée is described as 'a kind of Verlaine with the genius left out, simple, sentimental, humorous'.

Coppée's decision to dedicate himself almost fully to the novel and relatively unexplored topic of the life and surroundings of the Parisian poor<sup>52</sup> was in response to a mixture of motives explained retrospectively in the volume of reminiscences, Souvenirs d'un Parisien. Reflecting on Les Humbles, a collection begun before the Franco-Prussian war but not published until 1872 on which his reputation in this sphere of popular poetry largely rests, Coppée says,

Il (the collection Les Humbles) sort de cette source d'inspiration qu'Horace a si bien qualifiée du nom de Muse pedestre, Musa pedestris, et il marque un pas en avant dans cette voie de la poésie familière où décidément je m'engageais alors. Il m'a semblé en l'écrivant, il me semble encore aujourd'hui qu'il y a de la poésie dans tout et partout, qu'il est permis de serrer d'aussi près que possible, la vérité dans les vers, que le poète, comme le peintre, doit travailler d'après nature, que les sujets les plus vulgaires peuvent être relevés par un sentiment délicat, et qu'il est possible enfin de faire pour les objets ce que le romantisme a fait pour les mots, et d'être réaliste en restant poète.<sup>53</sup>

Firstly his new brand of poetry characterised by Les Humbles was to form a natural extension of the 'poésie familière' displayed in the Promenades et intérieurs. This poetry had ignored the momentous historical and political events affecting the life of the capital and its inhabitants and had concentrated as its title suggests on the portrayal on a small scale and without pretensions of aspects of contemporary Parisian life observed by the poet in his wanderings in the capital.<sup>54</sup> In Promenades et intérieurs IX for

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<sup>52</sup> Coppée was not the first to recognize the poor as a source; Hugo in Les Misérables provides a precedent in the field of prose as do Baudelaire and Manuel in that of poetry; see p.36 of the present study.

<sup>53</sup> From 'Causeries II' in Souvenirs d'un Parisien, pp.153-9.

<sup>54</sup> This 'poésie familière' verging on realism generated a series of parodies of Coppée composed in part by his more illustrious contemporaries. A selection of these were published under the title Dixains réalistes par divers auteurs by the Librairie de l'eau forte in 1876. The 'divers auteurs' included Charles Cros, Germain Nouveau, Jean Richepin et Nina de Villard. See Appendix I.

example the silent dispersal of a tired crowd after a fireworks display provokes a poem with Baudelairian overtones:

Quand sont finis le feu d'artifice et la fête,  
Morne, comme une armée après une défaite,  
La foule se disperse. Avez-vous remarqué  
Comme est silencieux ce peuple fatigué?  
Ils s'en vont tous, portant de lourds enfants qui geignent,  
Tandis qu'en infectant les lampions s'éteignent.  
On n'entend que le rythme inquiétant des pas,  
Le ciel est rouge; et c'est sinistre, n'est-ce pas?  
Ce fourmillement noir dans ces étroites rues,  
Qu'assombrit le regret des splendeurs disparues!

On a similar scale in Promenades et intérieurs XXXVIII two astonished peasants glimpsed wandering in a deserted fairground provide the poetic stimulus:

Comme le champ de foire est désert, la baraque  
N'est pas ouverte, et, sur son perchoir, le macaque  
Cligne ses yeux méchants et grignote une noix  
Entre la grosse caisse et le chapeau chinois;  
Et deux bons paysans sont là, bouche béante,  
Devant la toile peinte où l'on voit la géante,  
Telle qu'elle a paru jadis devant les cours,  
Soulevant décemment ses jupons un peu courts  
Pour qu'on ne puisse pas supposer qu'elle triche,  
Et montrant son mollet à l'empereur d'Autriche.

In the poems of Promenades et intérieurs Coppée also avoids well known legendary or contemporary characters and focuses rather on apparently insignificant figures observed during his day-to-day existence; a dedicated nun teaching a class full of distracted children:

La soeur de charité, rose sous sa cornette,  
Fait la classe, tenant sous son regard honnête  
Vingt fillettes du peuple en simple bonnet rond.  
La bonne soeur! Jamais on ne lit sur son front  
L'ennui de répéter les choses cent fois dites!

(Promenades et intérieurs XVIII)

an exhausted driver returning home after a hard day's work:

Le Grand-Montrouge est loin, et le dur charretier  
A mené sa voiture à Paris, au chantier,  
Pleine de moellons, par les chemins de boue;

Et voici que, marchant à côté de la rue,  
Il revient, écoutant, de fatigue abreuvé,  
Le pas de son cheval qui frappe le pavé.

(Promenades et intérieurs XIII)

or a pensive fisherman on the banks of the Seine, still very much a feature of the Parisian scene:

Assis, les pieds pendants, sous l'arche du vieux pont,  
Et sourd aux bruits lointains à qui l'écho répond,  
Le pêcheur suit des yeux le petit flotteur rouge.  
L'eau du fleuve pétille au soleil. Rien ne bouge.<sup>55</sup>

(Promenades et intérieurs XXVIII)

Secondly in reinforcement of Coppée's decision to enlarge the scope of his 'poésie familière' through Les Humbles stood the poet's growing conviction of 'de la poésie en tout et partout'. For Coppée there were no subjects, human or otherwise, inherently more suitable for portrayal in poetry than any others, hence the limits of what had traditionally been suitable material for verse were considerably enlarged. As a direct result of his catholic approach to subject matter Coppée believed himself responsible for effecting a process of liberation and vulgarisation of poetic subject matter ('faire pour les objets ce que le romantisme a fait pour les mots') and of enfranchising French poetry from the restraints imposed upon it by the Parnassian movement. More important than the mere choice of a new inspirational material however was that the poet<sup>should</sup> rise to the challenge of banal subjects and by applying his imagination and sentiments to the discovery of their 'poésie cachée',<sup>56</sup> render previously unacceptable material satisfactory to the demands of his public.<sup>57</sup> Thirdly Coppée's change of direction in Les Humbles was in response to a personal ambition to 'serrer, aussi près que possible la vérité dans les vers', to 'travailler d'après nature', in brief to be 'réaliste en restant poète'. This, if Coppée was to adhere to the realist code

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<sup>55</sup> These excerpts are taken from Poésies 1869-1874, pages 107, 126, 113, 109 and 119 respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Lescure, p.152.

<sup>57</sup> Coppée was of course not unique in his belief that a poetic temperament was capable of heightening unpoetic subjects and of thus greatly increasing the range of acceptable material. A key example of precedence is Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' from Les Fleurs du Mal where an obscene and horrible description of a rotting animal carcass leads the poet into meditation on death and his need to conserve the memory of the living through the powers of his imagination.

already established in the realm of prose fiction, would entail a sincere portrayal of rounded characters in a convincing social background in time and space conveyed by the use of ample detail and local colour; also perhaps as in Flaubert's notion of realism it should involve a sense of impersonality and a scientific approach to writing in which accuracy plays a key role. How far Coppée's concept of realism in poetry matched or modified these criteria will be shown by a detailed study of selected poems from the period during and after Les Humbles.

To take Coppée's description of Parisian décor (as opposed to his use of the city's human characters) first, his poetry reveals frequent examples where a pictorial web of what might be termed realist description matching the texture of nineteenth-century Paris is constructed. A particularly determined effort to create such realist tableaux is offered by sections II and III of 'Olivier' which describe respectively the sights and sounds of a Spring Sunday in the capital and Olivier's unsuccessful attempts to find 'quelque coin solitaire' away from the festive occupations of Paris' 'immense famille':

Le peuple du quartier populaire et lointain  
Bornant le Luxembourg et le pays Latin,  
Allait aux bois voisins, foule bruyante et gaie,  
- Car c'était justement un dimanche de paie, -

[...]

Des amoureux allaient, gais comme une chanson,  
Faire leur nid d'un jour à Sceaux, à Robinson,  
Sous les bosquets poudreux où l'on sert des fritures.  
Des gens à mirliton surchargeaient les voitures.  
Entre les petits ifs, aux portes des cafés,  
On buvait; et, jetant des rires étouffés,  
Nu tête et deux par deux, passaient des jeunes filles.  
A la foule joyeuse ouvrant ses larges grilles,  
Le Luxembourg, splendide et calme, apparaissait,  
Inondé d'un soleil radieux qui faisait  
Plus verts les vieux massifs et plus blancs les vieux marbres.  
A quelques pas, Guignol s'enrouait sous les arbres.  
Et le chant des oiseaux dominait tous ces cris.  
C'était bien le printemps, un dimanche, à Paris.

('Olivier', section II, lines 43-6 and 55-68)

and

Mais sur les quais déserts, derrière Notre-Dame,  
L'ouvrier promenait son enfant et sa femme.  
Sur les trottoirs les plus paisibles du Marais,  
Le petit monde, assis dehors, prenait le frais.  
C'était un jour de fête et de boutiques closes.  
Pleins de chapeaux de paille et de toilettes roses,  
Sur la Seine fumaient les bateaux à vapeur.  
Dans les squares publics, la bonne et le sapeur  
Commençaient sur les bancs l'idylle habituelle.

('Olivier', section III, lines 3-11)

Both of these excerpts firstly satisfy a criterion of realism in that their references to locations are to a particular, well documented and recognizable city i.e. Paris. Mentions of 'le Luxembourg', 'le pays Latin', 'Notre-Dame', 'la Seine' and the 'Marais' thus contribute to the convincing effect of the piece and also serve to draw the reader into unwitting complicity with the poet in his description of familiar and verifiable scenery. This unexceptional nature of events and places mentioned is important to Coppée's concept of realism and is insisted upon by the poet in the first passage where he assures us 'C'était bien le printemps, un dimanche, à Paris.' and in the second when he refers to the soldier and maid acting out the 'idylle habituelle' in full confidence that the reader would require no further explanation.<sup>58</sup> His desire to 'travailler d'après nature' is fulfilled in his reliance on details associated with the Parisian scene in particular and the French urban scene in general. These include the pavement cafés flanked by miniature trees in barrels, ('Entre les petits ifs, aux portes des cafés/On buvait'), dusty roadside trees and friture stalls ('Les amoureux allaient [...] / Sous les bosquets poudreux où l'on sert des fritures') and the 'quais déserts' and 'bateaux à vapeur' of the Ile de la Cité. Comparable examples of local colour <sup>occur</sup> in section XIV of the poem where Olivier returns to Paris from the country and is acutely aware of characteristic Parisian sights such as the 'fille publique [qui] / Assaille le passant de son regard oblique' and the 'kiosques lumineux' where 'S'étaient les journaux, frais du dernier scandale'. A similar preoccupation with the familiar scenes and objects of external reality is demonstrated in a later Coppée poem, 'Le Bateau-mouche', belonging to the collection Contes en vers et poésies diverses (published in 1886). Despite the superficial impression of authenticity conveyed by this work on its first reading, it is in fact a superb example of Coppée's selective realism in action; a code sometimes

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<sup>58</sup> Coppée's Poèmes modernes (1869) had included a poem entitled 'Le Banc' where just such an 'idylle' was described to the reader.

in tune with, sometimes at variance with the more widely accepted meaning of this problematic term. It shows how well the feel of an age, albeit experienced by a particular individual, can be conveyed in a poem to the general reader.

So as to give the impression of as complete a picture of reality as possible the poem follows a bateau-mouche and its customers on an actual journey along the Seine and through the various seasons of the year.

- On court bien loin, bien loin, chercher des paysages  
Avec des pins brisés sur des torrents sauvages  
Et des paquets de mer tordus sur des récifs;  
Mais le Parisien, dédaigneux des poncifs,  
5 Pour voir des coins charmants et des tableaux intimes,  
Se contente d'aller, pour ses quinze centimes,  
Au bord d'un bateau-mouche alerte et matinal,  
Du viaduc d'Auteuil au Pont National:  
Spectacle intéressant plus qu'on ne s'imagine!  
10 bercé par le hoquet rythmé de la machine  
Auquel parfois l'écho des rivages répond,  
Le flâneur fume et rêve en marchant sur le pont.  
Là, du monde amusant survient à chaque escale:  
C'est l'ouvrier lisant la feuille radicale  
15 Que rédige pour lui Rochefort ou Naquet;  
C'est le bourgeois de Londres, armé d'un Cook's ticket  
Et traînant après lui trois miss en robe courte;  
Le patronnet portant sur sa tête une tourte;  
Le gros homme en sueur qui s'assied et dit: 'Ouf!'  
20 Et la pâle grisette en mince water-proof,  
Avec ses jolis yeux et son teint de chlorose.
- Allez là par un temps voilé de brume rose,  
Par un matin d'octobre ou d'avril, voulez-vous?  
Faites-moi le trajet complet pour vos trois sous.  
25 Et puis, - j'aime à vous croire une âme délicate, -  
Autour des bains Vigier ou près de la frégate,  
Dites-moi franchement si vous n'avez pas vu  
De vrais motifs à peindre et d'un charme imprévu,  
Emergeant du brouillard que le soleil dissipe,  
30 Où le père Corot aurait fumé sa pipe.  
Pour moi qui de Paris fais mes seules amours,  
J'accomplis ce voyage au moins tous les huit jours.

- J'en connais tous les coins par coeur; je me rappelle  
Combien la flèche d'or de la Sainte-Chapelle  
35 Par un matin d'hiver anime le tableau;  
J'ai noté le fracas impétueux de l'eau,  
Quand, cédant à l'effort du bateau-mouche en marche,  
Elle va se briser sous les ponts, contre l'arche.  
De tous ces riens charmants je ne suis jamais las.  
40 J'ai pour ami, devant le port Saint-Nicolas,  
Un vieil arbre isolé qui montre ses racines.  
Puis, quand j'ai bien assez regardé mes voisines,  
Qui du Petit Journal lisent le feuilleton,  
Je descends, à travers la foule d'un ponton  
45 Qui ferait le bonheur des impressionnistes;  
Et, tout le long des quais où sont les bouquinistes,  
Le cerveau tout grisé de tant d'aspects divers,  
Je rentre en feuilletant les volumes de vers.<sup>59</sup>

In illustration of this poet's preoccupation with the visual, this composition is shot through with references and images connected with viewing or pictorial representation. One might quote the 'tableaux intimes' of line 5, the 'spectacle intéressant' of line 9 and more specifically 'de vrais motifs à peindre' in line 28, the reference to Corot in line 30<sup>60</sup> and to the rapidly developing impressionist movement in line 45.<sup>61</sup> Actual detailed visual miniatures are also present in the eager river boat waiting for its passengers ('un bateau-mouche alerte et matinal'), one of its less fortunate customers ('la pâle grisette en mince water-proof') or 'un vieil arbre isolé qui montre ses racines' spotted along the route. Specific geographical locations once more play a part, so accurate that we could confirm the truth of Coppée's observations by reference to a map. The bateau-mouche travels from the 'viaduc d'Auteuil' to the 'Pont National' to pass key landmarks such as the 'bain Vigier', the spire of Sainte-Chapelle and the 'port Saint-Nicolas' en route. We can situate Coppée's description in time as well as place by a series of contemporary allusions present here though on the whole fairly rare in Coppée's verse. The 'ouvrier lisant la feuille radicale/Que rédige pour lui Rochefort ou Naquet' is possibly a reference to La Lanterne set up in May 1868 by Rochefort and with which he was once again

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<sup>59</sup> Poésies, 1878-1886, pp.107-109.

<sup>60</sup> Rimbaud in fact refers to the same painter in his city poem 'Chant de guerre parisien'. Line 19 of this poem reads: 'Au pétrole ils font des Corots'.

<sup>61</sup> This detail suggests paintings like Seurat's 'Après-midi sur la Grande Jatte' (1884-6), roughly contemporary with the Coppée poem, where a similar crowded riverbank scene is portrayed.



heavily involved from 1875-6, but more probably to the paper L'Intransigeant established by the same politician in July 1880. Naquet, a republican doctor, was also in the Parisian news in 1884 on account of his call for a reintroduction of a law on divorce. The 'bourgeois de Londres armé d'un Cook's ticket' is an allusion to Thomas Cook's cheap European travel service set up in the mid nineteenth century. His first organised grand tour of Europe took place in 1856 but the idea was not really granted public acceptance until the late 1860s. The Petit Journal was an extremely popular publication set up in 1863 whose content and low price of one sou guaranteed it a large audience among the Parisian reading public until its closure in 1944. Other brief details of the scene such as the use of English words and phrases: 'trois miss en robe courte' and 'mince water-proof' add to the plausibility of the scene and its situation in late nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>62</sup> Contradicting these characteristics of style in tune with the realist code (visual details, accurate references and contemporary allusions) is the presence of the author whose point of view dominates the passage. Rather than presenting an impression of the world through the eyes of a created character or giving a picture of contemporary society in the tone of an omniscient narrator devoid of comment on the separate visual scenes encompassed, Coppée offers a view of urban reality wherein details of interest to him personally are pushed to the fore and where the reader's response to them is directed by authorial intervention or insinuation. Despite the first section of the poem being written in the third person, the fact that the whole scene is shown in a personal perspective is clear from the mention of

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<sup>62</sup> In L'Illustration 9 February 1867, attention had already been drawn to the over frequent use of English words and phrases in spoken and written French at the time. Among the particular words selected for criticism are 'meeting', 'beefsteak', 'banknote', 'trainer', 'wagon', 'express', 'turf', 'club', 'rail', 'rout', 'box', 'stick', and 'leader', many of which have persisted to provide a matter of heated debate in France today. The journalist's overtly critical attitude to the increased proliferation of anglicisms in French is evident in the sarcastic tone of his article:

Un article de politique, de finance ou de littérature n'est plus considéré comme complet, s'il n'est assaisonné de quelques mots anglais; ils relèvent un premier à Paris, donnent du ton à la côte, et servent d'ornement au plaidoyer. Au Palais, à la Bourse, dans les salons, le discours semblerait pâle ou sans saveur, s'il ne contenait cet ingrédient à la mode.

the 'Parisien dédaigneux des poncifs' of line 4 which is an oblique reference to Coppée himself, the true 'enfant de Paris' who prefers his native city environment to the traditional dramatic and rural sources of inspiration. The poet deliberately sets himself apart from the established order, 'les poncifs', and even in line 9 from the average inhabitant of Paris who is unaware of the fascination of the ordinary world around him; a ride on a bateau-mouche is a 'spectacle intéressant plus qu'on ne s'imagine'. From this explanatory phrase we can already sense at the beginning of the poem that our attention is going to be focused for us not on random aspects of the urban scene but on those parts not noticed or fully appreciated by the undiscerning viewer. Heavy-handed authorial direction of the poem and of the audience response to it is clearly apparent in the second section of the poem (lines 22-48) where Coppée imposes himself immediately: 'voulez-vous?' (line 23), 'Faites-moi' (line 24), 'Dites-moi' (line 27) and so on. In an attempt to generalize his own impressions he flatters the reader's sensibility, 'j'aime à vous croire une âme délicate' (line 25) and thus obliges him to conform with his own vision of the city scene in lines 27-9:

Dites-moi franchement si vous n'avez pas vu  
De vrais motifs à peindre et d'un charme imprévu,  
Émergeant du brouillard que le soleil dissipe.

In the final eighteen lines of the poem (lines 31-48) written in the first person Coppée makes no attempt to hide his own feelings regarding the scene before him as he revels in the description of an area of blatant sentimental appeal and attachment. His own familiarity with this environment simply generates a deeper love for its various aspects expressed in such a repetitive and sentimental manner as to alienate the reader; 'moi qui de Paris fais mes seuls amours', 'j'en connais tous les coins par cœur', 'de tous ces riens charmants je ne suis jamais las'.

This often embarrassingly personal approach increasingly marking Coppée's treatment of city décor in poetry after he had determined to be 'réaliste en restant poète' is similarly apparent in his portrayal of the Parisian poor to whom he turned his attention in Les Humbles and after 1872 the date of publication of this collection. Superficially Les Humbles reflects an attempt to portray the characters of ordinary life in more detail than was possible in the short dizain form of Promenades et intérieurs with this latter collection's anonymous and often faceless figures being replaced by recognizable characters whose station in life and situation in a living social background were already discernible in the titles of the poems themselves. Les Humbles includes poems such as 'La Nourrice', 'Petits bourgeois', 'Un Fils', 'Une Femme seule' and

'Emigrants' where we are confronted with the protagonist's profession or status even before the poem itself begins. 'La Marchande de journaux',<sup>63</sup> and 'L'Homme-affiche',<sup>64</sup> from later collections have a similar direct effect. In these poems the reader is invited to hazard a guess as to the likely environment of the poet's created characters and even in some cases as to their likely physical appearance from the outset. In 'La Nourrice' for example the title creates in the mind's eye a stereotyped picture of a hard-working country lass, conscientious yet full of joie de vivre. We are then reassured when Coppée's opening description, almost in response to our aspirations, conjures up this very figure:

En effet, elle était robuste comme un boeuf,  
Exacte comme un coq, probe comme un gendarme.  
Sa tête, un peu commune, avait pourtant ce charme  
Que donnent des couleurs, deux beaux yeux et vingt ans;  
De plus, toujours noués de foulards éclatants,  
Ses cheveux se tordaient, noirs, pesants et superbes.  
Elle savait filer, coudre, arracher les herbes,  
Faire la soupe aux gens et soigner le bétail.  
La dernière à son lit, la première au travail,  
Aux mille soins du jour empressée et savante,  
C'était le type enfin de la bonne servante.<sup>65</sup>

As in his picture of the Parisian scene in 'Olivier' here the familiarity of what is described is insisted upon by the poet; the nursemaid is 'en effet [...] robuste comme un boeuf', she is also the 'type enfin de la bonne servante'. This has the dual effect of increasing the credibility of the character involved and of wooing the bourgeois reader into a sympathetic attitude towards her. Where in Promenades et intérieurs the poetic evocation would have been forcibly limited to such a visual picture as Coppée presents in these opening lines of 'La Nourrice', in this latter poem, by virtue of a lengthier form, he continues with a narrative thread capable of sustaining a novel wherein the nursemaid type is transformed into a feasible and sympathetic individual. No longer the poet, as in Intimités, but his fictional character forms the point of focus of the poem as she acts out her personal drama. In the case of the nourrice this drama rests on the confrontation between herself as a character from the countryside and the city as a hostile environment.

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<sup>63</sup>From Contes en vers et poésies diverses in Poésies, 1878-1886, pp.3-15.

<sup>64</sup>From Les Paroles sincères in Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.154-164.

<sup>65</sup>Poésies, 1869-1874, p.4.

Exploited by an avaricious husband the nurse has been separated from her own small child and sent by train to the capital to nurse a sickly city baby neglected by his rich and socialising parents. The patronising attitude of these Parisian employers to the country nurse is well conveyed by their superficial and insensitive conversation in section II of the poem. The child's father speaks first:

'Ah! voici cette femme. Elle est fort bien, dit-il.  
Mariée? - Il paraît. - Et son pays? - Normande,  
Près de Caen. - Permettez, chère, cette demande:  
Le docteur n'est-il pas pour celles du Midi?  
- Croyez-vous?' Puis, riant de son rire étourdi,  
La mère dit: 'Pour peu que cela vous convienne,  
Elle est brune, je vais la mettre en Arlésienne.  
Le costume est joli, puis c'est la mode au Bois.'  
Le père eut un léger sarcasme dans sa voix,  
Et, s'en allant:- 'Fort bien. Amusez-vous ma chère'.

The nurse's regional background and rural sensibility are clearly of no interest at all to this haute-bourgeoisie couple. She is simply a necessary household acquisition and a barely human object for the amusement of her mistress. Dressed through the vanity of her employer in a costume from the south when she actually comes from Normandy, the simple nourrice suffers the increased dépaysement and indignity brought about by these 'habits d'opéra-comique' in the hope that her exile in the capital must eventually come to an end and she will be united with her own child.<sup>66</sup> Her timely release comes in winter with the sudden death of the unloved Parisian baby and she is able to return home. There a tragic scene awaits her: her house is deserted, her husband drunk and her own infant son long since dead. This final revelation is too much for the young woman's delicate mental balance already severely strained by the pressures of city life, she loses her mind and spends the rest of her days in an asylum. Despite the

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<sup>66</sup> Coppée's penchant for creating ingenuous rural characters and describing their reactions in a city environment probably reached its height with his 'Lettre d'un mobile breton' from Ecrit pendant le siège in Poésies 1869-1874. Here in a touching epistle to his family at home the experiences of a young provincial soldier in the war torn capital of 1870 are recounted. Despite its obvious potential for sentimentality the poem is nevertheless convincing in its portrayal of its bewildered young hero whose ignorance of the real political facts governing his situation rendered him the symbol of many sectors of Parisian society.

impression of authenticity offered by Coppée's coherent and fast moving narrative thread, his use of dialogue, accurate visual details such as the fleeting visions of the nurse's employers, 'cette jeune et jolie accouchée/Blanche et sur le berceau de dentelle penchée' and the father 'des dossiers sous le bras, en noir, un air subtil', above all by the use of a lower-class character as a chief protagonist in the drama, the poem nevertheless fails to correspond to all the tenets of the realist code. Once again Coppée's main stumbling block is his personal judgement of events which is readily discernible although he does not himself appear as a character within the poem. A hint of Coppée's presence is already apparent in the poem's first line, 'Elle était orpheline' where the emotive and pathetic term orphan is deliberately employed by an author anxious to force his audience's reaction to correspond with his own feelings of compassion for and desire to protect the rural immigrant. The biased description of the nursemaid's journey to Paris 'dans le noir wagon l'horrible nuit passée', the symbolic details of her return home under a darkened sky to 'les champs vêtus de neige' and encircling 'corbeaux' have the same effect of directing the reader's response along lines directed by the poet himself.<sup>67</sup> This intrusive desire to guide his public, if contradicting Coppée's realist ambitions, nevertheless reveals in its overt display of sympathy for his poetic subjects, an involvement with the poor and unfortunate members of Parisian society which sets his poetry apart from that of his contemporary city poets.

Coppée was of course not the first to realise the poetic possibilities of society's failures and rejects. Eugène Manuel, a minor poet and author of Poèmes populaires (1872) had frequently used such figures for inspiration years before Coppée but on the whole his pictures tend to be pessimistic and moralistic in their tone and unrelieved by fellow feeling on the poet's behalf.<sup>68</sup> Baudelaire too had considered the Parisian poor worthy of interest as poems such as 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles' from 'Tableaux parisiens' and 'Le Vieux Saltimbanque' from Le Spleen de Paris reveal. As this latter poème en prose illustrates however, his analogies between the poetic subject and himself were on a totally different level from those of Coppée. Baudelaire's

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<sup>67</sup> The cumulative effect of pathos and unnecessary authorial intervention and its effect on the reader, ultimately alienating him, will receive more detailed attention later.

<sup>68</sup> Eugène Manuel, Poèmes populaires (Paris, Michel Levy, 1872). The primacy of Manuel in the question of inspiration drawn from the poor of Paris is explained thoroughly by Aaron Schaffer in 'A Comparison of the poetry of Francois Coppée and Eugène Manuel', Modern Language Association of America 43,2 (December 1928), 1039-1054.

wretched object of attention in 'Le Vieux Saltimbanque' is an aged acrobat, isolated in a crowded scene, who is no longer able to compete with the jostling groups of clowns, dancers and strongmen for the audience's attention. Haunted by the gaze of this pitiful and moving figure Baudelaire questions the reasons for his inexplicable feelings of sympathy towards the 'vieux saltimbanque'. He discovers in this latter's rootlessness an extension of his own feelings of spiritual alienation in society. In the Baudelaire poem a constant shuttling between the physical and spiritual planes allows an observed city character to provide pointers to the poet's self discovery, in Coppée on the other hand these observed characters are never invested with such profound meaning.

Occasionally city people do represent counterparts for the poet but only on a literal and straightforward level. This occurs where Coppée takes as the basis for sympathetic poems on minor Parisian figures, his shared humanity with these equal members of Paris' 'immense famille' and his personal knowledge of the variable joys and miseries of city life which they too have suffered. In 'La Nourrice' for example the nurse acts as a counterpart for the poet in her experience of bereavement (Coppée's elder sister died suddenly in early life and his father prematurely in 1862), in 'Un Fils' life on the fifth floor and one-parent families are details drawn from Coppée's own life while in 'Le Roman de Jeanne' the heroine's pure and unrequited love is possibly an extension of the similar feelings of a poet who because of his responsibilities to an aged mother and sister was never able to marry. Where Coppée does not rely on experience mutually shared with his poetic subjects to deepen the alliance between himself and them, he nevertheless attempts to sympathise with them in their distress. His role is thus never that of an impassive observer of the human race but of a poet expressing his own clearly personalised view of reality in the city, and ultimately that of a didactic poet attempting to change our own attitudes to the surrounding social scene.

Coppée's personal involvement with his created characters is intensified in those poems where he himself features in the text on the same level of reality as his poetic subjects and where there is actual physical contact between himself and the object of his pity. In Intimités XIII this occurs as the poet and his mistress walk on an icy winter's day among the fashionable couples along a Paris avenue. They are suddenly jolted out of their complacency by a ragged flower girl who appears before them:

Le soleil froid donnait un ton rose au grésil

Et le ciel de novembre avait des airs d'avril.

Nous voulions profiter de la belle gelée.

Moi chaudement vêtue, sous la voilette et sous les gants,

Nous franchissons, parmi les couples élégants,  
La porte de la blanche et joyeuse avenue,  
Quand soudain jusqu'à nous une enfant presque nue  
Et livide, tenant des fleurettes en main,  
Accourut, se frayant à la hâte un chemin  
Entre les beaux habits et les riches toilettes,  
Nous offrir un petit bouquet de violettes.<sup>69</sup>

Coppée's complete identification with the object of his attention is made impossible by the stark contrast between himself and the child, one well insulated against the frost and the other nearly naked and blue with the cold. The flower girl's offer of a bouquet however forms a catalytic point of contact between them and generates first in Coppée a sense of horror and compassion which he shares with the reader in the authorial intervention of lines 17-18, then a feeling of guilt and shame for his own and his mistress' wealth and happiness.

Elle avait deviné que nous étions heureux  
Sans doute et s'était dit: Ils seront généreux.  
Elle nous proposa ses fleurs d'une voix douce,  
En souriant avec ce sourire qui tousse.  
Et c'était monstrueux, cette enfant de sept ans  
Qui mourait de l'hiver en offrant le printemps.  
Ses pauvres petits doigts étaient pleins d'engelures.  
Moi, je sentais le fin parfum de tes fourrures,  
Je voyais ton cou rose et blanc sous le fanchon,  
Et je touchais ta main chaude dans ton manchon.  
Nous fîmes notre offrande, amie et nous passâmes.

The offer of charity in line 23 'Nous fîmes notre offrande, amie et nous passâmes', is thus an ambiguous gesture of embarrassment and pity wherein the poet recognizes the problem of poverty surrounding him and tries to contribute to its relief but at the same time through his act of giving, accentuates the difference between himself and the unfortunate classes. Despite this distinction which makes Coppée's attempt to identify with his subjects ring false, the poem's last lines,

Mais la gaieté s'était envolée, et nos âmes  
Gardèrent jusqu'au soir un souvenir amer.

Mignonne, nous ferons l'aumône cet hiver.

still seem to express a future commitment to the poor of the city on the poet's behalf. Concrete evidence of this commitment is provided by the existence of

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<sup>69</sup> Poésies, 1864-1869, pp.119-120.

works of circumstance among Coppée's poetry designed specifically for recitation for the benefit of individual charities. These include the self-explanatory 'Aux Amputés de la guerre' and 'La Chaumière incendiée' of Le Cahier rouge (1874), the latter written in aid of house restoration after the Franco-Prussian war, and 'L'Asile de nuit' of Contes en vers et poésies diverses (1880) which produced actual financial help for a Paris hostel for unmarried mothers and homeless women. In a less limited sense Coppée's pledge to the poor and abused members of Parisian society took the form of social poetry wherein the attention of the general public was drawn to problems and evils which they might otherwise have chosen to ignore. This brand of social poetry, already latent in earlier collections and rooted in Coppée's own experience of Parisian life and its people, gradually supplanted the initial sensitive and elegiac tone of his urban verse and provided the basis on which his subsequent sentimental and didactic city verse was founded.

In contrast to Coppée's reputation for triteness and facility in verse, on some occasions he nevertheless surprises us by the problematic and controversial topics he chose to write about. Subjects such as wife-beating and child prostitution guaranteed to offend a nineteenth-century bourgeois audience were employed in the hope of galvanizing his embarrassed readers into action on behalf of the abused party. Others such as fair wages and strikes, both featuring largely in 'La Grève des Forgerons' intended to reveal to the moneyed classes an impecunious way of life of which they were largely unaware yet empowered to do something about. The problem of cruelty is portrayed by Coppée in the context of worker and bourgeois households which might serve as an indication of the widespread nature of this problem in nineteenth-century Paris. In 'Une Femme seule' of Les Humbles, the personality of the single woman is the poet's main concern, however he does not shrink from alluding to the social evil which has caused her separation in the opening lines of the poem:

Dans le salon bourgeois où je l'ai rencontrée,  
Ses yeux doux et craintifs, son front d'ange proscrit,  
M'attirent d'abord vers elle, et l'on m'apprit  
Que d'un mari brutal elle était séparée.<sup>70</sup>

In 'Le Père' from Poèmes modernes (1869) the problem is central to a piece of social criticism oddly combining horror and sentimentality. The poem basically tells of how a drunken man's beating of his mistress suddenly comes to an end when a child is born to the woman and paternal feelings overcome the father's spirit of aggression. The key question of drunkenness leading to senseless cruelty is expressed starkly in the poem's opening line, 'Il rentrait toujours

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<sup>70</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.56.



ivre et battait sa maîtresse'.<sup>71</sup> Typically in this early poem however the poet does not condemn his poetic subject for a congenital wickedness but instead points to the connection between his social deprivation and his criminal tendencies:

Deux sombres forgerons, le Vice et la Détresse,  
Avaient rivé la chaîne à ces deux malheureux.

Child prostitution features specifically in two Coppée poems belonging to the late collection of 1890 Les Paroles sincères, namely 'A une piece d'or' and 'Pâleur'. The first is a series of musings on the possible use of a gold coin which despite its unavoidable necessity in everyday life Coppée feels to be more often than not squandered on luxurious or vicious pursuits such as expensive food and debauchery rather than spent wisely. One of its most corrupt uses is in payment for the services of a girl prostitute.

Souvent tu [the 'piece d'or'] fus mise, discrète,  
Par un vieillard aux yeux luisants,  
Dans la main de la proxénète  
Dévoilant un sein de quinze ans;

Et dans la froide indifférence,  
Tu payais, sans t'en émouvoir,  
Le matin, quelque conscience,  
Et quelque débauche le soir.<sup>72</sup>

The vocabulary of these two stanzas, 'froide indifférence', 'conscience', 'débauche', 'proxénète' and so on and the brief but evocative picture of the child's lecherous client, 'aux yeux luisants' clearly reveal Coppée's stand in relation to this topic as one of condemnation. If in this poem the innocent child-victim of debauchery has the poet's sympathy, in 'Pâleur', also from Les Paroles sincères, Coppée, though pitying, seems more critical of the youthful prostitute who apparently enjoys success in her sinful profession. Three stages of the prostitute's career are shown in turn. Firstly we see her as the 'blonde et chétive apprentie' physically attractive because of her youth ('des cheveux', 'des dents, des yeux!'), fair hair and transparent complexion ('pâle, si joliment pâle!'). She is however already corrupted by her trade, 'Seize ans, l'air déjà vicieux/Et cherchant le regard du mâle'. Secondly she is seen as the 'Triomphante' at the height of her career, opulently dressed and in the company of three lovers at the theatre. By this stage she has lost a little of her infantile grace, her features are 'un peu plus lourds' and her 'grands yeux cernés de noir' are a witness to her degenerate existence and suggest a vague premonition of forthcoming death. The final picture is of the prostitute's naked

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71 See Poésies 1864-1869, pp.192-3.

72 Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.99-107.

body stretched out on a hospital mortuary slab, a mocking replica of the brothel bed. Her figure has now lost its mature contours and the face though still pale is contorted in a death agony and whitened with the horrid pallor of death:

Sur le marbre d'un hôpital  
Hier enfin je l'ai reconnue.  
Le cadavre, au grand jour brutal,  
Montrait sa maigreur froide et nue.  
Le visage gardait encore  
La grimace du dernier râle,  
Hideux sous les cheveux d'or...  
Fi, l'horreur. Comme elle était pâle!<sup>73</sup>

The final social dilemma of strike action and a working man's poverty, both of interest to a bourgeoisie which owned the means of production, is brought to the fore in what was undoubtedly one of Coppée's most popular social poems at the time of its composition and which is also probably one of his most successful ventures in artistic terms in this field: 'La Grève des Forgerons'.<sup>74</sup> The poem is set in Paris in the faubourg and recounts the personal history of an aged blacksmith from his initial position as a respected negotiator with the employers for better wages to his ultimate reduction through threatened poverty and starvation to strikebreaking and the unpremeditated murder of one of his workmates. As probably the first treatment of an industrial conflict in French poetry, preceding Zola's famous study of the problem in Germinal by sixteen years, it stands as an answer to critics of Coppée's banality and conservatism.<sup>75</sup> 'La Grève des Forgerons' is also unusual on account of its form, a dramatic monologue, and not least because of the socialist reforming ideas which make their brief appearance never again to recur in Coppée's poetry. The poem's opening lines arrest our attention by their rhythmic similarity to natural speech, created largely through Coppée's reliance on enjambement rather than classically ordained metric units, as the main protagonist, Père Jean, explains to the tribunal

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<sup>73</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.178-79.

<sup>74</sup> A parody of this piece features in the review La Parodie of 20-27 November 1869. (See Appendix II). The poem itself, which Coppée wished to hold back as the central piece of a larger collection was first published without his consent on the front page of Le Figaro 13 November 1869. A copy of the poem had been procured by a inventive reporter who had attended the 'Soirée de bénéfice de Sarah Bernhardt', at which, on 12 November 1869, Coquelin aîné had recited the Coppée poem.

<sup>75</sup> The claim for Coppée's primacy in this respect is made by E.M. Grant in his book French Poetry and Modern Industry (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1927), p.152.

about to judge him for murder, the prelude to the strike which ultimately cost him his liberty.<sup>76</sup>

Mon histoire, messieurs les juges, sera brève.  
Voilà. Les forgerons s'étaient tous mis en grève.  
C'était leur droit. L'hiver était très dur; enfin,  
Cette fois, le faubourg était las d'avoir faim.  
Le samedi, le soir du paiement de semaine,  
On me prend doucement par le bras, on m'emmène  
Au cabaret; et là, les plus vieux compagnons  
- J'ai déjà refusé de vous livrer leurs noms -  
Me disent: 'Père Jean, nous manquons de courage;  
Qu'on augmente la paye, ou sinon plus d'ouvrage!  
On nous exploite, et c'est notre unique moyen.  
Donc nous vous choisissons, comme étant le doyen,  
Pour aller prévenir le patron, sans colère,  
Que, s'il n'augmente pas notre pauvre salaire,  
Dès demain, tous les jours sont autant de lundis.  
Père Jean, êtes-vous notre homme?' Moi je dis:  
'Je veux bien, puisque c'est utile aux camarades.'<sup>77</sup>

Emerging most strongly from this passage is the ingenuous personality of Père Jean himself, a true representative of Paris' 'humbles'. His willing self-sacrifice on behalf of his fellow workers is apparent (line 17) as is his solidarity with the strikers' cause even after his own arrest (line 8). A reasoned justification for the strike as the correct and rightful weapon of the working class against exploitation is also put forward. The forgerons' action is described as their 'droit' (line 3) and as their 'unique moyen' of fighting

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<sup>76</sup> C. Fontaine, one of Coppée's contemporaries, criticises the poet for lax versification in 'La Grève des Forgerons' in his article, 'Les Poètes français de nos jours, François Coppée', Modern Language Notes, 5 (January 1890) pp.22-25. His abuse of the caesura, the break appearing after 'L'hiver' in line three of our quotation is especially indicated. In this however Coppée was simply following Hugo and to a lesser extent Baudelaire.

<sup>77</sup> Poésies, 1864-1869, p.205.

against gradually worsening pay and working conditions (line 11). This unqualified justification for the strike is however gradually undermined as the story progresses and Père Jean is trapped between the uncompromising attitude of the employers, determined to test the resolve of the workforce by closing down the forge and preventing a voluntary return to work and the more militant of the strikers equally determined only to return to work on their own terms. Once Coppée concentrates in characteristic fashion on the innocent human victim of social and political conflict Père Jean is raised in our eyes far beyond his real status of a simple Parisian workman. His desperate wanderings through the crowded city streets in search of oblivion and escape from the 'concoures d'événements fatal',<sup>78</sup> conspiring towards his downfall have analogies with classical tragedy,

Au bout de quinze jours nous étions sans un sou.

- J'avais passé ce temps à marcher comme un fou,

Seul, allant devant moi, tout droit, parmi la foule,

Car le bruit des cités vous endort et vous soule,

Et mieux que l'alcool fait oublier la faim.

His ferocious slaying of the young activist who accuses him of cowardice in his decision to return to work for the sake of his starving grandchildren would on the other hand not be out of place in a chanson de geste. Père Jean kills with epic strength, 'Et d'un seul coup, d'un seul, je lui brisai le crâne' while his victim lies dead at his feet like a soldier on a medieval battlefield, 'Il était à mes pieds, mort, perdant sa cervelle'. This deliberate shift of attention from scenes of group unity to ones symbolising Père Jean's growing independence and enfranchisement from his fellow workers ensures that the final impression created by 'La Grève des Forgerons' is ambiguous. Clearly the employers are in the wrong in their protracted exploitation of their workers ('Cette fois, le faubourg était las d'avoir faim'), but the more extreme of the strike committee are also implicitly guilty for their part in the ruin of a loyal and respected member of their own class. 'La Grève des Forgerons' thus combines social intent and a semi-didactic approach with Coppée's personal desire to appeal to a wide audience by the creation of a noble and sympathetic main character drawn from Parisian life. In this, the poem comes close to an artistic ideal (described by Coppée from a position of hindsight in the twentieth century looking back over his successful career as a popular Parisian poet) of a poetry wherein the author should decisively break with idealistic notions of 'l'art pour l'art' and instead concentrate on the tastes of the mass audience who would ultimately

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<sup>78</sup> 'La Grève des Forgerons', line 213.

decide his success or failure in financial terms.<sup>79</sup> If 'La Grève des Forgerons' survives examination by a modern reader because its social implications reinforce the purely entertainment value of its fast-moving plot, many of Coppée's less attractive compositions in the field of city poetry fail to measure up to this criterion and can only be described as mediocre. Their failure is due alternately to Coppée's blinkered insistence on extreme sentimentality as a constituent guaranteed to satisfy his reading public or to his overt display in his city poetry of dismal pessimism and a moralistic outlook on life resulting chiefly from his dramatic conversion to Catholicism in the late 1880s.

In his eagerness to pander to public taste for touching scenes and characters drawn from familiar city life Coppée often overstepped the mark between genuine pathos and overdone sentimentality and affectation. Not only are his characters old and poor but they suffer from bereavements and ill health as well. The 'Homme-affiche' (Les Paroles sincères 1891) for example is old, poor, unhappy, semi-paralysed, widowed, bereaved and deserted by his only daughter. Jeanne in 'Le Roman de Jeanne' (Contes en vers et poésies diverses, 1880) similarly has unhappiness heaped on unhappiness until she becomes merely an exaggerated caricature of the Parisian poor she is meant to represent. She lives with her widowed, nearly-blind mother in near poverty and is frustrated by a virginal love for a poet. Elsewhere typically Coppesque motifs and adjectives, fairly effective on a small scale, completely lose their forcefulness through repetition. This is the case in 'Une Femme seule' (Les Humbles 1872) where the social implications of the theme are swiftly dismissed by an avalanche of

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<sup>79</sup> Georges Beaume cites Coppée's advice to himself in a volume of literary impressions written in 1922. Coppée's somewhat cynical attitude to art emerges well from the following excerpt:

Il ne faut pas trop écrire pour soi-même en poète.  
Il faut que vous songiez à la matérielle et la  
matérielle est dure à gagner dans les lettres. Rompez  
bravement avec ces théories de l'art pour l'art,  
souvenez-vous que vous écrivez pour le public. Si  
vous voulez l'attacher, racontez-lui des histoires,  
comme à un enfant. Charpentez solidement votre drame,  
corsez vos intrigues. Il n'a pas le temps de s'intéresser  
à nos rêves.

(Au Pays des lettres. Parmi les vivants et les morts  
(Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1922),).

sentimental terminology used to describe her; she is 'pâle', 'résignée', 'très douce', 'naïve' and 'fidèle'. She has a 'humble regard', a 'voix lente et pure', 'yeux doux et craintifs', 'chastes paupières' and an 'accent/Brisé par la douleur et fait pour la tendresse'. In 'Emigrants' of the same collection the potentially touching spectacle of a group of rural figures out of their element in a Parisian railway station where they are awaiting emigration becomes sentimental and stereotyped because of Coppée's insistent and irritating use of ameliorative adjectives in their description:

Pourquoi donc partent-ils, ces braves gens? Pourquoi  
S'en vont-ils par l'Europe et vers le Nouveau Monde,  
Etonnés de montrer leur douce pâleur blonde  
Et la calme candeur de leurs tristes yeux bleus  
Sur les chemins de fer bruyants et populeux?  
C'est que parfois la vie est inhospitalière.  
Longtemps leur pauvreté naïve, pure et fière,  
En plein champ, près du pot de grès et du pain gris  
A lutté, n'arrachant que de maigres épis  
A la terre trop vieille et devenue avare.<sup>80</sup>

Acting as a safety valve for the more extreme manifestations of sentimentality in Les Humbles however is the technique of irony verging on the comic which illuminates other poems in the same collection. This tendency towards humour was not merely a literary affectation in the poet but a real trait in Coppée's personality, one too readily ignored as contrasting with the accepted view of the poet as an uncomplicated and innocuous individual.<sup>81</sup> It also suggests that

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<sup>80</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.51.

<sup>81</sup> Albert de Bersaucourt in a lecture given in Toulouse on January 12th 1911 entitled Conférence sur François Coppée (Ligagé, Vienna, 1911) summarizes Coppée's character and sense of humour on page 1 in the following words:

C'était un sourire de gamin que le sien, avec de la malice dans les yeux et une vivacité spirituelle sur ses lèvres rasées, sourire ironique et froideur de quelqu'un qui n'est pas dupe. Il se moquait volontiers de lui-même et des autres.

for a time Coppée, as his contemporaries were to be, was aware of the dangers of exaggeration in his own style and poetic subjects and chose to reveal this fact through self ridicule in his poetry.<sup>82</sup> A key example of Coppée's ironic deflation of a serious scene, of his transforming pathos to bathos, is provided by 'Dans la rue' (Les Humbles). Here the sentimentally evocative picture of two ragged orphans preparing themselves for the day at school is gradually invalidated and then shattered abruptly by the poem's comic suggestions.

Les deux petites sont en deuil;  
Et la plus grande - c'est la mère -  
A conduit l'autre jusqu'au seuil  
Qui mène à l'école primaire.

Elle inspecte, dans le panier,  
Les tartines de confiture  
Et jette un coup d'oeil au dernier  
Devoir du cahier d'écriture.

Puis comme c'est un matin froid  
Où l'eau gèle dans la rigole,  
Et comme il faut que l'enfant soit  
En état d'entrer à l'école,

Ecartant le vieux châle noir  
Dont la petite s'emmitouffle,  
L'aînée alors tire un mouchoir,  
Lui prend le nez et lui dit: 'Souffle'.<sup>83</sup>

The 'rigole' in stanza three, meaning a gutter or drain, also has connotations of rigolo and rigoler which lead us to question Coppée's sincerity and serious intent. The incongruous 'souffle' of the last line which conveniently dispels the city scene before us provides a comic counterpart for Rimbaud's 'Un souffle disperse les limites du foyer' from 'Nocturne vulgaire' (Illuminations) and for the 'rayon blanc' which wipes out the architectural scene of bridges and buildings created by this latter poet in 'Les Ponts'.

Coppée's most subtly ironic poem however is 'Le Petit Epicier' of Les Humbles, a masterpiece of tongue-in-cheek humour and double entente.<sup>84</sup> It is a poem designed not to ridicule the minor city character therein portrayed (Coppée, as

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<sup>82</sup> The relation between Coppée's self-parody and his attraction as a butt for parodists will be further developed in Appendix I.

<sup>83</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, pp.64-5.

<sup>84</sup> A parody of 'Le Petit Epicier' appears in La Lune rousse (red. en chef André Gill) 28 July 1878. See Appendix II.

Lescure observes,<sup>85</sup> still retains a 'lointaine sympathie'), but one designed for self-amusement and in the words of Jacques Bordeaux, to 'mystifier le lecteur'.<sup>86</sup> That Coppée succeeded in this latter calculation is evident from the shocked reception his poem was accorded in the serious literary world which Coppée himself remembers with a wry smile in his Souvenirs d'un Parisien:

'Le petit épicier fut considéré comme un crime de lèse poésie par plusieurs de mes confrères, et le poème lui-même, [...] on le traita d'outrage à la Muse. Bref ce fut une véritable tempête dans le verre d'eau du monde littéraire.'<sup>87</sup>

Fortunately in the years since 1872 critical opinion on Coppée's poem has mellowed somewhat and has come nearer to a reading in tune with the author's original intentions in writing.<sup>88</sup> This purpose is clearly stated in Souvenirs d'un Parisien the volume of personal reminiscences published in 1910 from which Coppée's contemporaries of the 1870s could unfortunately not benefit in their interpretations of 'Le Petit Épicier'. Coppée's sense of humour in describing the 'petit épicier' as 'ce scandaleux personnage' is again evident:

Mesdames et messieurs, [...] avant de vous lire 'Le Petit Épicier' et de vous faire faire la connaissance de ce scandaleux personnage, je me permettrai de vous demander si un artiste n'a pas le droit, une fois dans son oeuvre, d'outrer, par caprice, sa manière, d'exagérer ses procédés, d'exécuter par virtuosité pure, sa propre parodie, et si un lecteur un peu avisé n'aurait pas pu découvrir, dans l'équivoque bonhomie des vers du 'Petit Épicier', l'imperceptible lézard de l'ironie.'<sup>89</sup>

Where Coppée does exaggerate 'ses procédés' and 'outré, par caprice, sa manière' will be revealed by a study on the poem in question.

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<sup>85</sup> Lescure, p.94.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Bordeaux, François Coppée, (speech made on the centenary of Coppée's birth), (Paris, imprimerie de Firmin, 1942), p.14.

<sup>87</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.164.

<sup>88</sup> Andre Billy for example describes 'Le Petit Épicier' as 'des vers délicieux, de facture adroite et d'ironie rentrée' in the article 'Coppée, Petit bourgeois de Paris', Le Figaro, 4-5 April, 1942.

<sup>89</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.164.



'Le Petit Épicier' gives insight into the life of a Parisian grocer whose monotonously dull career is broken only by a weekly arrival of stock, bathetically described in lines 7-8 of the poem as 'des tonneaux de harengs-saurs',<sup>90</sup> and 'des caisses de pruneaux'. His chief tragedy however is personal rather than professional and stems from his fear of his wife (role reversal is a stock comic motif) and the consequent failure to father a longed-for child.<sup>91</sup> The épicier's initial timidity turns briefly to anger and ultimately, in old age, to resignation as he lives out his life emotionally sustained by the sticky-fingered children with whom he comes into contact through his job. The poem's first questionable aspect is its title where Coppée brings together the sublime and the ridiculous in poetry and 'épicier'. Though following in the tradition established with Les Humbles for titles wherein the status or profession of the main characters are revealed Coppée seems to be leaning towards self-parody in choosing undoubtedly the most unpoetic and banal member of Parisian society, the 'symbole même de l'esprit obtus, mesquin, pense petit',<sup>92</sup> as his subject. Similarly in the poem's opening line 'C'était un tout petit épicier de Montrouge', highly reminiscent of the beginning of 'La Nourrice' ('Elle était orpheline et servait dans les fermes'), Coppée introduces personal stylistic idiosyncrasies: use of affective adjective and Parisian location only to undermine their seriousness by exaggeration and irony. For example his 'épicier', rather than being 'simple', 'honnête' or 'naïf' is primarily small, 'tout petit' not just 'petit'. He is ambiguously minute in the sense of physical stature, he is 'faible' in his social significance, his 'affaires' are 'chétives', he does not 'vit' but 'vivote'. Montrouge though being an actual working class area of Paris also represents a mocking aural counterpart for Coppée's description of the épicier in line 13 of the poem as a 'petit homme roux'. In 'Le Petit Épicier' Coppée also pillories his own tendency, prevalent

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<sup>90</sup> A prose version of Charles Cros' comic poem 'Le Hareng saur' was published in La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 25 May 1872.

<sup>91</sup> This basically serious problem of childlessness is in no way held up to ridicule by the poet. This is possibly because 'Le Petit Épicier' may transmute Coppée's own unfulfilled wish for a child. As well as appearing incidentally in very many poems, children and especially their relationship with a father figure, are central to a number of other Coppée pieces. The most important is probably 'Angelus' (Poèmes modernes, 1869) which describes how a small boy is brought up alone by two aged gentlemen.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard Plessey, 'Le Poète et l'épicier', Le Bulletin des Lettres, 15 July 1973, pp.241-5, (p.241). Rimbaud had taken a similarly dismissive attitude towards grocers in 'A la Musique' where he mentions the 'clubs d'épiciers retraités'.

in the Promenades et intérieurs, to idealise simple professions such as that of the 'dur charretier' (XIII), the 'canotier' (XXVII) and the 'aiguilleur' (XXXV). The following passage from 'Le Petit Épicier' for example shows us the young apprentice grocer being introduced into the monotonous routine of his trade which Coppée describes in incongruously lofty alchemic terms as 'les mystères de l'art'. The idealistic bubble is then burst as the épicier assumes the flat and irksome qualities of punctuality, sobriety, chastity and thrift more commonly associated with his profession.

Il était de Soissons, et son humble famille,  
Le voyant à quinze ans faible comme une fille,  
Voulut lui faire apprendre un commerce à Paris.  
Un cousin, épicier lui-même, l'avait pris,  
Lui donnant le logis avec la nourriture;  
Et malgré la cousine, épouse avare et dure,  
Aux mystères de l'art il put l'initier.  
Il avait ce qu'il faut pour un bon épicier:  
Il était ponctuel, sobre, chaste, économe.  
Son patron l'estimait, et, quand ce fut un homme,  
Voulant récompenser ses mérites profonds,  
Il lui fit prendre femme et lui vendit son fonds.<sup>93</sup>

The technique of anticlimax based on overliteralisation is re-employed on other occasions in the poem. The épicier's future is described as 'aisée et laide' in line 31 for example while his relationship with his wife receives the same deflationary treatment in lines 69 and 71-4,

Etre père! c'était son idéal.

[...]

Mais les ans ont passé, lentement, lentement.  
Il comprend aujourd'hui que ce n'est pas possible;  
Il partage le lit d'une femme insensible,  
Et tous les deux ils ont froid au coeur, froid aux pieds.<sup>94</sup>

The scarcely veiled irony animating 'ils ont froid au coeur, froid aux pieds' shows Coppée confidently knocking down his own sentimental pictures of married life, life such as occurs in 'Petits bourgeois' of Les Humbles: 'un vieil homme avec sa vieille femme, [...] Retirés tout au bout du faubourg, près des champs'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.16.

<sup>94</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.18.

<sup>95</sup> Poésies, 1869-1874, p.30.

Underlining all these examples of exaggeration, anticlimax and deliberate explosion of his own poetic techniques in 'Le Petit Épicier' and contributing perhaps more than anything else to the poem's success as a humorous piece of self-parody is the uncharacteristic lack of authorial comment by the poet on the scenes and details offered to the reader. Candid indications of his personal stance such as the 'c'est affreux' of Intimités XIII or the 'je n'ai pas trouvé cela si ridicule' of 'Le Banc' (Poèmes modernes, 1869) which attempts to preserve the seriousness of a love scene between a nursemaid and a soldier in a Parisian park, are absent. The way is thus open for ambiguity and for what Coppée calls the 'lecteur un peu avisé' to come to his own conclusions regarding the 'tout petit épicier' and his 'mérites profonds'. Ironically, as we have already indicated, it was this very procedure of overt or implicit self-intrusion through personal moral judgements or a tendency towards sentimentality which Coppée keeps so expertly under check in 'Le Petit [é]picier' for his artistic end, that proved the poet's downfall in subsequent works.

A repeated constituent of Coppée's later sentimental poetry first designed to counteract the preconceptions of his contemporaries towards the working class but which serves to infuriate the modern reader, is what might be termed the poor-but-honest theme which inevitably occurs coupled with eulogistic mentions of the Parisian poor. This motif is rooted in Coppée's idealisation of menial tasks, practised in the Promenades et intérieurs and his desire to show the lower sectors of Parisian society in a favourable light which inspired Les Humbles, but it only reached its peak after 1880 in a series of poems where Coppée's subjectivity attains alarming proportions. Chiefly worthy of criticism in these poems is Coppée's extreme selectivity in his choice of city characters for portrayal and his inevitable insistence on their noble and generous qualities. No chance meetings such as that of Intimités XIII where the poet is challenged by the appearance of a ragged flower girl occur. He is always in control of the situation and most frequently prompts the contact with the object of his attention himself. In 'La Marchande de journaux' (Contes en vers et poésies diverses, 1880)<sup>96</sup> and 'L'Homme-affiche' (Les Paroles sincères, 1891)<sup>97</sup> this is effected in typically bourgeois fashion by the medium of money, in the first instance Coppée buys a newspaper to establish a rapport with the vendor whom he finds an interesting figure in human and poetic terms, in the second he invites the sandwichboard man for a drink in order to 'faire sa connaissance'.

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<sup>96</sup> Poésies, 1878-1886, pp.3-15.

<sup>97</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.154-164.

By over exaggeration in his sentimental assessments of these two ordinary characters (the 'marchande de journaux' has 'des yeux intelligents', she is 'bonne, brave, pauvre' and selfless in her devotion to her consumptive grandson; the 'homme-affiche' is a 'vieux philosophe') Coppée reduces the credibility of his poetry and ultimately risked confirmation through his verse of the general belief in the unworthiness and even criminality of the working classes which his works were designed to contradict.

Probably the clearest single example of Coppée's selectivity and over-bearing emotionalism in his later collections occurs in his treatment of the woman of easy virtue, not the child prostitute who is more often corrupted than corruptor, but the common city whore who becomes gradually transformed into an appealing, even religious, figure. In 'Une Aumône' of Contes en vers et poésies diverses a woman seen soliciting on a street corner is later seen giving money to a young flower girl who has fallen asleep with exhaustion at her stall, an action which in Coppée's opinion is sufficient to expiate her sins:

Fumant à ma fenêtre, en été, chaque soir,  
Je voyais cette femme, à l'angle d'un trottoir,  
S'offrir à tous ainsi qu'une chose à l'enchère.  
Non loin de là s'ouvrait une porte cochère  
Où l'on entendait geindre, en s'abritant dessous,  
Une fillette avec des bouquets de deux sous.  
Et celle qui traînait la soie et l'infamie  
Attendait que l'enfant se fût bien endormie,  
Et lui faisait alors l'aumône seulement.

- Tu lui pardonneras, n'est-ce pas? Dieu clément!<sup>98</sup>

In 'Fleurs impures' of Les Paroles sincères a similar figure is restrained by a 'scrupule délicat' from placing a bouquet of street flowers, the gift of a client, on the passing bier of a dead child. Coppée praises this modesty in stanzas nine, ten and twelve of the poem and forgives her sinful profession in his own mind in the final lines in a similar reference to God to that of 'Une Aumône'.

O fille qui vis dans la honte,  
J'aurais voulu qu'on remarquât  
Et que la foule le tint compte  
De ton scrupule délicat.

Car tu gardais sous tes souillures  
Un coin de coeur chaste et décent.

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<sup>98</sup> Poésies, 1878-1886, pp.95-96.

Tes fleurs t'ont semblé trop impures  
Pour le cercueil d'un innocent.

[...]

Plus que bien des vertus suspectes,  
J'aime ton simple et triste effort,  
O créature qui respectes  
L'enfance jusque dans la mort;

Et l'être à qui par pudeur d'âme,  
Ta main n'osa pas faire un don,  
Est un ange au Ciel, pauvre femme,  
Et demande à Dieu ton pardon.<sup>99</sup>

A total overtaking of the traditionally profane character by the sentimentally sacred one invented by Coppée occurs in 'Mère-nourrice' (Les Paroles sincères) where an erotic dancer makes a hasty exit from the stage at the end of her act only to appear minutes later, decently clad and with a small baby on her arm. The woman's self-profanation is seen as a supreme and justifiable sacrifice for the sake of her child and as such even merits praise from the poet:

Même dans l'infamie et la honte, salut,  
Acte auguste et touchant de la mère-nourrice!  
J'ai manqué d'indulgence envers toi, pauvre actrice.  
Tu faisais ton métier tout à l'heure. Il fallait  
Gagner ton pain pour que ton enfant eût du lait.  
Tu le prends où tu peux, ce pain. La gorge obscène  
Qu'aux regards libertins tu montrais sur la scène  
Est bonne au nourrisson qui tête avec ardeur,  
Et la maternité t'a rendu la pudeur.  
Courtisane en public, mère à la dérobée,  
Je t'excuse et te plains, pauvre fille tombée,  
Quand je te vois remplir un devoir solennel;  
Et je salue en toi cet instinct maternel  
Qui fait que toute femme est sacrée, et qui donne  
A la prostituée un geste de Madone.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the exaggerated pathos of these three poems brought about by the sympathetic vocabulary used in the description of the prostitute figures: 'délicat', 'chaste', 'décent', 'simple', 'triste', 'prude', 'auguste', 'touchant' even 'sacrée', by the poems' dubious theology and especially the grotesque comparisons

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<sup>99</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.139-142.

<sup>100</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.146.

of the last example where the woman is likened to a madonna it is impossible for Coppée to have intended them to have ironic effect. Their date of composition alone, almost ten and twenty years respectively after the composition of 'Le Petit Épicier' confirms this as does their unanimously religious tone undoubtedly inspired in the latter two examples by the poet's religious conversion at the turn of 1889-90. Moreover all possible ambiguity is cancelled out by Coppée through a clear display of his own predisposition towards the characters portrayed through authorial intervention in the text, a technique significantly absent from 'Le Petit Épicier'. In the first example the poet intrudes in the form of a prayer: 'Tu lui pardonneras, n'est-ce pas? Dieu clément!', in the second in an expression of sympathy, 'J'aime ton simple et triste effort' and in the third in one of forgiveness, 'Je t'excuse et te plains, pauvre fille tombée'.

If 'Fleurs impures', 'Une Aumône' and 'Mère-nourrice' seem implausible in their approach to characters from the lower sectors of Parisian society and sentimental in their content and final effect, their personal validity for Coppée, chiefly on account of their religious content cannot be questioned. In a final example however it will be shown how an exaggerated combination of these negative factors of implausibility and sentimentality, in the absence of sincere personal involvement by the poet (apart from his uncompromising desire to pander to the insipid tastes of his audience) conspires to reduce the worst of Coppée's city poems to mere stale and lifeless replicas of his early social urban verse. 'Le Raisin' of Contes en vers et poésies diverses is a particularly extreme example of how Coppée's tendency towards cumulative pathetic detail and mawkish emotionalism can become excessive. Its exaggerated effect is further intensified by its use of an imaginary plot, rather than of scenes observed in Paris as 'Fleurs impures', 'Une Aumône' and 'Mère-nourrice' purport to do, hence no intrinsic limits however vague are set on its contents. The poem opens with a deathbed scene with an aged man surrounded by his impoverished relatives. Having previously refused all nourishment the invalid's family are at a loss as to what could sustain their father through his final hours. Finally in a moment of inspiration, but at great personal sacrifice due to their prohibitive cost, they purchase some out-of-season grapes, talk of which the day before had sparked off a temporary enthusiasm in the ill man. The sight of the succulent fruit merely hastens the dying figure into his grave however while the grapes grotesquely become the envy of the bereaved children's friends as they unpack their lunchbasket at school the following day. Clearly Coppée's choice of subject and plot here is questionable, his treatment of it is also evidently lacking in subtlety and artistic skill. The whole of the poem is

pregnant with the sentimental detail (pawnbroker's tickets stuffed behind the family clock and so on) and predictable, by now almost completely meaningless vocabulary ('pauvre', 'humble', 'crédule', 'petit', 'triste', 'faible', 'malade') which hallmark Coppée's worst efforts in poetry. The following excerpt is a characteristic example:

Le Malade baissait tous les jours. Pauvre père!  
Et, dans l'humble logis, jadis presque prospère,  
Avait depuis longtemps sévi la pauvreté.  
Les sinistres papiers du Mont-de-Piété  
S'étaient accumulés derrière la pendule,  
Et, toujours espérant - le malheur est crédule -,  
La famille vendait tout son petit trésor.  
La timbale, les six couverts, la montre en or,  
L'un après l'autre étaient retournés chez l'orfèvre.  
Au moribond toussant et grelottant la fièvre  
On sacrifiait tout, sans se décourager.<sup>101</sup>

The capitalisation and exclamation mark used to emphasise the central object of attention ('Le Malade' line 1), the theme of the honest family lately fallen on hard times which comes to rival the poor-but-honest motif and the patronising aphorism in line 6, 'le malheur est crédule', do nothing to lighten the dismal effect of this poem. Similarly as the plot progresses punctuated by an emotive series of abstract nouns: 'la pauvreté', 'le malheur', and 'la misère', by increasingly extravagant and tasteless descriptions of the ill man: 'le Malade', 'Pauvre père!', 'le moribond', 'le triste grabataire', 'l'agonisant', and by an enumeration of the incongruous mixture of items offered to the 'malade': a biscuit soaked in wine, an 'oeuf poché', 'du bouillon', and curiously 'trois huîtres', presumably all the family could afford, Coppée's inability to recapture the direct tone and dramatic content of his earlier city poems is revealed. The final lines of this poem, which come as a welcome release to the twentieth-century reader, involve an ungainly periphrasis describing death as a departure into 'l'autre monde où nul n'a sans doute faim', and alone could symbolise the poet's artistic clumsiness and disproportionate reliance on sentimentality in this work.

As the evidence of these last few poems discussed reveals, by 1890 Coppée's city poetry had undergone a dramatic transformation since its reorientation towards a poetry of social realism with Les Humbles. Objective realism in connection with Parisian décor and characters had proved a near impossibility for

<sup>101</sup> Poésies, 1878-1886, pp.87-88.

a poet whose intimate knowledge of and relationship with his native city in his own words matched that of a lover for 'une maitresse bien-aimée'.<sup>102</sup> Similarly sentimentality, already existing in embryonic form in this latter collection, if at first held in check by irony, ultimately contrived to supplant genuine social concern in the poet's mind. Originally sympathetic characters from the lower strata of Parisian society thus often became transformed into exaggerated paragons of virtue, meaningless caricatures of the real characters they were supposed to represent. At first Coppée's religious conversion at the end of the 1880s found its outlet in this increasingly implausible poetry where the poet had apparently sacrificed his own integrity to the demands of audience appeal. Soon however with old age, calcifying inspiration and the external factors of social and scientific change which tended to place the recapturing of Coppée's 'Paris natal',<sup>103</sup> beyond the powers of his imagination the poet's attitude hardened towards his city surroundings and fellow Parisians until pessimism and sombre moralising prevailed.

Les Paroles sincères represents a transition zone at this stage of Coppée's career wavering between sympathy for the poor and outright criticism of them. 'A une pièce d'or' and 'Pâleur', two poems already quoted in connection with the theme of child prostitution, provide a clear example of the poet's ambivalence in the contrasting attitudes of compassion and disapproval expressed in them. In a similar manner other poems of Les Paroles sincères reveal the influence of a gloomier state of mind than that inspiring Coppée's other relatively cheerful, if over sentimental verse. In the aptly entitled 'Pessimisme' of Les Paroles sincères Coppée is at first assailed by doubts regarding the virtues of the Parisian poor when he wonders if his donation to a beggar will genuinely be used to feed a hungry family or if it will be squandered on drink:

Je refuse l'aumône: un pauvre meurt de faim  
Je la donne: un coquin se soule et bat sa femme.  
Et le plus scrupuleux, qu'il se loue ou se blâme  
De sa moindre action ne peut prévoir la fin.<sup>104</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the conciliatory tone of 'Le Père' from Poèmes modernes of 1869 for example where a father figure does in fact waste his money on drink and beat his mistress as a result but where the poet's criticism

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<sup>102</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.259.

<sup>103</sup> Lescure, p.136.

<sup>104</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, pp.133-34.



is reserved rather for the deprived social conditions in which the character is living than for his inherent criminal tendencies. By Les Paroles sincères it appears as if Coppée's earlier feelings of identification with and pity for the poor expressed consistently from Intimités until Contes en vers et poésies diverses were gradually breaking up to be replaced by a definite sense of superiority over these unfortunate members of society. Coppée's increasing misanthropy is also well illustrated in 'La Cloche du faubourg', (written in 1901 and published in the 1906 collection Des Vers français), where he aligns himself foremost with his bourgeois audience rather than with the poor who had formed his source of inspiration in earlier collections. 'La Cloche du faubourg' opens with the poet walking alone in a working class area of Paris, a 'quartier sinistre où le regard du gueux/Sur le bourgeois cosu qui passe est une insulte'. As the poem progresses he becomes gradually aware of the all-pervasive atmosphere of depression and dirtiness weighing down the area which had offered him emotional comfort and artistic stimulation in earlier years:

Par ce soir lourd d'un chaud samedi de quinzaine,  
Dans le faubourg qu'emplit une brume malsaine,  
Le peuple grouille. On sent l'alcool et la sueur.  
Le crépuscule met sa dernière lueur  
Sur les hautes maisons, mais, au fond des boutiques  
Le gaz revêt déjà de flammes fantastiques  
Les alambics de cuivre et les comptoirs de zinc.<sup>105</sup>

Where before Coppée had picked on sympathetic characters in the city scene as objects for his attention now his vision centres on the masses which he evokes in brutal and animalistic terms, 'grouiller' and 'sueur'. Clearly it is not a question of the lively crowds of workers and grisettes from Promenades et intérieurs or of the honest labourers of Les Humbles, but as Coppée says of an unhealthy 'peuple de la rue', 'tous les yeux sont cernés et tous les teints sont bilieux'. Unlike the 'enfant du vieux Paris' they are not emotively 'pâle' but 'morne', et 'las'. Further idealistic motifs of Coppée's earlier verses such as the twilight theme and the use of the faubourg or banlieue as a preferred setting are similarly undermined in this poem. Firstly the city streets have become invaded by a 'brume malsaine' which blocks the sun's dying rays and strangely diffuses the fiery glow of the gaslamps onto the metal surfaces of alcohol stills and café counters. Secondly the evocative and often melancholic faubourg area which had provided the poet with a refuge from the city centre in his youth is now defiled and transformed into a Babylonian metropolis ruled

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<sup>105</sup> Poésies, 1890-1905, p.164.

by sin and depravity. Coppée vents his wrath and disappointment in a tirade directed against the faubouriens whose lack of spiritual life and sincere Christian emotion he holds responsible for the desecration of his childhood paradise. They are 'ces êtres perdus de misère et de vice' ungrateful for Christ's sacrifice, they are a 'peuple athée' who wilfully ignore the call of religion symbolised by the tolling of a distant church bell, 'la cloche du faubourg'. In its conclusion the poem takes an embarrassingly personal turn as Coppée, who has turned to God points to this distinction between himself and the urban population and senses his own identity subsumed in the tolling Angelus. Like the bell it is his duty to tirelessly remind the Parisian poor of their duty to the church and ultimately to secure their salvation through repentance capable of redeeming the most wilful of sinners:

Cette fille aux yeux peints, qui dans le faubourg traîne,  
Peut-être pleurera comme la Madeleine  
Sur les pieds du Sauveur posé dans son giron.  
Ce voyou peut mourir comme le Bon Larron.  
Aussi rien ne me lasse et ne me décourage.  
Les blasphèmes, les cris de douleur et de rage  
N'étoufferont jamais mon tintement sacré.<sup>106</sup>

A similar tone of fanaticism to that displayed in 'La Cloche du faubourg' where city characters are the target for unprecedentedly harsh treatment colours 'Sur la Tour Eiffel' from Les Paroles sincères where Coppée picks up a second

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<sup>106</sup> Poésies, 1890-1905, p.170. An interesting exception to Coppée's harsh treatment of the Parisian population in his poetry is his changed attitude to military personalities who since the days of the Franco-Prussian war had featured in his poetry. Where realistic or sentimental representation of other human categories is replaced by sombre moralising, in the case of soldiers, ameliorative comments and terminology prevail. In 'La Charité du soldat' (Les Paroles sincères) for example the ragged queue waiting at the soup kitchen for its gruel and mouldy bread which in an earlier collection might have expected sympathetic treatment is dehumanised by the poet. A child is described as a 'très vieux singe' and when the food is finally produced the crowd descends on it like wild beasts. The soldiers on the other hand are seen as representatives of divine benediction: 'ces braves enfants [the soldiers], / Sont pareils au Samaritain'. This distinction between richer and poorer contrasts sharply with poems such as Intimités XIII where the difference between giver and receiver generates feelings of guilt on the part of the richer party. Here the décalage underlines and idealises the soldier's charity.

theme of his youth, that of urban décor and architecture and applies his increasingly hidebound imagination to it. Viewing the Eiffel Tower from afar the poet is inspired by a series of derogatory epithets to describe it. It is a 'monstre hideux', (line 4), an 'absurde prodige' (line 9), and a 'géante sans beauté ni style [...] / Symbole de la forme inutile / Et triomphe du fait brutal' (lines 5, 7-8). Worse however than its status as a feeble, man-made attempt at grandeur easily overshadowed in aesthetic terms by the achievements of the Renaissance or the triumphs of the natural world ('Le Mont Blanc hausse les épaules / En songeant à la Tour Eiffel'), is the tower's dubious morality. As a nineteenth-century counterpart for the biblical tower of Babel it has cast a shower of suspicion over its architects and creators and that of pride and sin over the city wherein it is constructed:

Enfants des orgueilleuses Gaules,

Pourquoi recommencer Babel?

(lines 45-6)

Clearly central to all Coppée's criticism in this poem is the personal consideration that the Tour Eiffel, as an edifice symbolic of change, forms a scar on the landscape known to the poet intimately in his youth and so belittles his beloved 'vieux Paris'. Any pity for Paris is thus really a displaced self-pity on Coppée's own behalf as he bemoans the inevitable destruction of his own native environment by the scientific achievements and the changed aesthetic criteria of the modern age. A quite literal illustration of this belittling effect is provided by the poet as he gives us an aerial view of the city from a vantage point half way up the Eiffel Tower and sees Paris below, immobile and reduced to the toytown proportions of a children's game. He refers to it as a 'plan de relief' and a 'morne panorama' and comments on the seeming unreality of Notre-Dame and the Arc de Triomphe, previous landmarks on the Parisian skyline and urban companions of his childhood as they are flattened out before him through perspective.

Et l'on est triste au fond de l'âme

De voir écrasés, tout en bas,

L'Arc de Triomphe et Notre-Dame,

La gloire et la prière, hélas!<sup>107</sup>

The resounding final syllables of this excerpt, the rhetorical and slightly pompous tone of the poem as a whole and the deepening vein of religious fanaticism apparent here and more so in 'La Cloche du faubourg' hint at how, by the end of the nineteenth century Coppée's city poetry had become almost totally divorced from the gentle, haunting and elegiac verses of Le Reliquaire and

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<sup>107</sup> Poésies, 1886-1890, p.133.

especially Intimités. Coppée himself observes this dramatic change of direction at the end of his career in the preface to Des Vers français (1906) where he reveals the two ideologies, both implicit in 'Sur la Tour Eiffel' and 'La Cloche du faubourg', directing his response to Parisian life at this stage in his life. 'Voici pourtant', he says, 'un nouveau volume de vers':

Je l'ai composé sur le déclin de l'âge, en des  
heures cruelles pour les hommes de patriotisme  
et de foi. On ne s'étonnera pas de trouver dans  
quelques-uns de ces poèmes, un écho de mes  
douleurs et de mes indignations.<sup>108</sup>

Coppée's personal and spiritual re-orientation towards the twin abstractions of faith and patriotism though crucial, did not alone account for the replacement of the earlier personal, pictorial or sentimental representations of the city inhabitants or the urban scene by a more wide-ranging, pessimistic and moralising approach to the same themes however. Coppée's declining artistic capabilities also played a part as did the dramatic modifications suffered by Paris, his source of inspiration, from the mid 1860s to the dawn of the twentieth century, the dates between which his city poetry was composed.

Despite several good compositions and numerous interesting and entertaining ones it is evident that Coppée's talents were not those of a poetic genius. The prolific nature of his output alone would have strained the inspiration of a greater man, while towards the end of his life the detrimental effect of his resignation of the quest for originality in favour of a poetry guaranteed to provide 'la matérielle', became increasingly apparent. Coppée's earliest city works, those belonging to the collection Intimités in particular are probably the author's best achievements in the field of verse. This is not only because they were written in the first flush of enthusiasm and before Coppée was put under public scrutiny and pressure after the success of Le Passant in 1869, but also because in the late 1860s Coppée's emotional links with his native city were at their strongest. The poetic richness of the Left Bank and banlieue, the clearly visible links between these areas and the themes of memory and imagination meant that at this stage especially Coppée could 'chanter' the capital city

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<sup>108</sup> Preface to Des Vers français in Poésies, 1890-1905.

'en amoureux'.<sup>109</sup> His strictly personalised visions of city life, unconcerned as yet with appeal to a wider audience, offered a highly evocative atmosphere and convey powerfully convincing emotions unrivalled by later works.

The desire to be 'réaliste en restant poète' in relation to city people and city décor (experimented with in Les Humbles, 'Olivier' and later) marked a new venture in Coppée's poetry but one which ultimately, like the vein of Intimités, proved only temporary in its duration and effect. Initially Coppée's handing over of the centre of the stage to insignificant urban figures or the physical attributes of the concrete world around him undoubtedly had the novel attraction of an almost previously unexplored territory and his serious treatment of the Parisian poor per se and reliance on real verifiable locations in Paris undoubtedly set him apart from his contemporaries. However this genuinely compassionate, social phase wherein the wide audience appeal of his subjects was used to draw attention to the plight of the poor was eventually supplanted by one increasingly reliant on sentimental motifs, emotional vocabulary, intrusive authorial intervention and personal revelation. This poetry though effectively establishing Coppée as the most popular poet of his generation with the reading public, has a distinctly dated flavour a century later and is often offputting in its effects on the modern reader.

By the 1890s Coppée was noticeably losing touch with the kind of city people he previously held in sympathy because of their unfortunate circumstances and their Parisian upbringing in common with his own, and seemed to be siding more and more with the bourgeois audience against the poorer members of Parisian society. A new generation of Parisian poor had sprung up, irreligious and ignorant of Coppée's 'Paris natal', similarly a new city-scape had developed desecrating his former paradise and dulling the stimuli to his imagination his earlier poetry had relied on. Henceforth unable to recapture the intimate simplicity of his former works and apparently unwilling to celebrate aspects of the modern world which contradicted his ossifying attitudes and religious beliefs, Coppée turned away from his original personalised source of inspiration of the city and towards the wider field of great universal themes, religion and patriotism included. When in 'Chauvinisme' of 1903 he claimed,

Ceux de mon âge ont trop vécu.<sup>110</sup>

he had already outlived his significance as a city poet.

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<sup>109</sup> Albert de Bersaucourt, p.64. The quotation is taken from the speech of M. Cherbuliez on receiving Coppée into the Académie Française in 1884. Speaking of Coppée and Paris he had said: 'vous ne ressentiez pas pour elle une demi-tendresse. Vous l'avez chantée en amoureux'.

<sup>110</sup> Poésies, 1890-1905, pp.283-84.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHARLES CROS: A NOCTAMBULIST IN THE CITY

Always in connection with the multi-faceted personality of Charles Cros one is faced with a problem of definition. His independence from established terms of reference has provoked the epithet 'the outsider' from Howard Sutton<sup>1</sup> while Ernest Raynaud, recognising Cros' originality, has pointed to the danger of his possibly contradictory tendencies marking him out as a

Pauvre diable de savant, égaré chez  
les poètes; de poète égaré chez les savants,  
d'un essayiste sans envergure, d'un touche-  
à-tout sans importance.<sup>2</sup>

Cros' chameleon versatility in the literary field displayed in such diverse areas as amorous Germanic ballads influenced by Heine such as 'Nocturne'<sup>3</sup> (Le Coffret de santal), semi-slang lyrics such as the 'Chanson des Sculpteurs'<sup>4</sup> (Le Coffret de santal), rhythmic flowing prose poems such as 'Distrayeuse'<sup>5</sup> (Le Coffret de santal), satirical articles

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1 Howard Sutton, 'Charles Cros, the Outsider', French Review 39 (February 1966), pp.513-520.

2 Ernest Raynaud, La Bohème sous le Second Empire, Charles Cros et Nina (Paris, L'artisan du livre, 1930), p.12.

3 Cros, O.C., p.49.

4 Cros, O.C., p.140.

5 Cros, O.C., p.151.

such as 'L'Eglise des Totalistes',<sup>6</sup> and humorous short stories and monologues such as the hilarious Caillou mort d'amour<sup>7</sup> or L'Homme aux pieds retournés, have earned him the more appropriate title of a 'poeta senza etichetta' from Gianni Nicoletti, an Italian critic.<sup>9</sup> Similarly his varied talents in other disciplines, notably science and the visual arts,<sup>10</sup> have led to his description as 'un carrefour' by the Frenchman Raymond Jean.<sup>11</sup>

The definition and assessment of Cros' poetry has no easier a solution than the categorising of the man and is a problem avoided even by the poet himself on all but the rarest of occasions. One of Cros' few statements with bearing on the key qualities and aims of his works comes in the early poem forming the preface to the 1873 edition of Le Coffret de santal, a poem replaced in the modified 1879 version of that work. Besides this poem providing an introduction to Cros' first edition of poetry it is also significant in that it indicates in general terms the poet's state of mind, attitude to poetry, poetic subjects and the public at a critical stage in his career.

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6 Cros, O.C., p.381.

7 Cros, O.C., p.238.

8 Cros, O.C., p.315.

9 Gianni Nicoletti, 'Charles Cros, poeta senza etichetta', La Fiera Letteraria 15 May 1955, pp.5-6.

10 In scientific matters Cros was interested in various fields of research. In 1867, his automatic telegraph system was one of the exhibits at the Exposition Universelle. In early 1869 his Solution générale du problème de la photographie des couleurs and Moyens de communication avec les planètes were published. In 1877 he first conceived of the idea of the phonograph, while in 1883 he produced his first successful results in colour photography with a reproduction of Manet's 'Printemps' on paper. His achievements in the field of art included a pastel of Nina de Villard seated at a piano and a drawing of the 'Noircisseur de verres pour éclipses' designed as a frontispiece for the Dixains réalistes.

11 Raymond Jean, 'La Voix de Charles Cros', Le Monde 6 June 1964, p.10.

Au plus grand nombre je déplais  
Car je semble tombé des nues,  
Rêvant de terres inconnues  
D'où j'exile les gens trop laids.

La tête au vent, je contemplais  
Le ciel, les bois, les splendeurs nues.  
Quelques rimes, me sont venues.  
Public, prends-les ou laisse-les.

Je les multiplie et les sème  
Pour que, par hasard, ceux que j'aime  
Puissent les trouver sous leurs pas.

Quand ceux-là diront que j'existe,  
La foule, qui ne comprend pas,  
Paiera. C'est l'espoir de l'artiste.<sup>12</sup>

Emanating most strongly from these lines is Cros' sense of superiority over his fellow men. His contempt stems partially from their anticipated incomprehension of his idealist works: 'je semble tombé des nues' (line 2) and is conveyed in the poem by the romantic, Chateaubriandesque pose, isolated from humanity and embraced by the natural world, which the poet assumes in lines 5-6:

La tête au vent, je contemplais  
Le ciel, les bois, les splendeurs<sup>13</sup>

As the poet believes his imagination to be unique so he desires his poetry to be elitist in character too. It is written for the poet's personal satisfaction and for 'ceux que j'aime' (line 10), not for 'les gens trop laids' (line 4) who are excluded from his rêverie. Broadly speaking therefore Cros' concept of poetry in 1873 as a highly personalised vision to which only a few initiated individuals were admitted, contrasted sharply with that of Coppée at the same time. The latter poet, after the success of Les Humbles (1872) was gradually coming

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<sup>12</sup> Cros, O.C., p.1079.

<sup>13</sup> A similar independent stance is taken by the poet in 'Tsigane' (Cros, O.C., p.134):

Un vent nouveau baigne ma chevelure,  
Et je vais, fier de n'être attendu nulle part.



to terms with a brand of poetry and subject matter dictated increasingly by public taste and audience demand. As well as contradicting Coppée's preference for a more popular poetry from the evidence of the preface to the first edition of the Le Coffret de santal, in 1873 Charles Cros' notion of poetry also opposed Coppée's belief in 'de la poésie en tout et partout'<sup>14</sup>, especially in the ordinary and immediate surroundings of Paris. In his poetic preface Cros claims to have sought his inspiration beyond the known world, in 'de terres inconnues' (line 3) or, as he reaffirms in the first poem of his new collection 'La Vie idéale', 'aux pays lointains'.<sup>15</sup> Where Coppée relied on his native town and contemporary life for poetic stimuli in his first collections, Cros here suggests his stimuli lay outside the real world of nineteenth-century Paris. This literary claim and the notion that Cros himself as a man belonged spiritually to a different order of existence from his fellow Parisians, form motifs repeated throughout Cros' poetry. In 'Plainte' from Le Coffret de santal for example, the poet dreams of spending his life 'en quelque coin/Sous les bois verts ou sur les monts aromatiques/En Orient, ou bien près du pôle, très loin,/Loin des journaux de la cohue et des boutiques'.<sup>16</sup> While in 'Testament' (Le Collier de griffes, 1908) Cros seems to have achieved his longed-for sense of liberation from the material world:

Et si je meurs, soûl, dans un coin

C'est que ma patrie est très loin

Loin de la France et de la terre.<sup>17</sup>

This theme of alienation from the real world and circumstances of nineteenth-century Paris, backed up by examples in the poetry such as those quoted, has been frequently pushed to the fore by a critical body upholding Cros' reputation as a personal, idealist, lyric poet, a fantaisiste whose works lack visible connection with the mundane physical

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<sup>14</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.158.

<sup>15</sup> Cros, O.C., p.48.

<sup>16</sup> Cros, O.C., p.94.

<sup>17</sup> Cros, O.C., p.213.

world.<sup>18</sup> Cros has been described as creating his own world through poetry as a replacement for objective reality with which he was unable to come to terms on many occasions. Irene Merlin and G. Germa for example emphasise Cros' substitution of fantasy for reality in strikingly similar terminology in their respective comments on the poet. Irene Merlin says:

Sous son regard rapide [...] La vie se  
changeait comme naturellement [...]   
l'espace et le temps disparaissaient pour  
laisser la place aux merveilles [...] pays  
des merveilles où toutes les Alices du  
monde se seront complues.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fantaisie and the idea of Cros as a fantaisiste are notions common to critical works on the poet and are terms which deserve some clarification. G. Germa in the article 'Charles Cros', La Revue de Toulouse (May 1946), pp.36-46, speaks of Charles Cros' 'cerveau de fantaisiste' and 'existence de fantaisiste' while Jules Bertaut in 'Quand Nina de Villard faisait dîner la Bohème et tenait le salon de l'intelligence parisienne', Le Figaro littéraire 9 February 1959, p.7, calls him a 'fantaisiste en science comme en poésie'. The terms fantaisie and fantaisiste convey a sense of individualistic creativity and bohemianism, suggest a poet victim to his own capricious imagination and are frequently used to describe Cros' humorous verse and monologues. They are used in this sense by Pierre Dufay in an article entitled 'Le Parnasse fantaisiste', Mercure de France 239 (1 October 1932), pp.91-109, where in a discussion of the regular visitors to Nina de Villard's salon in the Rue des Moines, M. Dufay suggests that Cros preferred 'la fantaisie au Nirvana'. The possibility that Cros himself suggested the term so frequently used to describe him and his works is also feasible. He entitled two sections of Le Coffret de santal of 1879 'Drames et fantaisies' and 'Fantaisies en prose'. This seems at least to have directly inspired André Gill's choice of terminology in his compte rendu of this collection in La Lune rousse 12 January 1879. Here Le Coffret de santal is described as a 'véritable écrin dont tous les bijoux scintillent des feux diversement colorés du rêve, de l'esprit et de la fantaisie'.

<sup>19</sup> Irene Merlin, Poètes de la révolte de Baudelaire à Michaux (Paris, Editions de Sèvres, 1971), p.78.

In his summary of the poet's achievements G. Germa is slightly more critical of his penchant for escapism:

Dans son cerveau de fantaisiste,  
n'aurait-il pas délaissé peut-être  
trop souvent la réalite pour la chimère  
et n'aurait-il pas remplacé notre  
machine ronde par le pays des merveilles?<sup>20</sup>

Contemporary Parisians and acknowledged city poets have likewise solely referred to Cros' idealism and fantaisie. Verlaine described his poetry as 'un voyage au pays bleu',<sup>21</sup> while Verhaeren judged that Charles Cros' literary bent was a 'synonyme de rêver' which 'ne lui servait qu'à s'échapper de la vie'.<sup>22</sup> Louis Forestier, the present-day Cros specialist, similarly affirms the poet's reluctance to treat exterior reality in poetry and in particular his apparent detachment from the city life around him:

Chez Cros, on ne devine guère le  
Parisien. Il a pourtant vécu à Paris  
quasiment toute son existence. Cet  
homme, habitué, nous le savons, à  
aller et venir quotidiennement du  
Quartier Latin aux faubourgs de  
Montmartre [...] aime peu la condition  
de citadin. Sa poésie est muette  
à ce sujet.<sup>23</sup>

Admittedly in support of these various views a superficial glance at the poetry reveals a surprising lack of city allusions in the works of a poet almost exactly a contemporary of Coppée (the latter poet was only eight months Cros' senior) and with a common Parisian upbringing and life.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Germa, p.46. (see footnote 18).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Verlaine, 'Charles Cros', Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui 335 (August 1888).

<sup>22</sup> Emile Verhaeren, Impressions, Troisième série (Paris, Mercure de France, 1928), p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Louis Forestier, Charles Cros, Poètes d'aujourd'hui (Paris, Seghers, 1972), p.10. The somewhat different opinion on Cros expressed by Louis Forestier in his all-embracing volume published in 1969 will be referred to later.

<sup>24</sup> Though born in Fabrezan (Aude), Charles Cros moved to Paris with his family when he was barely two years old and lived there until his death in 1888.

Cros' two collections, Le Coffret de santal, first published in 1873<sup>25</sup> and reprinted in an enlarged form in 1879,<sup>26</sup> and Le Collier de griffes published posthumously by the poet's son Guy Charles Cros, in 1903<sup>27</sup> lack the urban titles common to the collections of major and minor Parisian contemporaries alike. One might quote Emile Goudeau's Fleurs du bitume<sup>28</sup> and Nina de Villard's (Cros' mistress in 1873) Feuillets parisiens<sup>29</sup> as examples. Similarly city content is not betrayed by the titles of individual poems as, for example, in Verlaine's 'Croquis parisien' (Poèmes saturniens), Nouveau's 'Fantaisies parisiennes' (Premiers poèmes) and Rimbaud's 'Villes' (Illuminations).

Despite this evidence to the contrary, however, Cros' inclusion in a study of French poetry and the city is still justifiable. Clearly, as Louis Forestier suggests, Charles Cros' poems do not constitute the same kind of 'Paris-Guide'<sup>30</sup> as do those of François Coppée, nor do they betray themselves by their titles; yet in general terms Cros was concerned with Parisian attitudes and modern life and literature. In the first edition of La Revue du monde nouveau (a literary and scientific review set up by himself and Henri Mercier in 1874) Cros affirms that his review 'veut être la serre où s'épanouissent les fleurs de l'esprit moderne' also that it 'affirme sa sympathie pour l'actuel'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Le Coffret de santal (Paris, Lemerre, 1873).

<sup>26</sup> Le Coffret de santal (Paris, Tresse, 1879).

<sup>27</sup> Le Collier de griffes (Paris, Stock, 1903).

<sup>28</sup> Emile Goudeau, Les Fleurs du bitume (Paris, Lemerre, 1878).

<sup>29</sup> Nina de Villard, Feuillets parisiens (Paris, H. Messenger, 1885).

<sup>30</sup> Louis Forestier, Charles Cros, Poètes d'aujourd'hui, p.10.

<sup>31</sup> La Revue du monde nouveau was born on 15 February 1874 and survived for a further two editions, the second on 1 April 1874 and the third on 1 May 1874. The revue upheld its promises of modernity by publishing in its first edition Mallarmé's avant-garde poème en prose 'Le Démon de l'analogie' and Cros' own scientific treatise 'L'Alchimie moderne'. Cros' satirical article 'L'Eglise des Totalistes', critical of the extremes of the Parnassian aesthetic, was printed in the second number showing Cros' personal eagerness to break free from outmoded restraints of style and subject matter.

Moreover, in Cros' poetry itself, mentions of city places, things and people do occur. One might quote the cafés of 'L'Heure verte' and 'Au Café',<sup>33</sup> theatres in 'J'ai bâti...',<sup>34</sup> and 'Scène d'Atelier',<sup>35</sup> the factory of 'Sonnet' ('Moi, je vis la vie à côté,')<sup>36</sup> the gaslights in 'Le Fleuve',<sup>37</sup> and 'Drame en trois ballades',<sup>38</sup> fashionable city clothes in 'Matin',<sup>39</sup> racehorses in 'Memento',<sup>40</sup> the poor in 'Brave Homme',<sup>41</sup> and the bourgeois in 'Insomnie'.<sup>42</sup> These references though possibly disparate in comparison to those of Coppée's poetry are still undeniably present. Their quality, significance and value in the works of a poet hitherto frequently associated with the notion of fantaisie, termed an idealist or an escapist remains to be revealed.

In defiance of Cros' leaning towards 'la vie idéale' or 'la vie à côté' stood the poet's experience of forty-four years of life in the French capital which could never be completely banished from his awareness. Hence frequently, poems though not pregnant with urban references or contemporary social allusions, undeniably bear the mark of the poet's city living or Parisian sensibility. If the city in Cros is not often selected per se as a theme, more frequently it imposes itself on the poet's works independently and filters, often unconsciously, into his imagery. Most successful in a sense and certainly most representative of Cros' urban compositions therefore are those poems where he does not specifically set out to write about the city but creates a city poem all the same or where, sensing a conflict between the city scene and his poetic sensibility, he effects a readjustment of surrounding urban reality until it is in harmony with his own mental state. With this distinction in mind, special attention will be given in the following pages to poems which, though lacking in necessarily Parisian suggestions or locations, are evidently written from the standpoint of a city-dweller or which clearly describe experiences specifically urban in character; and particularly, in view of their high proportion in Cros' works, to poems whose action takes place in the city at night and which evoke acute mental states or are themselves transformed by moments of

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<sup>33</sup> Cros, O.C., p.206.

<sup>34</sup> Cros, O.C., p.132.

<sup>35</sup> Cros, O.C., p.130.

<sup>36</sup> Cros, O.C., p.215.

<sup>37</sup> Cros, O.C., p.77.

<sup>38</sup> Cros, O.C., p.112.

<sup>39</sup> Cros, O.C., p.81.

<sup>40</sup> Cros, O.C., p.134.

<sup>41</sup> Cros, O.C., p.142.

<sup>42</sup> Cros, O.C., p.108.

privileged mental awareness. From this procedure, a clearer picture of Charles Cros' special achievements in the realm of city poetry should emerge.

Those Cros poems distinctly marked by the viewpoint of a city dweller fall into two overlapping groups: those ostensibly describing other things yet permeated by urban connotations and images and those where an escapist rêverie or a scene inspired by the natural world dissolves back into the city setting to reveal this latter's intrusive effect on the poetic imagination. 'Vanité sous-marine', a prose poem from the 'Sur trois aquatintes' section of Le Coffret de santal belongs to the first category.<sup>43</sup> In the poem's opening lines its heroine, the fairy-like Amphitrite, conveyed along the sea bed in a mussel shell, is likened in an urban simile to 'les nymphes parisiennes qui vont au bois'. Her general similarity to the archetypal Parisian woman, la Parisienne, is enlarged upon in a series of images as the poem progresses. Like Cros' Parisian mistress described in 'Matin', as 'Ma rose et blonde amie',<sup>44</sup> Amphitrite is 'rose et blonde'. She is also vain, as the woman in 'Matin' with her 'fière toilette', regarding clothes and material possessions to be of prime importance:

C'est l'imprévue absurdité féminine,  
désastreuse et adorable, plus fière des  
étoffes achetées que des blanches  
courbures de son sein, plus orgueilleuse  
de la pure généalogie de son attelage  
que de la transparence de ses prunelles.

Her deliberately late arrival at a meeting similarly parallels the Parisienne's ambition to 'aborder la scène et triompher sur son théâtre',<sup>45</sup> in making her the necessary centre of attention for the assembled crowd. As Amphitrite's Parisian qualities emerge to contradict her water sprite disguise, so the developing status of the other characters in the poem as members of the Parisian

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<sup>43</sup> Cros, O.C., p.157-8.

<sup>44</sup> Cros, O.C., p.80.

<sup>45</sup> Arsène Houssaye, 'Quelques opinions avancées sur la Parisienne', L'Artiste 3 (1869), 147-164 (p.148).

petite bourgeoisie contrasts with their legendary nomenclature. The tritons for example represent the minor officials, uncomfortable in their starched collars yet full of self-importance, the sirens, blue-stockings speaking for the cause and M. Protée, in a contradiction of his ethereal title, a somewhat pompous philanthropist:

Elle est attendue à quelque réunion de  
bienfaisance où les Néréïdes font la  
quête, escortées au milieu de la foule  
par des tritons empesés dans leurs  
faux-cols de cérémonie, et où les sirènes  
doivent se faire entendre au profit des  
cités ouvrières qui fabriquent le corail.

Elle arrivera en retard, un peu exprès,  
pour faire une entrée à sensation au  
milieu du discours officiel de M. Protée,  
organisateur zélé mais ennuyeux à entendre.

The actual scene evoked, though transposed under water is also one instantly recognisable to literary society of the time. It represents a charity evening organised in aid of some worthy cause of the kind frequently presided over by François Coppée and certainly familiar to Cros himself. Here the collection is 'au profit des cités ouvrières' with the exotic, tongue-in-cheek touch of 'qui fabriquent le corail'.

Where in 'Vanité sous-marine' urban ideas insinuate themselves to undermine a fantastic scene, in 'Villégiature' (Le Coffret de santal) and in 'Evocation' (Le Collier de griffes) they impose <sup>upon and</sup> fracture the imaginary creation completely. In the first of these two poems, for example, the poet, depressed by the death or loss of a beloved mistress, an 'Ame superbe, fleur de beauté' yet 'splendeur frêle' (line 12), seeks the tranquillity of the countryside in the heat of the day in which to meditate on his sorrow and past memories:

Or que le vent discret fait chuchoter les chênes  
Et que le soleil soûle, aux clairières prochaines,  
Vipères et lézards endormis dans le thym,  
Couché sur le sol sec, je pense au temps lointain.<sup>46</sup>

His chosen rural isolation is not of long duration however, as Cros discovers,

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<sup>46</sup> Cros, O.C., p.106.

the insects of the natural world are anxious to disturb his concentration.

La mouche désœuvrée et la fourmi hâtive

Ne veulent pas qu'aux bois l'on rêve et l'on écrive.

Furthermore, a victim of his own urban awareness, he finds that the city, in Rimbaud's words, 'suivait très loin dans les chemins',<sup>47</sup> reminding him at each instance in his natural haven of the environment he has just left and substituting its elements for those of the countryside:

Les champs aussi sont pleins d'insectes affairés,

Foule de gens de tous aspects, de tous degrés.

Noir serrurier, en bas, le grillon lime et grince.

Le frelon, ventru comme un riche de province,

Prend les petites fleurs entre ses membres courts.

Les papillons s'en vont à leurs brèves amours

Sous leurs manteaux de soie et d'or. La libellule

Effleure l'herbe avec un dédain ridicule.

C'est la ville.

Et je pense à la ville, aux humains,

Aux fiers amis, aux bals où je pressais ses mains;

Malgré que la bêtise et l'intrigue hâtive

N'y souffrent pas non plus qu'on rêve et qu'on écrive.

The prominence of urban over rural motifs in this passage is especially apparent in the vocabulary and imagery used and is made more clear (as in 'Le Fleuve') by the typographical separation of 'C'est la ville' in line 9 of the excerpt. The insects are 'affairés' (line 1) hinting at the bustle of a commercial centre and 'de tous degrés' (line 2) suggesting social status in a class system. They imitate city characters in sound and appearance, with the exception of the hornet (line 4) which is 'comme un riche de province'. The cricket's singing conveys the sound of a locksmith's file, the short-lived but gaily-coloured butterflies represent the fickle and fashionable

Parisiennes while the contemptuous dragonfly possibly parallels an aristocrat disdainful of those below his own social rank and standing. Consequently what initially purports by its title to be a work of rural inspiration and by its second stanza to develop the theme of nostalgia for lost love, ultimately becomes a poem of urban significance offering a critique of city life and its fickle populace. A similar imaginative movement whereby the poet is magnetically drawn away from his refuge in another environment or era by insistent and powerful

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<sup>47</sup> From 'Ouvriers', Rimbaud, O.C., p.133.



images of city life reasserting the existence of contemporary reality, occurs in 'Evocation' where Cros' temporary escape is to the Classical age of legend and literature. After an opening exhortation wherein the poet rejects the 'muse ou démon des jours actuels' (line 2) and calls upon the mythical figures of antiquity to transport him away from the artificiality of present reality:

Venez Nymphes, avec vos longues chevelures,  
Chantez, rossignols morts jadis dans les ramures,  
Parfums d'avant, parfums des là-bas: mon ennui  
Veut s'oublier, en vous, des odeurs d'aujourd'hui.

Venez Sylvains, venez Faunes, venez Dryades!

Nous avons tant souffert de vivre en ces temps fades.<sup>48</sup>

there follows an evocation of Ancient Greece (a paradise for literary men according to Cros where 'les mots même sont beaux') with traditional, associated allusions to Plato, Venus, Orpheus and Homer. Taking the poem beyond the bounds of literary orthodoxy however is Cros' lively conjuring-up of a market scene where in typical semi-serious style he pictures Aristophanes haggling with a Greek stallholder over the price of fruit! The frivolity of this scene or possibly its similarity to an occurrence witnessed in real life bursts the imaginative bubble, the rêverie fades and Paris gradually replaces Athens in the picture:

L'Agora! comme on s'y dispute, on s'y démène!  
Mais je connais trop bien cette marée humaine;  
Ai-je rêvé, Bacchus? Ces paroles, ces cris,  
Ces gens d'affaires, ça me rappelle Paris.

As in 'Vanité sous-marine' a confusion of legendary and real life prevails as the pastoral figures are slowly transformed into Parisians with respectable social accoutrements, ties, gloves, hats and so on:

Cravatez-vous, Sylvains; Faunes, mettez des gants;  
Dryades, montrez-nous vos chapeaux arrogants,  
Allons souper, Bacchus! Paris vaut bien Athènes.  
Je quitte sans regrets mes visions lointaines.

Despite the parallel structure and movement of thought in 'Villégiature' and 'Evocation' from poetic refuge to city scene, the poet's reaction to the intrusion of the urban world on the rêverie on the two occasions differs dramatically. In the first example, Paris' insinuation in the form of busy insects

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<sup>48</sup> Cros, O.C., p.172.

paralleling the city inhabitants is unwelcome, it contradicts both the poet's communion with the natural world and his desire for solitude in his bereavement. In the second it is initiated and controlled by the poet himself who calls for the urbanisation of the 'Sylvains', 'Faunes' and 'Dryades' as he had originally conjured up these legendary figures to transport him back in time. His reintegration into modern life is thus accomplished 'sans regrets',<sup>49</sup> a point underlined by the 'Muse ou démon des jours actuels' which he criticised in the poem's opening lines, ('tu mens!'), being replaced by a benevolent, maternal image of the same muse in the poem's closing lines:

Oh! berce-moi toujours de tes chuchotements,  
Muse ou démon des jours actuels et charmants!

In the same way as these latter poems could not be classed as direct, descriptive city poems, yet are undeniably urban in image and implication, other Cros poems, though devoid of specifically Parisian allusions, are evidently the creation of an individual with intimate knowledge of city life and especially its ability to create feelings of solitude and anonymity in various degrees. Among Cros' most successful achievements in this sphere we must place 'Insomnie' and 'L'Heure froide', the first a poem in verse, the second a prose poem, both from Le Coffret de santal.<sup>50</sup> These two pieces strike the reader predominantly by their stark and direct approach to the problem of intense solitude and alienation in a city, often considered a specifically twentieth-century ill, and by their convincingly sincere tone. 'Insomnie' with its bare, scientific title begins by evoking a picture, quite common in Cros and indeed in Rimbaud, of early morning in the city. As in the more lyrically entitled 'Romance' (Le Coffret de santal) where blueness 'fait pâlir les étoiles',<sup>51</sup> or in 'Matin' (Le Coffret de santal) where the dawn effaces the warm memories of the poet's night of love: 'Voici le matin bleu qui vient sur l'oreiller/Eteindre les lueurs oranges du foyer',<sup>52</sup> here the morning steals onto the inanimate and human scene dispelling the blackness of night and throwing into relief the hard metallic and stone outlines of the Parisian skyline:

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<sup>49</sup> Almost as Coppée is refreshed by periodical excursions into the banlieue and can resume the hectic pace of inner city life, here Cros seems to have partly expurgated his frustrations with modern life by his imagined journey back in time.

<sup>50</sup> 'L'Heure froide' featured in the 1873 and 1879 editions of Le Coffret de santal while 'Insomnie' only appears in the 1879 version of the collection.

<sup>51</sup> Cros, O.C., p.58.

<sup>52</sup> Cros, O.C., p.80.

Voici le matin ridicule  
Qui vient décolorer la nuit,  
Réveillant par son crépuscule  
Le chagrin, l'intrigue et le bruit.

Corrects, le zinc et les ardoises  
Des toits coupent le ciel normal,  
On dort, dans les maisons bourgeoises.  
Je ne dors pas. Quel est mon mal?

Est-ce une vie antérieure  
Qui me poursuit de ses parfums?  
Ces gens vont grouiller tout à l'heure,  
Dispersant mes rêves défunts.<sup>53</sup>

As in 'Romance' where the morning is 'moqueur' in relation to the poet's 'ennui morose',<sup>54</sup> here it is 'ridicule' in its dawn awakening of the petty tribulations of the material world 'le chagrin, l'intrigue et le bruit' and in its dissolving of the poet's dreams of 'une vie antérieure'. Its effect on the loneliness of a sleepless man among his fellows is moreover reinforced here by the immutable city setting as its silent houses (here the uncomprehending 'maisons bourgeoises'), bear witness to the existence in close proximity of other uncaring human beings. If morning stimulates resentment in the poet, night offers the possibility of comfort and escape through dream, 'mes rêves défunts' of line 12. Here there is an implicit comparison with Baudelaire's 'Le Crépuscule du soir' (Les Fleurs du Mal) where night, as well as heralding sin and vice, comes as a consolation to 'les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage'.<sup>55</sup> In 'Insomnie' the poet's dream is far-removed from nineteenth-century Paris and is of himself as a prophet figure leading, in the company of a 'bien-aimée exquise', a noble race in an Epicurian existence in the natural world (Stanzas IV-VII). The brilliant coloration and heavy scents of their Eden are present in 'les vastes bruyères/Les aubépines, les genêts', 'Les aromates plein les champs' and its decorative mineral wealth is apparent in 'des broderies,/Les gemmes,

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<sup>53</sup> Cros, O.C., p.108.

<sup>54</sup> Cros, O.C., p.58.

<sup>55</sup> Baudelaire, O.C. Vol.I, p.94. As well as the pattern of ideas in the Cros poem recalling those of the Baudelaire, the opening lines of 'Insomnie' are also reminiscent of those of 'Le Crépuscule du soir':

Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel;  
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup;

cristaux des couchants', 'des perles dans mes cheveux'. This contrasts favourably with the bleakness of the urban visual scene of angular rooftops outlined against a nondescript sky, and with the second dream section of the poem (following a series of suspension marks after stanza VII) where the enchantment of the 'vie antérieure' gradually fades and disillusionment sets in:

J'ai pleuré, muet et farouche  
Tous mes ravissements changés

Les arômes en fades herbes  
Les diamants en froid cristal,  
En loups gris les tigres superbes  
En sapin banal le santal.

(Stanzas VIII, IX)

The repeated use of contrasts in these lines, the banishment of exotic terminology by flat adjectives similar to those of 'Intérieur' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879); 'fade', 'gris', 'banal' and 'froid', aptly convey the poet's return to monotonous, urban reality. Also, their suggestions of a scene unrelieved by warmth or colour lead neatly into the final stanza of the poem whose first two lines employ a repetition of the first two of the second stanza.

Corrects, le zinc et les ardoises  
Des toits coupent le ciel normal,  
On s'éveille aux maisons bourgeoises,  
Je crois que je meurs de mon mal.

(Stanza XII)

Here the 'ardoises' of the poem's first and last lines form a link with 'gris' of Stanza IX, their 'ciel normal' with its 'sapin banal' while 'zinc', contrasted with the brilliant wealth of the first dream sequence, connects with 'fade'. Thus the structure of the poem itself matches the circular movement of the poet's imagination which first wakes to a dawn vision of Paris, moves back in time through a dream sequence and forward through disillusionment to be confronted a second time by the unchanging and insensitive city panorama.

In 'Insomnie' the poet's sense of isolation is intensified by his contemplation of the silent, morning city world and his feelings of alienation in the modern world by his reliance on a vaguely remembered dream of a 'bien-aimée' and a 'vie antérieure' where close contact with his fellow men was the norm. In 'L'Heure froide' the gathering night and Cros' insistence on death, real and metaphorical at the heart of the silent capital, exaggerate his fears

of loneliness.<sup>56</sup> As well as exploring the fears and anxieties of a city person, this poem is also crucial in connection with Cros' preference for nocturnal settings in his city poetry. As Baudelaire notes nightfall in a Parisian context in 'Crépuscule du soir', so Cros, in his poem, concentrates on the evening's 'heure froide' and the way it affects particularly the city and its inhabitants. Evening is divided into separate stages by the poetic imagination each individually characterised by qualities evident to the sensitive observer. First is the crépuscule whose evocative name alone suffices to conjure up untarnished memories ('des pierreries'), of 'vie antérieure' as well as lighthearted reminiscences of a wild youth spent in Parisian cafés: 'Les ravissements de jeunesse enivrée'. The evening twilight and its stimulating effect on the poet's sensibility thus contrasts with the morning crépuscule, described in 'Insomnie' which dispels both his 'vie antérieure' ('Insomnie', line 9) and his 'ravissements' ('Insomnie', line 32). In a physical sense, the crepuscular half-light brings the warm, translucent blueness of a summer evening in its wake ('après le crépuscule, la douce nuit transparente') or leads into a thick and comforting ('comme des fourrures') blackness of a winter night. In the former case, attention is focused on present activity in the nocturnal city with the artificial luminosity of gaslight replacing fading day and transforming the visual appearance of trees in a park:

L'été, le gaz, brillant parmi les  
arbres des jardins, donne aux feuilles qu'on  
ne voit qu'en dessous, des tons verts  
et mats de décor de féerie.

Mingled with the swirling winter fog the man-made light also illuminates and mimicks typically Parisian pleasures: steam rising from glasses of hot tea and wine, frothy beer, wafting tobacco smoke in cafes and billowing dresses at evening balls. Suddenly aware of his own intellectual isolation from the capital's joyful, nocturnal activity ('Ou encore la nuit de travail: la lampe, le coin du feu, aucune obsession bruyante'), the poet is forced into a solitary and anguished reflection on the city's darkness, made more intense in comparison to the light in his own room and through the extinguishing of shop and commercial lights. Suggestions of emptiness and despair prevail in these paragraphs of the poem (V-VIII) which precede and set the mental tone for the harrowing description of the 'heure froide' itself:

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<sup>56</sup>See Cros, O.C., pp.159-161.

Les passants deviennent plus rares. On rentre. Les uns pensent à la chambre tranquille, au lit à rideaux (bon endroit pour mourir); les autres regrettent l'agitation interrompue et s'étourdissent de chants et de cris en plein air. Quelques querelles d'ivrognes.

Des dames en capeline sortent des soirées honnêtes; des vendeuses de volupté chuchotent leurs offres, modestes à cause de l'heure avancée.

On marche. On écoute ses propres pas. Tout le monde est rentré. Les bouchers, ensommeillés, reçoivent d'énormes moitiés de boeufs, des moutons entr'ouverts et raidis.

Tout le monde est chez soi, égoïstement et lourdement endormi. Où aller? Tout endroit hospitalier est fermé. Les feux sont éteints. A peine trouverait-on quelques brins de braises dans les cendres des foyers refroidis.

Heightening the morbid tone in this passage is the poet's negative stance to the objects and characters of city life portrayed around him. The refuge potential of the 'lit à rideaux' is cancelled out by its qualification as a 'bon endroit pour mourir'. The hope of a new day in the sleepy butchers unloading their merchandise is undermined by the suggestions of death in 'moutons entr'ouverts et raidis'. Warmth is extinguished ('feux [...] éteints' and 'foyers refroidis'), silence becomes obsessive ('on écoute ses propres pas') and images of depopulation prevail: 'Les passants deviennent plus rares', 'Tout le monde est rentré', and 'Tout le monde est chez soi'. As in 'Insomnie' where the poet is struck by the insensitive attitude of his fellow Parisians, here, walking alone through the deserted city streets, he becomes aware of their equal unconcern, they are 'égoïstement et lourdement endormi[s]', totally oblivious of the 'heure froide'. A final, nostalgic yearning for the vigour of antiquity where night was artificially prolonged by human animation: 'On sert à boire. On s'agite. On chante', is dashed by the realisation that in 'la vie antique' this activity was merely a distraction from the ever-present 'mortelle influence' of death. Thus past and future hope are banished and our attention, like that of the poet, is centred on the present moment, made more claustrophobic by effects of natural

lighting: 'Les transparences de la nuit deviennent dures ou se voilent de brume' and its chilling and dramatic relevance for mankind. The subsequent evocation of the 'heure froide' in psychological terms is unforgettable in Cros' poetry:

Minuit est la limite fictive, astronomique,  
entre la veille et le lendemain. Mais  
l'heure froide est l'instant vrai, humain  
où un autre jour va venir. Il semble  
qu'à cette heure, il soit mis en  
question pour chaque être, si ce jour  
qui vient - s'ajoutera à ceux qu'il a  
déjà vécus ou si le compte en est  
fini pour lui.

Unlike midnight which marks the death and reincarnation of the day in a cosmic sense, but in human terms is merely an artificial division of time having little relevance, Cros' moment here is the meaningful 'instant vrai' when time seems halted between 'la veille et le lendemain', when fears of loneliness, insomnia and death reach their apogee and when man becomes aware of his own finite nature. The threat of death hovering over the city roofs is conveyed in a passover image, 'l'ange de la mort plane sur les hommes, profitant de leur sommeil implacable pour choisir sa proie pendant que nul ne s'en doute'. Suddenly, Cros focuses in macabre fashion on the imaginary plight of one unfortunate victim:

Oh! oui, à cette heure-là, on  
étoufferait, on râlerait, on sentirait  
son coeur se rompre et le sang  
tiède, fade, monter à la gorge dans un  
dernier spasme, que personne ne pourrait  
entendre, ne voudrait sortir du sommeil  
pesant et sans rêves qui empêche les  
terrestres de sentir l'heure froide.

This final description which concludes the prose poem, as well as betraying Cros' medical training<sup>57</sup> in its detail; 'on étoufferait', 'on râlerait', 'son coeur se rompre', 'le sang tiède... monter à la gorge', 'un dernier spasme', also shows him clearly as an inheritor of Baudelaire in terms of

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<sup>57</sup> Cros pursued medical studies from 1862-5 and there is evidence that he assisted his brother Antoine, a doctor by profession, in the Paris cholera outbreak of October 1865 and during the political troubles of 1871, reputedly the date of composition of the 'Fantaisies en prose'.

prose poem technique, theme and satanic vocabulary. The rhetorical opening of the stanza and its use of the temporal motif: 'Oh! oui, à cette heure-là' recalls Baudelaire's at the end of 'La Chambre double' of Le Spleen de Paris: 'Oh! Oui! le Temps a reparu' and 'Oui! le Temps règne', while 'implacable', 'horreur' and 'dernier spasme', cast in the infernal world of Baudelaire's terminology, also feature in the same Baudelaire prose-poem.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the flowing prose and macabre detail of 'L'Heure froide', its use of a nocturnal setting is a key factor contributing to this poem's compelling effect on the reader. Though possibly inspired specifically by Baudelaire in this particular poem, Cros' more general use of the night setting in his city poetry betrays not only a literary debt but a fact of contemporary reality. In the latter half of the nineteenth century (as indeed now) Paris blossomed into a second life around midnight and this period of night-time activity was of particular value for the literary bohemia, who, often tied to office hours during the day, saw it as an opportunity for like minds to come together for lively intellectual discussion and cultural entertainment. Raymond de Casteras, in an anthology of Parisian bohemia, quotes Georges Moynet, a monologist and eccentric cartoonist of the 1870s (better known to his public by his pseudonym 'Cabriol'), to illustrate what he terms this 'noctambulisme habituel' of the literary intelligentsia:

J'étais rentré chez moi avec l'intention  
de me coucher de bonne heure; il  
pouvait être huit heures du matin.<sup>59</sup>

A similar penchant for evening and night, displayed frequently in Cros' Parisian poems represents his contribution to the cult of urban noctambulism. The particular modifications he lent to the theme ensure that over and above any other aspect of his work it characterises the most successful of his city poetry.

Though at its worst in Cros, night is associated with death and solitude (as in 'L'Heure froide'), at its best it is a time of activity, both imaginative and erotic, carried out under the double concealment of darkness and the city's buildings, boudoirs and attic rooms. It is to the latter group, i.e. imaginative activity in the city at night, that the strange prose-poem 'Effarement' from the 'Sur trois aquatintes' section of Le Coffret de santal (1873 and 1879) belongs. As well as continuing themes from Cros's poetry as a

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<sup>58</sup> Baudelaire O.C., Vol. I, pp.280-2.

<sup>59</sup> Raymond de Casteras, Avant le Chat Noir les Hydropathes 1878-80 (Paris, Editions Albert Messein, 1945), p.191.



whole, 'Effarement' is significant on three other accounts. Firstly in comparison to the two other poems in the 'Sur trois aquatintes' section, 'Vanité sous-marine' and 'Le Vaisseau-piano', it has received comparatively little critical attention in recent years and what attention it has received is sketchy or contradictory. Secondly it is important in the links it establishes between Cros and Stephane Mallarmé. Thirdly, and not the least, its setting in a railway station makes its study essential to any assessment of Charles Cros as a city poet.

Frequently, interpretations of this poem have been limited by the ready dismissal of the group title embracing 'Effarement', 'Vanité sous-marine' and 'Le Vaisseau-piano', that of 'Sur trois aquatintes d'Henry Cros'. Hence undue attention has been given to the first poem's structural and stylistic attributes rather than to its content. Suzanne Bernard for example, limits her comments on this poem to brief references to its 'tonalité particulière' and Cros' use in it of 'phrases brèves' and 'le style de notation'.<sup>60</sup> Pamela Renna's Ph.D. thesis is only marginally more illuminating being also limited to pointing out structural peculiarities, short, verbless sentences, weirdness of imagery and so on.<sup>61</sup> She does however reiterate an interesting point made by Louis Forestier in his all-embracing volume on Cros, that the poem could be an 'angoissante recherche d'un ailleurs'.<sup>62</sup> Though I would not suggest a simple translation of a visual image into words could totally explain 'Effarement', (since the poem involves a narrative thread rather than a descriptive collage which invalidates the transposition d'art theory, and it is also strikingly devoid of colour, which normally enriches an artist's view of the world), the possibility that certain elements in the scene created by Cros spring from visual stimuli cannot be ignored. Most probably these real objects are drawn from observation of life in Paris but the possible existence of an aquatint executed by Charles Cros' brother Henry and which too offered inspi-

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<sup>60</sup> Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, Nizet, 1959), pp.353-6.

<sup>61</sup> Pamela S. Renna, 'Aux pays lointains: The poetry of Charles Cros' (unpublished PhD thesis, Brown University, 1971), pp.190 et seq.

<sup>62</sup> Louis Forestier, Charles Cros, l'homme et l'oeuvre, (Paris, Minard, 1969), p.411.

ration must not be dismissed.<sup>63</sup>

What is definite in the Cros poem however is that though its title is reminiscent of Rimbaud's 'Les Effarés', its content was undoubtedly also inspired by Mallarmé's 'Igitur ou la folie d'Elbehnon' written during the late 1860s.<sup>64</sup> This important point has been stressed by Ian Lockerie in his 1957 PhD thesis on Charles Cros in what remains potentially the most interesting interpretation of 'Effarement' as a humorous poem ridiculing the exalted ambitions of its chief protagonist M. Igitur and challenging Mallarmé's integrity in writing his supremely esoteric 'Igitur' poem.<sup>65</sup> The link between Charles Cros and Mallarmé is also borne out by historical fact as the two poets would certainly have met towards the end of the 1860s, probably at a soirée organised by Nina de Villard at 82, rue des Moines as Cros was a regular participant in these events at that time and Mallarmé had been acquainted with Nina since the early years of the decade. That Cros admired Mallarmé's work is also clear, firstly because he dedicated the poem 'Paroles perdues' ( Le Coffret de santal, 1873) to him and secondly because he gave Mallarmé's 'Démon de l'analogie' space in the opening edition of his short-lived review La Revue du monde nouveau in 1874. Whether Charles Cros ever heard Mallarmé reading his epic work 'Igitur ou la folie d'Elbehnon' is more doubtful however though it is still possible he may have heard some version of it (from which conceivably critical points were missing) from Catulle Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, both regulars at Nina de Villard's salon, who were definitely present when Mallarmé recited 'Igitur' at his house in

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<sup>63</sup> In 1964 Henry Cros' sketch of a vaisseau-piano, of which it appears Charles Cros' poem is simply a 'très fidèle description', was located. Michael Pakenham relates and comments on his discovery amongst papers in the possession of M. Henri Matarasso in 'Le Vaisseau-piano des frères Cros', Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 64 (April-June 1964), pp.293-4. So the possibility that an undiscovered aquatint model for 'Effarement' also exists cannot be ignored. Ex Madame Paul Verlaine in Mémoires de ma vie (Paris, Flammarion, 1935), p.131, mentions a series of drawings executed by Henry Cros at her mother's house during the siege of Paris; 'il dessinait des villes fantastiques en ruines qu'il appelait le faubourg maudit'. It is interesting to speculate that the model for 'Effarement' may have belonged to this collection.

<sup>64</sup> See Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, edited by Henri Mondor and G. Jean Aubry (Paris, Gallimard, 1945), pp.433-443.

<sup>65</sup> Ian Lockerie, 'Charles Cros, l'homme et l'oeuvre' (unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1957), p.28.

Avignon in mid-1870.<sup>66</sup> This eventuality, together with the possible existence of an aquatint by his brother Henry, means that Charles Cros' 'Effarement' could have sprung from a combination of events and stimuli. This does not prevent the work from representing ultimately a personal creation of its author. Whereas 'Igitur' for Mallarmé represented a character and theme struggled with in solitude whose completion represented a cathartic experience, Charles Cros' 'Effarement' stands for us as a unique and original urbanisation of the Mallarmian myth:

Au milieu de la nuit, un rêve. Une gare de chemin de fer. Des employés portant des caractères cabalistiques sur leurs casquettes administratives. Des wagons à claire-voie chargés de dames-jeannes en fer battu. Les brouettes ferrées roulent avec des colis qu'on arrime dans les voitures du train.

Une voix de sous-chef crie: La raison de M. Igitur, à destination de la lune! Un manoeuvre vient et appose une étiquette sur le colis désigné - une dame-jeanne semblable à celles des wagons à claire-voie. Et, après la pesée à la bascule, on embarque. Le coup de sifflet du départ résonne, aigu, vertigineux et prolongé.

Réveil subit. Le coup de sifflet se termine en miaulement de chat de gouttière. M. Igitur s'élance, crève la vitre et plonge son regard dans le bleu sombre où plane la face narquoise de la lune.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Catulle Mendès' description of the soirée d'Avignon given in Le Mouvement poétique français de 1867-1900 (Fasquelle, Imprimerie Nationale, 1903) is particularly significant. He summarises his own and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's reaction to the Mallarmé poem in the following words:

Dès les premières lignes, je fus épouvanté, et  
Villiers tantôt me consultait d'un regard furtif,  
tantôt écarquillait vers le lecteur ses  
petits yeux gonflés d'effarement.

Perhaps Mendès' use of the word 'effarement' and Cros' adoption of it for the title of his poem was not purely a coincidental occurrence.

<sup>67</sup> Cros, O.C., p.157.

Mallarmé's setting in 'Igitur' is the stifling atmosphere of a darkened room whose scanty décor (mirror, candles, curtains, phial, opened book and clock) is pregnant with symbolic significance. Cros, in his poem, ignores abstract concepts in a timeless universe and works within the framework of contemporary society. The hardness and heaviness of objects such as the 'dames-jeannes en fer battu' (an ironic transposition of Mallarmé's phial) and the 'brouettes ferrées' together with the staccato sentence 'Les brouettes ferrées roulent avec les colis qu'on arrime dans les voitures du train' combine to suggest the harsh outlines of a nineteenth-century railway station. A change of name and status of the main character has also been effected from the Mallarmé to the Cros text. Mallarmé's hero is Igitur, both a nobody and an Everyman, he exists in relation to his ancestors but does not fit into any particular social or temporal framework. In 'Effarement' he becomes M. Igitur, a debasement in terms of a descent from universality to particularity and also an attempt at mock respectability by the poet on behalf of a character apparently belonging to the most ambiguous and amorphous of social classes. The details of the final paragraph, the whistle blast ending in the strangled cry of a gutter cat and the clear view of the night sky from M. Igitur's room would tend to suggest he is to be associated with a certain class of bohemian poets, with which Cros himself identified, often lodging in the highest and therefore least expensive portions of a house and revelling in a nocturnal existence.<sup>68</sup> The odd name Igitur, with its hint of foreignness or possible quality of a pseudonym goes some way to confirming the notion that Cros' character is a literary man.

A further similarity between the poems and a point highly significant in the links it forms with the best of Cros' poetry in general is their temporal setting; 'au milieu de la nuit', literally midnight. This moment is endowed with special value for Mallarmé's Igitur being firstly the signal for his action, the descent of the stars to begin and secondly, in the form of the double six of the 'coup de dés', being the fixing of his destiny in an unquestionable mathematical formula. For Cros and his M. Igitur on the other hand it represents a moment for dream during which contemporary reality temporarily changes its pattern yet after which inevitably the immediacy of the urban world is reaffirmed with venom. Various recognisable elements of real life are present in the poem's dream sequence, categories of workers for example ('des employés', 'un sous-chef', 'un manoeuvre'), fragments of likely railway paraphernalia also exist ('des casquettes administratives', 'des wagons', 'des brouettes') and so on, yet further details are confusing often having mythological or magical

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<sup>68</sup> The attic setting features also in 'Insomnie' where the poet observes the rooftops of Paris from his window.

significance. They point to a sinister meaning underlying the innocent façade presented by the various actions taking place. These actions form an almost ritualistic ceremony in several well-defined stages: (i) the 'voix de sous-chef; (ii) 'un manoeuvre vient'; (iii) 'la pesée à la bascule'; (iv) 'on embarque'; (v) 'le coup de sifflet'. This impression of mystery is merely reinforced by the puzzling 'caractères cabalistiques' the employees are wearing on their hats, the 'wagons à claire-voie' with their punning suggestion of clairvoyance. The symbolic weighing of the abstract concept, 'la raison' as if it were an independent object with mass is possibly a premonition of future death in the severing of thought and body and thus parallels the death motif in 'L'Heure froide'.

There are two possible interpretations of the meaning of 'Effarement'. Firstly in view of the poem's title it can be read as a nightmare. Secondly, with knowledge of the poet's leaning towards 'la vie idéale', it can be interpreted as a dream of wish-fulfilment. On one hand in 'Effarement' M. Igitur is deprived of his reason which is imprisoned in a secure metal container (its opposite in terms of density), and despatched on a train bound for an impossible destination. It is thus in a state of suffocation and panic therefore that one could conclude the character awakes, smashes through his attic window and, sighing with relief at the realisation of the unreality of his dream, contemplates the face of the moon which reflects his gaze in a spirit of sly mockery: 'et plonge son regard dans le bleu sombre où plane la face narquoise de la lune'. On the other hand the poème en prose could show the reworking of the journey theme on a spiritual level (Louis Forestier senses a 'route d'ailleurs'<sup>69</sup> in 'Effarement'), with the departing train offering M. Igitur the possibility of mingling his otherwise ineffectual intellect with a great cosmic force and of himself being absorbed into his image of the ideal, that is the moon. In this case the 'coup de sifflet' which 'se termine en miaulement de chat de gouttière' shatters this illusion and frustrates M. Igitur's ambition. Though this latter interpretation hints at a similar movement from dream to awakening, motivating 'Effarement' as had animated 'Insomnie' it is impossible to describe 'Effarement' as an escapist work in the same sense as the latter poem with its idealised vision of a 'vie antérieure'. Primarily the dream sequence through which the ideal is to be attained in 'Effarement' is neither totally separate from, nor indeed in many points even at variance with, the real world. Paragraphs I and II though admittedly marked by certain odd or ambiguous details are essentially,

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<sup>69</sup> Louis Forestier, 'A propos de Rimbaud et de Charles Cros', Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 64 (1964), p.293.

in terms of setting and décor, no less urban in content and implication than the final stanza beginning 'Réveil subit' which is clearly set in the substantial world. As Rimbaud's 'Villes' employ identifiable elements of nineteenth-century life and décor among objects of private or esoteric significance<sup>70</sup> so Cros' 'Effarement' is anchored in the real city despite its purported dream content. Furthermore, potential escape from this transitional dream world is not by an exercise of intellect or imagination but by means of an aspect of city life more representative than any other of the noise and machine power brought about by the industrial revolution: the railway. This increasingly popular theme, employed by all four of Cros' contemporaries featuring in this study but especially dear to Verlaine, gained special significance during the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, reputedly the date of composition of 'Effarement', in the form of the chemin de fer de ceinture which offered the sole illusion of escape for Parisians from the besieged city.<sup>71</sup> Its dual importance in 'Effarement' both as setting and as a symbol representing man's conquest of space suggests possibly a personal attraction of this theme for Cros. This point is borne out by the other railway images in Cros' poetry notably in a parody of Coppée belonging to the Dixains réalistes whose final line reads 'Peut-être le bonheur n'est-il dans les gares,'<sup>72</sup> and in the poem 'Drame en trois ballades' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) where Cros, in a daring combination of ancient form and modern terminology, salutes the railway as an agent of reconciliation in bringing his mistress to Paris:

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<sup>70</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.135 and p.137.

<sup>71</sup> Coppée uses the railway theme in 'Emigrants' (Les Humbles) which is set in a station, in 'Dans un train de banlieue' (Jeunes filles) and especially in 'Le coup de tampon' (Les Paroles sincères). Verlaine mentions the railway in a poem from La Bonne Chanson beginning 'Le paysage dans le cadre des portières/Court furieusement...', in 'Malines' (Romances sans paroles) and 'Tantalized' a prison poem from Parallèlement. Nouveau makes a reference in 'Le Square des Batignolles' (Petits tableaux parisiens) and Rimbaud in 'Métropolitain' (Illuminations). The motif also recurs in the Coppée parodies (see **Appendix I**).

<sup>72</sup> Cros, O.C., p.143.

ENVOI

A toi, merci! chemin de fer,  
J'étais seul; mais un soir d'ivresse,  
Tu m'as tiré de cet enfer,  
Car j'ai retrouvé ma maîtresse.<sup>73</sup>

Night-time rêverie of a different existence as implied in 'Insomnie' and illustrated in 'Effarement', or nocturnal flânerie in the darkened city and meditation on death as in 'L'Heure froide' did not of course account for all Cros' evening hours nor indeed did they provide the sole source of inspiration for his night-time city poetry. Occasionally, as in the nostalgic 'Au Café' (Le Collier de griffes) for example, he is stimulated by the social life of Paris:

Le rêve est de ne pas dîner,  
Mais boire, causer, badiner  
Quand la nuit tombe;  
Epuisant les apéritifs,<sup>74</sup>

Elsewhere and more frequently he adopts a more traditional theme linking it to the erotic motif. In 'Scherzo' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) the secret coming together of lovers, protected by the natural cover of darkness is remembered by the poet as providing substance for dreams in times of loneliness: 'Sourires, fleurs, baisers, essences./Après de si fades ennuis,/Après de si ternes absences/Parfumez le vent de mes nuits!'<sup>75</sup> Similarly in 'Souvenirs d'avril' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) as the poem's title suggests the woman's image reappears like Venus, the 'sereine étoile de la nuit' to illuminate the poet's imagination and comfort him 'aux heures glacées'.<sup>76</sup> The connotations of the 'heures glacées' are much the same as those of 'L'Heure froide' in the prose poem of that name. Where the memory of love supports the poet through a night of loneliness in the capital in 'Souvenirs d'avril', elsewhere it has a more direct effect on the immediately visible urban scene and the poet's perception of it. A clear example is provided by 'Drame en trois ballades' whose three poems describe successive stages in the poet's emotional life. The first ballade begins by recalling the theme of

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<sup>73</sup>Cros, O.C., p.114. The value of what he terms this 'lyrisme ferroviaire' is explored in general terms by Raymond Prince in Les Chemins de fer dans la littérature française (Uzès, Editions de la capitelle, 1955). Marc Baroli's unpublished Thèse pour le doctorat ès lettres, 'Le Train dans la littérature française' (University of Paris, 1963), also forms interesting reading on this theme.

<sup>74</sup>Cros, O.C., p.206.

<sup>75</sup>Cros, O.C. p.85.

<sup>76</sup>Cros, O.C. p.82.

'Villégiature' and describes the poet fleeing from the city during daylight hours to seek the comfort of the countryside when his mistress leaves Paris. Obligated to return to the capital at night however he is struck by its sordid and depressing aspects, its bright lights and noisy activity which intrude on his muted sensibility and emphasise his loneliness:

Le soir, traînant la flèche qui me blesse,  
Le gaz qui brille aux cafés grands ouverts,  
Les bals publics, flots d'obscène souplesse,  
Montrent des chairs, bons repas pour les vers.<sup>77</sup>

In the following ballade (where the octosyllable replaces the decasyllable of ballads I and III to give a much lighter touch) the tone changes completely and similar brash urban elements are used to underline the poet's elation at reunion with his mistress:

La rue a des joyeuses voix  
Les ouvrières sous leurs mantes  
Frissonnent, en courant. Je vois  
Des amants joindre les amantes.  
Aux cafés, voilà le gaz clair,  
Lumière vive et charmeresse.<sup>78</sup>

Clearly in these two excerpts where details are repeated with ameliorative modification: 'bruits divers' becoming 'de joyeuses voix', the dazzling 'gaz qui brille aux cafés grands ouverts' becoming a 'lumière vive et charmeresse', it is not external city décor which is changing drastically from one evening to the next but merely Cros' perception of it, altering according to his differing mental states and the veil they cast over objective reality. The same is true of the contrasting eulogistic congratulation of the railway in ballade II 'A toi, merci! chemin de fer' coloured by 'j'ai retrouvé ma maîtresse' and the bitter condemnation of the same aspect of city life as an 'enfer d'engrais, de charbon et de cuir' in ballade III because of its role in removing his mistress from the Parisian scene.

Aware of the uplifting effect of the transformatory love experience Cros often seeks to employ it, combined with suggestive night lighting (and its excitative effect on the imagination) as a lens through which to view the city landscape. The clearest example of where the 'réalité étrangère et hostile de la ville est volontairement brouillée par le

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<sup>77</sup>Cros, O.C., p.112.

<sup>78</sup>Cros, O.C., p.113.



poète,<sup>79</sup> occurs in 'Soir' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) where Cros, emerging from his mistress' house and still vividly caught up in his love experience, sees the outlines of the city soften, aspects of its décor change and he himself senses a feeling of lightness and levitation:

Mes yeux voient à travers le voile  
Qu'y laisse le plaisir récent,  
Dans chaque lanterne une étoile  
Un ami dans chaque passant.

Chauves-souris disséminées,  
Mes tristesses s'en vont en l'air  
Se cacher par les cheminées,  
Noires, sur le couchant vert-clair.

Le gaz s'allume aux étalages...  
Moi, je crois, au lieu du trottoir,  
Fouler sous mes pieds les nuages  
Ou les tapis de son boudoir.<sup>80</sup> (Stanzas II-IV)

As in 'Souvenirs d'avril' where the poet's memory of his mistress lingers on in the sound and touch of the wind recalling her voice and embraces, here the afterglow of Cros' love experience persists to partly soften the harshness of the urban landscape into which he emerges. The precise outline of the city weighing down on the poet in moments of depression (as in 'Insomnie' where he is acutely aware of the clear-cut 'zinc et les ardoises des toits',<sup>81</sup> or in 'Le Fleuve' where the 'ligne capricieuse et noire' of the Parisian houses stands out against the sky<sup>82</sup>), here takes on a positive aspect acting as a concealment for previous unhappiness ('mes tristesses') now banished from his mind. Though having the physical effect of blurring sharpness of outline Cros' 'voile' in 'Soir' is nevertheless subjective in essence in its idealisation of street lamps which become stars, linking up with the Venus motif,<sup>83</sup> and transformation of

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<sup>79</sup>The phrase is that of France Jore in 'Ville et modernité dans Les Fleurs du Mal', Europe 45 (April-June 1967), 139-162, (p.150). He uses it in connection with the recurrent city fog motif in Baudelaire.

<sup>80</sup>Cros, O.C., p.88.

<sup>81</sup>Cros, O.C., p.108.

<sup>82</sup>Cros, O.C., p.77, lines 116-7.

<sup>83</sup>The image of Venus occurs frequently in Cros notably in 'L'Heure verte' and in the 'Sonnet astronomique' where the poet and his mistress stand bathed in the protective light of the planet and imagine a parallel couple on Venus looking down upon the earth.

anonymous passers-by into friends with whom he can share his joy. Underfoot also, fantasy supplants reality as the hardness of pavements melts away into clouds (conveying physical as well as mental elevation), or the welcoming softness of a boudoir carpet in a flashback to a moment of intimacy.

In 'Soir' the transformation of urban reality making the poet feel at ease rather than exiled in his environment follows on from a real, emotional experience. Elsewhere there is evidence that the transformation of Cros' surroundings and changes in his own perception of them have been deliberately provoked by the hallucinatory effect of an external agent namely absinth. Though instrumental in the composition of some of his most haunting verse, whether absinth's artistic benefits outweighed the final personal fee exacted on Cros by this 'sorcière verte' of alcoholism, premature senility and death remains a moot point. An admission of the magical effect of absinth is given in 'Lendemain' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) where the drink is classed among those sensual pleasures exciting the poet's imagination:

Avec les fleurs, avec les femmes,  
Avec l'absinthe, avec le feu,  
On peut se divertir un peu,  
Jouer son rôle en quelque drame.

L'absinthe bue un soir d'hiver  
Eclaire en vert l'âme enfumée,<sup>84</sup>

Associated with nighttime ('un soir d'hiver') the spirit offers its artificial warmth and light as a replacement for those of the sun in daytime, not simply illuminating the poet's vision of reality 'en vert' but also firing his soul to alter his personal appreciation of the world and fill him with fresh inspiration. The state of mind engendered by absinth is not a rational one however, but 'enfumée', one in which the normal perception of events is blurred or clouded as the pale green aspect of absinth is clouded on the addition of water.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cros, O.C., p.67.

<sup>85</sup> An interesting recipe for the perfect absinth and water mix is given by Cros in a monologue first published in 1877, 'La Famille Dubois', Cros' friend speaks:

Il n'y a pas besoin de verser de haut. (C'est un préjugé.) Il faut aller doucement, doucement et puis tout d'un coup flouf! on a une purée parfaite. (See Cros, O.C., p.264)

One of Cros' most memorable Parisian poems conveying in verse an evening scene in the city 'éclairé en vert' by the effect of absinth and perceived by the induced 'âme enfumée' of the poet is 'L'Heure verte' from Le Coffret de santal of 1873, but first published in L'Artiste, 1 August 1869 under the title 'Crépuscule parisien'.

Comme bercée en un hamac,  
La pensée oscille et tournoie,  
A cette heure où tout estomac  
Dans un flot d'absinthe se noie.

Et l'absinthe pénètre l'air,  
Car cette heure est toute émeraude.  
L'appétit aiguise le flair  
De plus d'un nez rose qui rôde.

Promenant le regard savant  
De ses grands yeux d'aigues-marines,  
Circé cherche d'où vient le vent  
Qui lui caresse les narines.

Et, vers des dîners inconnus,  
Elle court à travers l'opale  
De la brume du soir. Vénus  
S'allume dans le ciel vert-pâle.<sup>86</sup>

What has been termed the 'calme douceur'<sup>87</sup> of this poem assures its instant appeal on first reading. This quality emanates particularly from the poem's opening stanza with its accumulation of rhythmic and soporific motifs ('bercée', 'hamac', 'oscille', 'tournoie', 'se noie' and so on) its lilt-ing rhythm and the impression of lightness conveyed by the vowel sounds which leave the lines open ended. Though evocative of pictorial representations of the Parisian evening scene, one thinks of Degas' 'L'Absinthe' (1876) where a melancholic female figure is portrayed in grey-green tones seated in a city café or Toulouse Lautrec's more lively impressions of the heure de l'apéritif, Cros' poem is devoid of specific geographical location and accurate description of a particular city. 'L'Heure verte' remains vague and its technique impressionistic as if to convey the intoxicating effect of absinth itself blurring and changing the material

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<sup>86</sup>Cros, O.C., p.82.

<sup>87</sup>Jacques Brenner (editor) in Charles Cros, Poètes d'aujourd'hui (Paris, Seghers, 1955), p.96.

world and substituting its own green image for objective reality. Nevertheless this poem, as 'L'Heure froide' whose title it recalls, captures effectively a distinct moment of time, less real in the time-scale of the objective world than significant in the personal time-scale of the poet; the 'heure verte', a time when the fading blueness of the day at twilight mingles with the setting sun to create a sympathetic greenish hue actually lighting up 'en vert' aspects of reality. Green, Cros' 'couleur heureuse par excellence',<sup>88</sup> illuminates the poem continually: in the glass of absinth in stanza I, in the 'émeraude' of stanza II, in Circe's 'grands yeux aigues-marines' in stanza III, in the 'Ciel vert-pâle' of the final line. As the colour and smell of absinth, it pervades the city and its people, 'tout estomac/Dans un flot d'absinthe se noie'(line 4) and 'l'absinthe pénètre l'air' (line 5), magnetically drawing the inhabitants to rendez-vous and into the capital's restaurants. The final two stanzas are centred on the figure of Circe, a legendary character brought into the modern world<sup>89</sup> who represents either an archetypal female figure, (Parisiennes have an inevitable element of deceit in Cros) or as Ian Lockerbie believes, a courtesan.<sup>90</sup> Obviously a being of intelligence ('le regard savant') and sensuality ('le vent lui caresse les narines') she is a creature of the 'heure verte' both engendered by its emerald light (her eyes are blue-green) and ultimately swallowed up into its cloudy opalescence<sup>91</sup>: 'Elle court à travers l'opale/De la brume du soir'. As she disappears into the

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<sup>88</sup> Forestier, Charles Cros, l'homme et l'oeuvre, p.446.

<sup>89</sup> Cros' use of Circe here in a modern setting can be compared to Verlaine's use of Phidias in his early city poem 'Croquis parisien'. See Verlaine, O.C., p.49.

<sup>90</sup> While admitting the poem appears to celebrate absinth Ian Lockerbie places more emphasis in his interpretation of the poem on the 'rite de l'amour mondain' he believes to animate the final two stanzas. Op.cit., p.160.

<sup>91</sup> The progression from emerald to opal in 'L'Heure verte' involves two of the privileged groups of precious stones singled out for evocative description in the 'L'Alchimie moderne' where Cros speaks of:

Les diamants scintillants, les saphirs profonds,  
les rubis aux fulgurations opulentes, les fraîches  
émeraudes, les topazes, glaçons de vieux vins dépouillés,  
les opales irisées, changeantes suivant le temps  
comme les femmes. (See Cros, O.C., p.571.)

evening mist which provides a physical cover for her meeting with a lover or a client for the night, Venus, her guiding spirit, re-emerges in the sky, symbolic of, and witnessing, her erotic activity:

Vénus/S'allume dans le ciel vert-pâle.

The poem thus closes with a natural image and on a note of evaporation and nostalgia. In this respect and on account of the absence of objective description of a specific city 'L'Heure verte' may be considered typical of Cros' more oblique and subtle approach to city poetry. His suppression of the original title of 'L'Heure verte', 'Crépuscule parisien', on the poem's inclusion in the 1873 version of Le Coffret de santal can also be read as indicative of Cros' desire to aim at implicit rather than conspicuous urban themes and city content in his poetry.

As long as Cros was able to keep the city at bay in his poetry through the transformatory effect of love, rêverie or artificial stimuli therefore, there is evidence to suggest his attitude to Paris and its people remained fairly cheerful and optimistic. As we have seen where the city does intrude unexpectedly or in an unwelcome fashion as in 'Villégiature' or where the poet is trapped in contemplation of the fatal psychological implications of night in the city as in 'L'Heure froide' or his attention is focused unwillingly on for example the stark, silent, urban panorama which in 'Insomnie' contradicts his own mental activity, his mood towards his city surroundings turns to one of depression and pessimism. In reinforcement of this point, in those rarer poems where city motifs are made deliberately central by the poet's own contrivance, rather than their merely assuming importance as the poem progresses, the tone is equally dismal. This suggests, as Louis Forestier has stated, that Cros 'ne connaît de Paris que ce qui l'offusque et l'opprime [...] ce qui choque son regard',<sup>92</sup> but also implies that on certain occasions the poet specifically employed urban motifs and characters in an unfavourable light in order to criticise the environment and society they represented. This critical approach is evident in Le Coffret de santal of both 1873 and 1879 where its effect is heightened by the use of humour, irony, comparison and symbolic detail as Cros shows himself openly resentful of the constrictions of city life and their detrimental effect on the poetic imagination. It only reaches its apogee in Le Collier de griffes where Cros appears quite disenchanted with the materialism of Parisian life and society and even critical of his own earlier short-sighted poetic idealism.

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<sup>92</sup>Louis Forestier, Charles Cros, Poètes d'aujourd'hui, p.11.

'Intérieur', a piece from the Album zutique<sup>93</sup> which appeared for the first time in the 'Grains de sel' section of Le Coffret de santal of 1879 is unusual in its clear urban references being one of the few examples (apart from in the dizains parodying Coppée) where Cros uses proper names (here Pape and Musard<sup>94</sup>) for an effect of social contemporaneity and employs recognisable characters from Parisian society as subjects. In other respects, the two framing lines at beginning and end in babytalk and sol-fa and its satirical, possibly parodic content<sup>95</sup> 'Intérieur' is clearly a humorous piece designed to ridicule the boring and menial occupations of a Parisian bourgeois household which it catalogues at length:

"Joujou, pipi, caca, dodo"  
 "Do, ré, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do."  
 Le moutard gueule, et sa soeur tape  
 Sur un vieux clavecin de Pape.  
 Le père se rase au carreau  
 Avant de se rendre au bureau.  
 La mère émiette une panade  
 qui mijote, gluante et fade,  
 Dans les cendres. Le fils aîné  
 Cire, avec un air étonné,  
 Les souliers de toute la troupe,  
 Car, ce soir même, après la soupe,

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<sup>93</sup>The Album zutique was a slim volume of comic verse begun in 1871 by Charles Cros and his friends. It included contributions from Verlaine, Léon Valade, the musician Cabaner and photographer Etienne Carjat, Rimbaud and Nouveau. 'Intérieur' featured in the collection under the title 'Intérieur matinal'. This piece manifestly in the hand of Charles Cros is falsely attributed in the Album zutique to Alphonse Daudet.

<sup>94</sup>Heinrich Pape (1789-1875) was, as Louis Forestier explains in the Pléiade edition of Cros' complete works, a famous German piano maker. Philippe Musard (1792-1859) was a musician concerned in organising public concerts in Paris. The popularity of the particular form of entertainment he originated known as the 'concerts Musard' lingered on long after his death.

<sup>95</sup>Certain details in 'Intérieur' are highly reminiscent of Coppée. His Promenades et intérieurs XIX for example evokes 'Une petite fille, assise au clavecin,/ Qui joue, en frappant très-clair les touches un peu dures/ Un andante d'Haydn plein d'appoggiatures.'

Ils iront autour de Musard  
Et ne rentreront pas trop tard;  
Afin que demain l'on s'éveille  
Pour une existence pareille.  
"Do, ré, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do."  
"Joujou, pipi, caca, dodo."<sup>96</sup>

This poem is at its best read aloud in the stacatto delivery favoured by Cros himself and particularly suitable here to imitate a child's labourious playing of piano scales. In it the poet deliberately relinquishes traditional lyrical techniques to produce a work flat in tone and devoid of relieving imagery. It is stripped of all but the most banal ('vieux', line 4) or unattractive ('gluante', 'fade' line 8) adjectives and sparse in literary vocabulary. 'Moutard' (line 3) and 'gueuler' (line 11) and 'soupe' (line 12) provide challengingly unpoetic rhymes. The form and style of the poem itself thus voice Cros' criticisms of the prosaism of middle class society without the poet himself having to intervene and directly confront the readers. His use of enumerations similarly emphasises the repetitiously monotonous yet self-satisfied nature of mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois living: 'le moutard' (line 3), 'sa soeur' (line 3), 'le père' (line 5), 'la mère' (line 7), 'le fils aîné' (line 9) and so on. The characters' trivial tasks, shaving, shoe-cleaning, soup-making, are performed mechanically and are irritatingly self-perpetuating:

demain l'on s'éveille

Pour une existence pareille.

'Vocation' belongs to the same 'Grains de sel' section of Le Coffret de santal of 1879 as 'Intérieur' but had previously featured in the section 'Débris' of the 1873 edition of Cros' poems.<sup>97</sup> Despite its description as a 'production humoristique' by Henri Parisot in a collection of Cros' works<sup>98</sup> the poem is less comic than ironic in its use of the urban theme. It focuses in potentially Coppesque fashion, on the pitiful figure of a country girl who, disillusioned with her life on the farm, has come to the capital to seek her fortune. Yet it is shot through with contemptuous references to the 'public idiot' and the Parisian society they epitomise:

Jeune fille du caboulot,  
De quel pays es -tu venue  
Pour étaler ta gorge nue  
Aux yeux du public idiot?

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<sup>96</sup> Cros, O.C., p.139.

<sup>97</sup> See Cros, O.C., pp.141-2.

<sup>98</sup> See preface to Charles Cros poèmes et proses (Paris, Gallimard, 1944).

Jeune fille du caboulot,  
Il te déplaisait au village  
De voir meurtrir, dans le bel âge  
Ton pied mignon par un sabot.

(Stanzas I, II)

The opening stanzas of the poem provide an interesting reversal of the theme of rural personage versus urban milieu as expressed in such poems as Baudelaire's 'A une Malabaraise' (Les Epaves),<sup>99</sup> where the restrictions of civilized society, symbolised by 'le corset brutal', contrast unfavourably with a native woman's physical freedom in her natural environment. In the Cros poem the drawbacks of a rural life, represented by the 'sabot' are thrown into relief by 'les bruits de la rue' and 'l'absinthe' which for the simple, country girl epitomise the refinements of Parisian life. As the poem progresses, the traditional antithesis between attractive rural ingenuousness and disagreeable urban worldliness is further undermined by the poet who ironically praises his heroine's dubious profession as a waitress in a seedy café and the unhealthy pallor which has replaced her previously ruddy complexion:

Jeune fille du caboulot  
Ta mine rougeande était sotte  
Je t'aime mieux ainsi, pâlotte,  
Les yeux cernés d'un bleu halo.

[...]

Jeune fille du caboulot  
Laisse crier et continue  
A charmer de ta gorge nue  
Les yeux du public idiot.

(Stanzas VI, IX)

On a more serious level his apparent sympathy with this observed city character tends to suggest that he recognises in her physical decadence, brought about by urban life, a counterpart for his own Parisian bohemianism; and in her dependence on the 'public idiot' who appreciate her nakedness on a basic level, an extension of his own ultimate reliance on the despised 'foule, qui ne comprend pas' but 'qui paiera'.

Where criticism in 'Intérieur' and 'Vocation' is directed against city inhabitants Cros' target in 'Plainte' (Le Coffret de santal), is also that of the city's landscape and its social dimension which seems alien to the workings of the poetic imagination. The poem is constructed on a comparison between the poet himself and his mistress, one drawn to the quiet of the

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<sup>99</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.173.



countryside or the sensual pleasures of the Orient, the other attracted to the social whirl of the city:

Vrai sauvage égaré dans la ville de pierre,  
A la clarté du gaz je végète et je meurs.  
Mais vous vous y plaisez, et vos regards charmeurs  
M'attirent à la mort, parisienne fière.

Je rêve de passer ma vie en quelque coin  
Sous les bois verts ou sur les monts aromatiques,  
En Orient, ou bien près du pôle, très loin,  
Loin des journaux, de la cohue et des boutiques.

Mais vous aimez la foule et les éclats de voix,  
Le bal de l'Opéra, le gaz et la réclame.  
Moi, j'oublie, à vous voir, les rochers et les bois,  
Je me tue à vouloir me civiliser l'âme.

Je vous ennuie à vous le dire si souvent:  
Je mourrai, papillon brûlé, si cela dure...  
Vous feriez bien pourtant, vos cheveux noirs au vent,  
En clair peignoir ruché, sur un fond de verdure!<sup>100</sup>

Like the gypsy figure in 'Tsiganes' (Le Coffret de santal) who strains to escape from the 'course effarée et sans but' of modern life by way of the 'après monts', 'insidieux vallons', 'sommets', 'lacs' and 'champs blonds' of the rural world,<sup>101</sup> the poet in 'Plainte' aligns himself with the free and natural man. He is a 'Vrai sauvage' out of his milieu in the hard and uncompromising environment of the 'ville de pierre'.<sup>102</sup> The city with its soul-destroying social values (line 12) and harsh light withering imagination and spontaneity and threatening death (lines 12-14) appears not to constitute a true stage on Cros' poetic journey. He is 'égaré' in Paris, drawn away from his preferred rural setting by the fatal attractions of a 'parisienne fière' who is drawn towards the city's kaleidoscopic variety (conveyed by the urban paraphernalia mentioned by the poet: 'des journaux', 'des boutiques', 'la foule', 'le gaz', 'la réclame' and so on) and who

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<sup>100</sup> Cros, O.C., p.94.

<sup>101</sup> Cros, O.C., p.134.

<sup>102</sup> The uncomplimentary description of Paris as a 'ville de pierre' heralds Verlaine's of four years later where the capital is evoked as a 'tas oriard de pierres blanches'. (Sagesse, III, XVI, 'La 'grande ville'!'). See Verlaine, O.C., p.190.

flourishes in the city's artificial atmosphere.<sup>103</sup> Only when divested of her Parisian accoutrements, as in 'Matin' (Le Coffret de santal, 1873), where the poet wakes after a night of love to see his mistress' fashionable city clothes discarded, cocoon-like on the floor of his room, can she and the poet achieve compatibility.<sup>104</sup> In 'Plainte' the bewitching and deadly female is unresponsive to the poet's plea to accompany him back to the natural world (lines 15-16) leaving him with an impossible choice of a return alone and the relinquishing of his love or the self-sacrifice and concomitant imaginative suicide of continued life in the city.<sup>105</sup>

An increasingly pessimistic attitude to Paris and especially towards its constrictive effect on the poetic sensibility animates one central section of the uncharacteristically lengthy and symbolic poem, 'Le Fleuve', belonging to Le Coffret de santal of 1879 but first published independently in 1874.<sup>106</sup> The picture of the capital suggested by Cros in this poem is probably the most detailed and instantly memorable of all his poetry but is also one of the most damning. It alone approximates to the visual and atmospheric evocations central to a work such as Coppée's 'Olivier' yet its symbolic significance adds a further dimension not exploited by the elder poet. Flowing water in 'Le Fleuve' represents in a Parisian context the waters of the Seine yet in the wider poetic context as an ancient symbol of power and fertility it can be equated with literary creativity. The

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<sup>103</sup>Notions of cruelty and magic are frequently present in Cros' pictures of Parisian women. In 'Madrival sur un carnet d'ivoire' for example the woman is seen as a fairy-like enchantress bringing death to her victim.

Willis parisienne, empreinte  
D'un charme inquiétant, mais doux,  
J'attends, voluptueuse crainte,  
La mort, si je valse avec vous.

<sup>104</sup>See Cros, O.C., p.81.

<sup>105</sup>The closing image of this poem where Cros imagines his mistress silhouetted against the green of the natural world, 'Vous feriez bien pourtant, vos cheveux noirs au vent,/En clair peignoir ruché, sur un fond de verdure' is a popular one with the poet who repeats it in 'Trois quatrains' also in the poem's closing lines,

Voici le fond qu'il faut au lumineux dessin:  
Un matin rose, avec arbres rouillés, l'automne.

<sup>106</sup>'Le Fleuve' was first published independently in 1874 by the Librairie de l'eau forte. It included several illustrations by Manet.

poem thus describes on one level a real river's journey from its source to the sea with the enumeration and description of all the different landscapes it passes through on the way, and on another level the movement and progression of the poet's imagination from the moment of inspiration to final communication with an audience and the different stages of creation involved. Cros begins with an evocation of the actual river passing effortlessly through the rural landscape, integrated into the scene, providing succour to its population of woodmen, farmers and fishermen then bubbling gaily over rocky ground. This approximates in symbolic terms the poet's periods of effortless, enjoyable composition and spontaneous inspiration. Suddenly the flow of Cros' verse is halted as we approach the urban enclave and the city section of the poem. The typographical separation and repetition of the word 'ville' at the beginning of this passage draws to readers' attention the uniqueness of this landscape and of its necessarily detrimental effect on the river's free movement and by extension that of the poetic imagination:

C'est la ville,  
La ville immense avec ses oris hospitaliers.  
L'eau coule entre les quais corrects. Des escaliers  
Mènent aux profondeurs glauques du suicide.  
A la paroi moussue un gros anneau s'oxide,  
Pour celui qui se noie inaccessible espoir.<sup>107</sup>

(lines 115-20)

Apart from isolated lyrical images such as those describing the rooftops as a 'ligne capricieuse et noir sur le soir/Verdâtre' (lines 121-2) or the 'maisons' and 'palais en étages' whose lighted windows 'se constellent' (lines 122-3) in the night sky (which illustrate the hidden potential of the cityscape for enriching the depth of expression of a receptive poet, but which Cros himself refused consciously to admit to), the Parisian spectacle described in lines 120-140 is wretched and pessimistic. Notions of decay occur in 'vieux quais' and 'pierres disjointes', of poverty in 'femmes pauvres', of death in 'suicide' and 'qui se noie' and of disease in 'Des chiens, des chats pourris'. Other details are overwhelmingly sordid and depressing:

Le jour baisse, et les chauves-souris  
Voltigent lourdement, poussant de petits oris  
Ces vieux quais oubliés sur leurs pierres disjointes  
Supportent des maisons grises aux toits en pointes.  
Là, sèchent des chiffons que de leurs maigres bras

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<sup>107</sup> Cros, O.C., p.74.

Les femmes pauvres ont rincés. En bas, des rats.

(lines 124-9)

As well as providing the horrible pollution described in lines 139-41

L'égout vomit l'eau noire aux affreuses écumes,

Roulant des vieux souliers, des débris de légumes

Des chiens, des chats pourris qu'emène le courant.

(which though absorbed as a 'souillure sans effet dans le Fleuve si grand' nevertheless contradicts its tranquil dignity), the city also has the more serious effect of hampering the river's freedom of movement. Its flow is directed laterally through the constrictive 'quais corrects' and 'piles massives' of the bridges, vertically by the 'chalands ventrus' under whose weight it is forced to pass. To expand the artistic metaphor; Paris can stifle or control the poet's creativity in the same way as the physical restrictions of a city can limit the spontaneity of a river previously expressed in cascades and meanderings on its journey through the natural world. The poet thus reaffirms the point made in 'Plainte' relating to city décor and the workings of his imagination: 'A la clarté du gaz je végète et je meurs' and that made in 'Vocation' concerning the uncomprehending 'public idiot' who detract from a poet's ultimate success.

Accentuating Cros' critical approach to the city and its people expressed directly in 'Intérieur', 'Vocation', 'Plainte', and 'Le Fleuve' and undermining the ameliorative transformation of the cityscape made possible and effected discreetly in poems such as 'L'Heure verte' or 'Soir', was Cros' growing awareness (especially at the end of the 1870s and during the 1880s) of the increasingly temporary nature of the transformation of Paris afforded by alcohol, love and rêverie and of the threatened reaffirmation of the reality of the objective urban world ousting his subjective 'vie idéale'. This awareness had first been hinted at in relation to the artificially created state of mind in 'Lendemain' (Le Coffret de santal, 1879) where Cros, though appreciating the ability of absinth to 'éclairer' en vert l'âme enfumée' is also equally aware of the depths of depression to be plumbed once the false sense of happiness and acute sensual awareness engendered by the alcohol had worn off and only its sordid, rather than magical, connotations remained:

Et, si la triste vie est sauve

Restent l'absinthe et ses hoquets.<sup>108</sup>

In relation to Cros' transforming imagination which towards the end of his poetic career appeared to experience more difficulty in dealing with the restrictive and obsessively materialistic city world around him, a feeling of étouffement can be sensed in the 'Douleurs et colères' section of

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<sup>108</sup> Cros, O.C., p.68.

Le Collier de griffes in 'Aux Imbéciles', 'Banalité' and 'Saint Sébastien' especially. In these poems Cros' attitude towards the city borders on the pessimistic while his vision of Paris is of a harshly claustrophobic environment peopled by brutal and uncomprehending inhabitants.<sup>109</sup> Moreover as the city, especially in its material form, threatens to fully reassert itself, contradicting and stifling the poet's spirituality in the process, images of death as a deliverance (often underlined by suggestions of hope and immortality) or as an inevitable conclusion, (intensified by notions of despair and disillusionment), proliferate. Here Cros' contribution to the city theme in nineteenth-century French poetry ends on a note of ambiguity as had characterised his attitude to Paris from the outset.

'Aux Imbéciles' is a good example of Cros' poetic continuity in action since as its title suggests it is cast in the mould of earlier poems notably the preface to the 1873 edition of Le Coffret de santal and 'Vocation', where Cros disdains 'La foule, qui ne comprend pas' and reproaches the 'public idiot'. The same implicit contrast in height and depth between the poet 'rêvant des terres inconnues' and 'contemplant les splendeurs nues' ('Préface') and the uncomprehending crowd or public in base exile on earth is present in this poem. The 'horizons/D'émeraudes et de cuivre' contrast with the 'gens bien assis' of Stanza I:

Quand nous irisons  
Tous nos horizons  
D'émeraudes et de cuivre,  
Les gens bien assis  
Exempts de soucis  
Ne doivent pas nous poursuivre.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the poet's affirmed imaginative superiority over his fellow men, affirmed in his fruitful activity ('nous irisons/Tous nos horizons'), as compared to their complacent immobility ('bien assis' and 'Ne doivent pas nous poursuivre'), his failure in a material sense beside the 'gens [...] / Exempts de soucis' is apparent. This point is illustrated in the poem's second and third stanzas where in a subtly ironic play on words ('fin' and 'fain') the artist's decorative imaginative superiority in his Watteauesque pose ('jouer de la guitare') is shown to be materially worthless:

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<sup>109</sup> A similar sense of disillusionment can be felt in connection with the love theme in Le Collier de griffes. 'Caresse', 'Jeune homme' and 'Un immense désespoir' reveal Cros' bitterness especially in their misogyny and death imagery.

<sup>110</sup> Cros, O.C., p.202.

On devient très fin,  
Mais on meurt de faim,  
A jouer de la guitare.

This financial décalage between himself and his fellow men both provokes the poet against his contemporaries and affects his attitude to the city whose modern inventions offer to the rich the possibility of travel yet to him only the temptation of contact on a real level with his horizon or 'bout du monde'. To the impecunious poet, trains, steamers and railway stations thus merely underline his present isolation in a money-oriented society:

On n'est emporté,  
L'hiver ni l'été,  
Dans le train d'aucune gare.

Le chemin de fer  
Est vraiment trop cher  
Le steamer fendeur de l'onde  
Est plus cher encoor;  
Il faut beaucoup d'or  
Pour aller au bout du monde.

In the poet's predicament the human protagonists, here the 'gens bien assis' like the sleeping bourgeois in 'Insomnie' or Paris' population 'lourdement endormi' in 'L'Heure froide' embody for Cros the irritating smugness and quiescence at the heart of Parisian society, a claustrophobic force to be destroyed before it itself was able to destroy. The final stanza of 'Aux Imbéciles' thus reveals the poet, in a modified repetition of the word play of stanza I ('faim' and 'fin') resorting to threats of violence and death as an outlet for his frustrations and as a means of preserving his integrity in a hostile environment:<sup>111</sup>

Donc, gens bien assis,  
Exempts de soucis,  
Méfiez-vous du poète,  
Qui peut, ayant faim,  
vous mettre, à la fin,  
Quelques balles dans la tête.

A more passive reaction to the crowding in of the material and objective city world forms the inspiration for 'Banalité' which opens the 'Douleurs

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<sup>111</sup> The threats of 'Aux Imbéciles' recall that of 'Indignation' where Cros 'rêve, poignards, poisons, dynamite.'

et colères' section of Le Collier de griffes. This poem entails an interesting reversal of Cros' previously characteristic softening of the outlines of the 'réalité étrangère et hostile de la ville' through effective exercise of his imagination as the poet envisages a volcanic eruption of molten gold and silver (the outward symbols of a prosperous urban society) flowing over the surface of the world to stifle himself and aspects of the natural order in a rigid layer of calcified metal:

L'océan d'argent couvre tout  
Avec sa marée incrustante.  
Nous avons rêvé jusqu'au bout  
Le legs d'un oncle ou d'une tante.

Rien ne vient. Notre cerveau bout  
Dans l'Idéal, feu qui nous tente,  
Et nous mourons. Restent debout  
Ceux qui font le cours de la rente.

Etouffé sous les lourds métaux  
Qui brûlèrent toute espérance,  
Mon coeur fait un bruit de marteaux.

L'or, l'argent, rois d'indifférence  
Fondus, puis froids, ont recouvert  
Les mugets et le gazon vert.<sup>112</sup>

In stanza I of the poem the ominous, physical presence of the 'océan d'argent' contrasts with the poverty and the self-confessed idealism of the poet alternately dreaming of an inheritance (lines 3-4) or occupied in contemplation of his ideal (lines 5-6).<sup>113</sup> His submission ('nous mourons', line 7) to the merciless metallic flood which leaves only the

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<sup>112</sup> Cros, O.C., p.198.

<sup>113</sup> The apparent obsession with money exhibited in many of the poems of Le Collier de griffes had its roots in Cros' real financial situation at the time. Married in 1878, he was a father of two sons by 1880 and had a constant struggle for survival on a personal level and in relation to his scientific achievements many of which were undermined by the lack of sufficient monetary backing. The literary confraternity demonstrated their concern with Cros' predicament in 1879 when he was awarded the prix Juglar of the Académie Française, a cash reward of 2000 francs, in a humanitarian gesture as well as in acknowledgment of the poet's literary achievements.

financially successful (caustically described as 'ceux qui font le cours de la rente' in line 8) standing in its wake seems inevitable. The reality of death described in stanza III however proves very different from the poet's conception of it as his essence ('mon coeur') is 'étouffé sous les lourds métaux', (like the 'raison de M. Igitur' which in 'Effarement' was encapsulated in a 'dame-jeanne en fer battu'), and he slowly stifles. The graphic image of line 11, 'Mon coeur fait un bruit de marteaux' conveys successfully both the frantic desperation and the physical symptoms of a suffocating man while the stealthy progress of the hallucinatory volcanic flow and its patent disregard of the poet's distress allow us to sympathise and share in his sense of claustrophobia in the city world more intensely than had a different symbol been chosen for this particular environment.

Through their alternative tones of grim irony and agonised despair, 'Aux Imbéciles' and 'Banalité' illustrate the rapid crescendo during the 1880s, of the theme of alienation between poet and urban life present earlier in 'L'Heure froide' and 'Insomnie' where the city had first intruded in an unwelcome fashion on Cros' poetic sensibility. The ultimate and most complete expression of Cros' deteriorating relationship with Paris and its people is however reserved for 'Saint Sébastien' (Le Collier de griffes) where the poet is able to combine the resignation of 'Banalité' in a further horrifying vision of his own death, with the defiance of 'Aux Imbéciles' as he finally reasserts his own ultimate superiority over his contemporaries in death:

Je suis inutile et je suis nuisible  
Ma peau a les tons qu'il faut pour la cible.  
Valets au pouvoir public attachés,  
Tirez, tirez donc, honnêtes archers!

La première flèche a blessé mon ventre,  
La seconde avec férocité m'entre  
Dans la gorge, aussi mon sang précieux  
Jaillit, rouge clair, au regard des cieux.

Je meurs et là-haut sont dans les platanes  
Des oiseaux charmeurs. En bas de bons ânes  
Mêlés à des ours, brutes qu'il ne faut  
Jamais occuper des choses d'en haut.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Cros, O.C., p.203.



From the opening words 'Je suis' of this emphatically personal poem our gaze is directed towards the disillusioned figure of the poet himself. He is both fully conscious of his failure in a material sense and also seemingly abandoned by the sustaining self-confidence marking earlier works; 'Je suis inutile', he says. Masochistically he lays himself open to torture and ultimate martyrdom at the hands of the minor officials of bourgeois bureaucracy, the 'valets du pouvoir public' whose standards he has contravened. These figures can be compared to 'ceux qui font le cours de la rente' in 'Banalité' or the 'gens bien assis/Exempts de soucis' of 'Aux Imbéciles'. Despite the poet's failure beside these successful society figures, the sudden brutality and physical violence of Stanza II; 'La première flèche a blessé mon ventre/La seconde avec férocité m'entre/Dans la gorge', raises Cros to a point spiritually high above his tormentors as his mute passivity is transformed into a spirit of self-sacrifice and he is identified with the personage of Saint Sebastian.<sup>115</sup> This change of emphasis is conveyed in the poem by the fountain of blood image in lines 7-8 'mon sang précieux/Jaillit, rouge clair, au regard des cieux' linking the poet's life-essence with the higher plane of 'des cieux'. In an effective contrast with 'je suis' of Stanza I and as repetition of the phrase from 'Banalité' ('je meurs') the poem concludes with a reiteration of the death motif and on a note of moral composure with the poet's body balanced between the two levels of existence: the ethereal of 'en haut' and the material, city world 'en bas', represented in animalistic terms by the 'oiseaux charmeurs' and the 'bons âmes/Mêlés à des ours' respectively. If apparently denied full consummation of his ideal through death (the poet's eyes are still at this point directed upwards to an unattainable point 'dans les platanes') his martyrdom has at least secured final enfranchisement from the 'brutes' of his mundane existence in Paris and from those people incapable of occupying or unwilling to occupy themselves with the poet's dream and with 'des choses d'en haut'.

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<sup>115</sup>Cros uses the image of Saint Sébastien in a pictorial rather than a religious sense. No Christian dimension is implied.

In its illustration of Cros' final spiritual and poetic triumph over his fellow Parisians yet undeniable failure in a material sense among them 'Saint Sébastien' summarises Charles Cros' ultimate and tragic destiny as a literary man and a city poet. Coppée had become aware that 'la matérielle est dure à gagner dans les lettres' and had thus abandoned his early nostalgic city poetry inspired by a genuine love of Paris, in favour of a more commercially viable verse, treating a wealth of recognisable urban figures and social themes which would assure him of a regular income. Cros, however, in the sphere of serious poetry at least,<sup>116</sup> was unprepared to bow to popular demand and the tastes of a mass audience for the sake of personal expediency.<sup>117</sup> Though one might argue a desire to appeal only to a limited and more sensitive audience ('ceux que j'aime'), partly influenced Cros' reliance on a subtler and more oblique use of the city in poetry than Coppée, the poet's temperamental links with his Parisian environment also had a major role to play. Since Cros had not actually been born in Paris,

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<sup>116</sup> Cros' monologues on the other hand do reveal a desire to appeal to and amuse a larger audience. They were consequently the most profitable of his works in a financial sense and assured him a small income towards the end of his life. Having however sold the copyright of individual monologues to their interpreter (the actor Coquelin Cadet) Cros as the talented author ultimately and ironically made less profit from his creations than he otherwise might have done.

<sup>117</sup> Cros' deliberate avoidance of Coppée's realist approach, clear-cut themes and identifiable city characters (which precluded the possibility of his ever attaining the instant success enjoyed by his contemporary) not only points to a radical temperamental difference between the two poets and their attitude to Paris but also begs the question, which cannot be fully answered within the limited scope of this study, of whether Cros even aspired to a Coppesque popularity with his poetry or if his works, as suggested by their reliance on personal experience, were not intended primarily for his own satisfaction or for the delectation of a literary élite capable of a fuller appreciation of his work.

these links were not those of a son to his native city nor, despite his Parisian upbringing, did they rest on early memories of the capital. Cros' Parisian poems make use less of nostalgic reflections on past occurrences in the city than of powerful reactions to experiences undergone in relation to, or emotions generated by, aspects of present urban life. Being however reluctant to expose these personal experiences and emotions to the critical public gaze, Cros refused to set them in poems evoking well-specified, contemporary settings. Hence those examples of local colour and verifiable geographical locations in the city which characterised Coppée's descriptive city pieces are for the most part, absent in Cros' poetry.<sup>118</sup> Obscure cafés provide rendez-vous points with friends, nameless streets link the poet and his mistress' house and merely the silhouettes of buildings are glimpsed from his attic window. Allusions to city people are similarly indistinct in his poetry. The bourgeois nevertheless feature in 'Insomnie', a vague 'jeune fille' in 'Vocation' and a faceless Parisian family in 'Intérieur'. Elsewhere Cros employs generalities when he wishes to refer to the city inhabitants, in 'Préface' (Le Coffret de santal, 1873), he mentions 'la foule' and 'le public', in 'Saint Sébastien' he resorts to the animalistic terms of 'ours', 'âne' and 'brutes' to describe the human race. Paris' political life so important to Rimbaud and even significant for Coppée, is also virtually absent in Cros. It features only indirectly in the unconvincing allegorical piece 'La Blessée'.<sup>119</sup>

Though the city may not form a descriptive thread running through Cros' poetry and is therefore a theme more difficult to trace than in Coppée's works, the feeling of Parisianism which emanates from Cros' compositions nevertheless points to urban life as having provided a stimulus for the poet if on an unconscious, emotional or psychological level, rather than

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<sup>118</sup> Exceptions to this general tendency are the comic poem 'Le propriétaire' from Le Collier de griffes where Cros seizes on Coppée's preference, especially in Les Humbles, for poems employing the profession of the main protagonist as their title, 'Le Fleuve', and poems employing the railway motif.

<sup>119</sup> With its emphasis rather on the war as it has affected France as a whole than Paris in particular 'La Blessée' does not qualify for detailed comment in a study of Cros' city poetry. Strangely, apart from this uncharacteristic piece, Cros fails to comment on the Franco-Prussian war, the siege and the Commune in his verse. Jean Dautry's article on the 'Opinions politiques de Charles Cros' Europe 387-8 (July-August 1961), pp.321-4, remains on the whole unconvincing of the poet's political commitment and draws only vaguely on the poetry for illustration.

on a simple, pictorial or visual one. Works such as 'Vanité sous-marine', are city poems in that they betray the Parisian nature of their author in obliquely revealing urban references. Their subjects are ostensibly non-urban (an imaginary scene, the natural world, the classical age and so on). Similarly 'L'Heure froide' and 'Insomnie' which only involve brief evocations of the objective city surroundings where they are relevant to the poet's mental state, can also be justifiably classed as urban pieces. They succinctly express Cros' feelings of anguish and fear as generated by life in an insensitive urban environment.

Up to the point where the city imposes itself unconsciously on the poet's writings and filters imperceptibly into his imagery Cros does not resent its interference. Neither does he object to its presence in what remain the most evocative and successful of his city pieces, the night poems. In this group especially, Cros gives the real world of contemporary Paris an uniquely personal dimension by effecting, in the words of Herbert Juin, an 'épanchement du songe dans la vie éveillée'.<sup>120</sup> The discordant notes of a nineteenth-century railway station are embraced in the poet's rêverie in 'Effarement', the city's sordidity and angular contours are transformed through personal amorous adventures in 'Drame en trois ballades' and 'Soir', through an alcoholic experience in 'L'Heure verte'. The metropolis is thus preserved on one level in Cros, less as a visual spectacle than as an environment inextricably linked to the poet's imaginative and emotional life. In contrast to these privileged moments of urban awareness, are occasions when Parisian life appears to close in around the poet, stifling his creativity and anchoring him in alien surroundings, as the rigid city décor in 'Le Fleuve' channels the course of the freely-flowing river. When this happens, Cros' relationship with Paris deteriorates, his attitude towards the city becomes more pessimistic and his use of urban motifs less suggestive. Though early criticism of the city setting and its inhabitants as voiced in 'Intérieur' and 'Vocation' for example, tends towards irony and humour, in Le Collier de griffes these safety valves disappear. Ultimately only the bleak expression of the décalage between the poet and his incompatible surroundings and his apparent self-sacrifice of life in the city remains. From the evidence of Cros' inimitable night poetry and on account of numerous other examples in Le Coffret de santal and Le Collier de griffes where he is influenced, directly or indirectly, by life in the French capital and his own problematic relationship with the

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<sup>120</sup> Charles Cros, Le Coffret de santal préface de Hubert Juin (Paris, Gallimard, 1972), p.17.

city, any dismissive evaluation of Cros as purely an escapist or a fantaisiste can be questioned. Such an assessment of the poet, based on his expressed yearnings towards a higher plane or reality than his immediate surroundings offered, represents an oversimplified view of a figure whose life and works rest on an essential ambiguity. As contrast and variety marked Charles Cros' double life as a scientist and a poet, it also marked his poetry with escapist idealism and Parisianism. His city poetry in its turn was similarly heightened by vacillation and ambivalence. The capricious city spirit which Cros aptly described as the 'Muse ou démon des jours actuels' ('Evocation', Le Collier de griffes), rendered this particular environment alternately a powerfully inspirational and then a deeply resented poetic subject for Cros. In producing poems of a rare beauty, such as 'Soir' and 'L'Heure verte', yet others scarcely veiled in their profound distaste for the urban environment, Cros' 'Muse ou démon', ensured subsequent interest in his city poetry among that of his contemporaries.

### CHAPTER 3

#### PAUL VERLAINE: REVERIE AND DEATH IN THE CITY

As is the fate of many anthology poets, Paul Verlaine has frequently been caricatured for the general public by a highly selective collection of what have been made his best-known pieces but which in view of the vast range of his talent and long poetic career hardly constitute a representative selection of his work.<sup>1</sup> He has thus emerged as a poet primarily concerned with escapist illusions, whose compositions emanate vagueness, musicality and melancholy.<sup>2</sup> On the few occasions when Verlaine offered a direct comment on his poetry he seems to have done little to dispel this restricted evaluation and even added fuel to the fire of his commentators. The self-parody 'A la manière de Paul Verlaine', for example exaggerates those elements traditionally considered typical of his poetry: moonlight, saturnism, musicality and so on.<sup>3</sup> Likewise the article Verlaine wrote on himself in the

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<sup>1</sup> These include primarily 'Le ciel est par-dessus le toit', 'Chanson d'automne' 'Art poétique' and the Fêtes galantes.

<sup>2</sup> Such qualities are described as the 'apport essentiel de son art' by Jacques Borel in Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.xxxiii.

<sup>3</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.503-4.

Poètes maudits series, picks neither on modernity, realism nor the city as characterising 'Pauvre Lélian'. It gives a flippant description of the poet as a 'vilain galopin pas trop méchant avec la rêvasserie dans la tête'.<sup>4</sup>

Though attention focused on this particular side of Verlaine's character is valid and interesting, it has tended to deflect attention away from his use of the real city world about him in poetry. A number of critical works concentrating wholly on limited periods of Verlaine's life such as his escapades with Rimbaud<sup>5</sup> or his religious conversion,<sup>6</sup> to the detriment of other important periods have also helped to undermine a broader approach to Verlaine and his poetry. Commentaries wherein Verlaine is treated in an indirect manner by dint of extensive comparisons with his masters and contemporaries so that his own originality escapes, also frustrate an assessment of Paul Verlaine as an individual. A frequent detraction from the central figure of Paul Verlaine has been practised in connection with the city theme as nowhere yet has the poet been considered specifically on his own merits as a poet of the city despite a wealth of fascinating and relevant material in the realms of verse and prose.

In his comprehensive work La Formation littéraire de Verlaine, Georges Zayed stops briefly in the section dealing with Baudelaire's influence to comment on the theme of Paris. His reflection is unfortunately limited to a rather vague statement detrimental to Verlaine.<sup>7</sup> In those pages dedicated to Coppée, Zayed offers slightly more detailed comment to the effect that this poet's influence led to 'toute une série de pièces réalistes' of which 'Le Soldat laboureur' and 'La Soupe du soir' are given as examples. Neither of these is characteristic of Verlaine's urban poetry however. Jacques Borel in Verlaine, O.C. en prose also points to Coppée's influence in a city piece, namely 'Anteuil', a prose work from Mémoires d'un veuf which he sees as

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<sup>4</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.687.

<sup>5</sup> A.E. Carter in Verlaine - A Study in Parallels (University of Toronto Press, 1969), p.67, states categorically that 'the advent of Rimbaud was the central point of Verlaine's life and explains everything that followed'.

<sup>6</sup> See Louis Morice, Verlaine, le drame religieux (Paris, Beauchesne, 1946).

<sup>7</sup> Speaking of 'Nocturne parisien' he says that Verlaine 'avec moins de vigueur et un peu de timidité' tried to capture 'le bas fond et la misère de la grande ville' exploited previously by Baudelaire. La Formation littéraire de Verlaine (Geneva, Droz, 1962), p.242.

derivative.<sup>8</sup> The fifteen year gap between 'Auteuil' and the poems of Intimités which Borel sees as inspirational and the varied and dramatic events which had overtaken Verlaine in the meantime since his early years of close friendship with Coppée make this claim highly suspect however. Suzanne Bernard similarly mentions the city theme in Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours. She focuses naturally on Verlaine's prose poems of urban ~~relevance~~ especially on those of the 1860s, but uses them to underline primarily the poet's debt to Baudelaire rather than his own developing relationship with the city theme.<sup>9</sup> None of these critics therefore offer a satisfactory evaluation of Verlaine as an urban poet. It is against such a background of opinion that a fresh vision of Verlaine's contribution to the large volume of nineteenth-century city poetry must be attempted.

The young Verlaine's earliest known impression of Paris, formed on his move to the capital from Metz, his native town, in 1851 is described in the opening pages of his volume Confessions.<sup>10</sup> Bitter disappointment prevails in these lines describing the bleakness of a city which had failed miserably to correspond to the idealised vision of the metropolis as a

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<sup>8</sup>On page 1153 of Verlaine, O.C. en prose Jacques Borel claims 'Auteuil' displays a 'veine réaliste, à la fois pittoresque et grinçante, émotion et raillerie' characteristic of Coppée. If Verlaine was indebted to one of his contemporaries in this poem it would seem to be Germain Nouveau rather than Coppée, however, as a discussion of 'Auteuil' later in this study will reveal.

<sup>9</sup>Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, Nizet, 1959), p.348.

<sup>10</sup>Confessions was first published in Paris in 1895 by the Imprimerie industrielle et artistique, Albert Ten Veldhuys, 15-17, Rue des Martyrs.



'Bagdad' or a 'Visapour' conjured up in the young poet's provincial and childish imagination:

Ma première impression de Paris fut  
laideur, boue et jour sale, - et l'odeur  
fade qui flotte en son atmosphère, pour  
des narines habituées aux fortes et  
simples bises de l'Est lorrain et aux  
salubres courants d'air d'une ville en  
échiquier.<sup>11</sup>

Fortunately by the morning after his arrival Verlaine's youthful indignation had cooled somewhat (an early indication of what was to prove a deeply-seated ambivalence towards urban life) and he found himself irresistibly caught up in the excitement and variety of city life and its people:

Le lendemain, je dois l'avouer, me récompensa  
du mécompte si véhémentement subi dès en  
arrivant. [...] Peu d'embellissements ont  
altéré la physionomie du si absolument varié  
amusant encore plus que grandiose - de clair  
fourmillement humain et de richesse et de  
luxure, et de philosophie et de gaieté, faux ou  
vrais, vrais et faux, mais intenses et légers  
ensemble et libres, - Boulevard de Paris.

Eleven years later, in tune with an increasing awareness of his own poetic talent<sup>12</sup> and the need to exploit it in a fertile atmosphere, Verlaine's attitude to Paris had expanded from a child's simple appreciation of his personal environment to an assessment of the city as a literary nerve-centre essential to his existence. In a letter of 16 September 1862 to Edmond Lepelletier for example, Verlaine cuts short a general preamble describing the change of activities he was enjoying in the rural surroundings of Lecluse (where he was relaxing for a month after his baccalauréat) to consider the subject nearest his heart, that of the city:

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<sup>11</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.455.

<sup>12</sup>Verlaine's first published piece 'Monsieur Prudhomme', a comic picture of an affected bourgeois, was published in La Revue du Progrès in August 1863.

Et toi mon cher Lepelletier [...] serais-tu  
rentré à Paris? Oh, alors, fais-moi vite  
une chronique. Je suis affamé de  
nouvelles, j'ai soif de littérature [...]   
écris-moi au plus tôt, annonce-moi les  
publications nouvelles, fais-moi part de  
tous les bruits de la ville, dis m'en le  
plus que tu pourras, le plus sera le mieux.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly by this stage (1862), Verlaine perceived of life in the natural world as an exile from his preferred environment. Though calm and appealing on one level, Lecluse offered on another, intellectual starvation, a feeling which could only be resolved by renewed contact with the city. This latter environment offered both fellowship with better known figures in the poetic world and promise of a future audience in its literate population.

For Verlaine's most crucial statement on Paris, this time of the environment specifically as a source of poetic inspiration, we must wait a further three years however until 1865 and the publication of his lengthy article on Charles Baudelaire.<sup>14</sup> Arguably the greatest of nineteenth-century French city poets, Baudelaire was Verlaine's admitted poetic master during his school years.<sup>15</sup> In his commentary on Baudelaire,

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<sup>13</sup> Correspondance de Paul Verlaine, edited by A.D. Van Bever (Paris, Messein, 1922), Vol.1, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> This article reproduced in Verlaine, O.C. en prose, pp.599-612 was in fact first published in three instalments as follows: parts I and II under the title 'Charles Baudelaire I' in L'Art (16 November 1865), parts III and IV as 'Charles Baudelaire II' in L'Art (30 November 1865) and parts V, VI and VII as 'Charles Baudelaire III' in L'Art (23 December 1865).

<sup>15</sup> Speaking in Confessions of his schooldays when he indulged in illicit readings of Baudelaire, Verlaine explains:

Quoi qu'il en soit, Baudelaire eût à ce moment, sur moi,  
une influence tout au moins d'imitation enfantine et  
tout ce que vous voudrez de cette gamme, mais une  
influence réelle qui ne pouvait que grandir et alors,  
s'élucider, se logifier avec le temps.

(Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.481)

Though in his schooldays Verlaine would only have read the first edition of Les Fleurs du Mal, his comments in Confessions are made in full familiarity with the collections's second edition with its higher proportion of city poems.

Verlaine abstracts what he defines as the 'lieux communs' of Baudelaire's poetry and considers in turn 'l'amour', 'le vin' and 'la mort' explaining how Baudelaire ' [chante] sur tous les tons' and ' [passe] en revue toutes les situations poétiques données' where these different themes are applicable. As Baudelaire's final poetic 'lieu commun' Verlaine pinpoints the city:

Ainsi de Paris, lieu commun aussi depuis  
Balsac, mais moins exploité par les poètes  
encore que par les romanciers. Et pourtant  
quel thème poétique, quel monde de  
comparaisons, d'images et de correspondances!  
Quelle source intarissable de descriptions  
et de rêveries! C'est ce qu'a compris  
Baudelaire, génie parisien s'il en fut en  
dépit de l'inconsolable nostalgie de l'idéal  
qu'il y a en lui.<sup>16</sup>

This eloquent and eulogistic praise of the city theme, tinged with regret at its vast, yet almost untapped potential could easily be interpreted as the profession of faith of a nascent city poet. It clearly deserves careful attention coming as it does at the dawn of Verlaine's poetic career. This is especially true in that the statement reveals in its expression of Verlaine's views on Paris a heavy reliance on those of Baudelaire drawn from a working knowledge of this latter's poetics as illustrated in the critical writings and in Les Fleurs du Mal. Verlaine's 'quel thème poétique' and 'quelle source intarissable de rêveries' for example are but pale echoes of Baudelaire's evocative call to arms in the 'Salon de 1846': 'La vie parisienne est féconde en sujets poétiques et merveilleux. Le merveilleux nous enveloppe et nous abreuve comme l'atmosphère, mais nous ne le voyons pas'.<sup>17</sup> The notion of Paris as a source of images, analogues and correspondances similarly takes its roots in Baudelaire, in the poems of the 'Tableaux parisiens' section of Les Fleurs du Mal (especially 'Les Sept vieillards') and in Le Spleen de Paris.

Even if Verlaine's description of the city as a poetic theme in his article on Baudelaire was not wholly original since his reliance on

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<sup>16</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.603.

<sup>17</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. II, p.496.

Baudelairian terminology to explain a primarily Baudelairian theme reveals a debt to the elder poet, this does not preclude the possibility that in his tribute to a master poet, Verlaine was not at the same time feeling his way towards a more independent evaluation of a subject of interest to him personally. A more personal evaluation of the city theme and a realisation of its full significance as a poetic source was not immediately forthcoming however. Verlaine's commitment to the city theme in the first stage of his literary career can only be described as equivocal. This early period, from roughly 1865-1870 embraced several poèmes en prose and poems in verse which later became part of Mémoires d'un veuf, Jadis et naguère and Poèmes divers, also Verlaine's first three collections: the Poèmes Saturniens (1866), Fêtes galantes (1869) and La Bonne chanson (written in 1870 and published in 1872). It reveals a sparse scattering of urban pieces rather than solid collections where the city plays a major part (as in Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs for example). Neither is the visible city environment explored in any detail. Moreover, this five year period was also clearly marked in the city works which do exist by the influence of contemporaries (primarily Hugo,<sup>18</sup> Coppée<sup>19</sup> and Baudelaire). This shows Verlaine looking towards his fellow poets for advice and inspiration regarding the treatment of so vital and modern a theme. Though a study of Verlaine's more individualistic works

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<sup>18</sup> Hugo's 'Les Pauvres gens' from La Légende des siècles may have tempted Verlaine to try his hand at a similar vein of verse in 'La Soupe du soir' (1869) which describes the wretched evening meal of a labourer and his family.

<sup>19</sup> The brief paternal influence of Hugo was balanced by that of Coppée as a literary accomplice and companion. In 1866-7 Coppée and Verlaine were especially close friends frequenting the literary gatherings of Théodore de Banville and Nina de Villard together and even working on a joint verse rendering of Hugo's <sup>son's</sup> translation of King Lear. Rather than influencing Verlaine in terms of city compositions at this stage Coppée's influence is primarily perceptible in the similar tone of melancholy and nostalgia permeating pieces both from the Poèmes Saturniens and Intimités. Whereas Coppée links his nostalgia specifically to the theme of the city as in Intimités for example, where he describes himself as 'un pâle enfant du vieux Paris', Verlaine often seems content merely to associate the sentiment with the theme of lost love as in 'Nevermore'.

must be central to our assessment of his city poetry those poems derivative of Baudelaire also deserve brief attention at this point. This is especially true on account of Verlaine's expressed admiration for this poet in Confessions and in the article from L'Art, and because of the necessarily limited nature of Suzanne Bernard's comments on individual Verlaine poems in her study of the pòème en prose.

Baudelaire's effect on the young Verlaine was more strikingly Parisian than either that of Hugo or Coppée. It was concentrated chiefly in a series of prose poems published in the review La Parodie in 1870 which revealed a certain dependence on the Petits pòèmes en prose.<sup>20</sup> Notably these included 'Eloge des fleurs artificielles', and 'L'Hystérique', both published on the 2-9 January 1870 edition of La Parodie. The first of these prose poems was entitled simply 'Les Fleurs artificielles' in Mémoires d'un veuf but in its original title it recalled Baudelaire's 'Eloge du maquillage' from Le Peintre de la vie moderne.<sup>21</sup> It imitates this latter poet's technique of shedding new and mysterious light on everyday aspects of the city scene. Rejecting real flowers as the birth-right of the rich, and exotic ones, such as the rose, camellia or lily as being more suited to 'Les cheveux crispelés des grandes Dames' or to being 'sous les chevaux des tyrans et parmi les autels des faux dieux'.<sup>22</sup> Verlaine turns his attention to the multi-purpose, long-lasting decorations accessible to even the poorest of Paris' inhabitants: 'les fleurs artificielles'. He captures in turn the 'rose en jaconat glacé' as it decorates a special birthday cake and as it pathetically rejoins 'Les

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<sup>20</sup> La Parodie was a short-lived review running from 4 June 1869 until 16 January 1870 under the ebullient direction of André Gill. As the title suggests, parodies of well-known literary figures were a regular, if not exclusive, feature. The review included in its 20-27 November edition 'La Grève des Poètes' which pilloried Coppée's 'La Grève des Forgerons' (see Appendix II), and in that of 5-12 December 'La Carafe' attributed to Pôle-vers-l'Aïne. In the edition of 1-15 September Charles Cros' 'L'Archet' and his 'L'Orgue' (set to music) appear. As neither of these productions is humorous we cannot assume Verlaine's prose poems were intended as parodic imitations of Baudelaire simply because they were first published in La Parodie.

<sup>21</sup> See Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. II, pp.714-718.

<sup>22</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.93.

myosotis mauvais teint [...] qui tremblent au vent inclément des villes' to brighten up the modest 'chapeaux de crêpe' of the poorer women of Paris. These artificial blooms possess qualities absent in their natural counterparts and are thus infinitely superior. They emanate simplicity, the 'rose en jaconat' is 'se pavanant ingénument au-dessus du gâteau de Savoie' for example. In the form of cemetery bouquets, 'jugées dignes par le deuil universel de fleurir autour des morts oubliés, la féroce aridité des grilles!' they also represent immortality. Though possibly imitating Baudelaire's predilection for macabre detail this final point with its reference to death also presages the future direction of a large number of Verlaine's city poems set in or near to cemeteries, and concerned with mortality and death in a physical sense.

In a Baudelairean context, 'L'Hystérique' as a contrast, takes for its subject one of the 'bizarreries' or 'monstres innocents' spawned by the French capital and evident to the discerning poet 'qui sait se promener et regarder'.<sup>23</sup> The poem describes a madman wandering the streets of Paris and for the ghastly appearance of the 'hystérique' draws on details reminiscent of the 'êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants'<sup>24</sup> of Les Fleurs du Mal:

Il allait par les rues chaudes, les yeux  
hideusement écarquillés, la bouche ouverte  
comme par d'effrayantes faims, tandis  
que ses mains, étreignant le vide et se  
crispant parfois, simulaient parfois des  
caresses équivoques. Parmi la buée  
d desséchant de son haleine tout hoquets,  
se précipitaient des cris rauques qui  
étaient un nom sempiternel.<sup>25</sup>

The mixture of horror and fascination with which the figure is greeted, 'Les gens regardaient, non sans dégoût, tituber ce personnage suspect, et les filles avaient peur de son intention', parallels Baudelaire's ambiguous reactions to similar Parisian rejects in his poetry. The allusions to the poet and the concept of flânerie in 'passant', also take their origin in the elder poet:

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<sup>23</sup>From 'Mademoiselle Bistouri', Petits poèmes en prose, Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.355.

<sup>24</sup>From 'Les Petites vieilles', Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.89.

<sup>25</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.94.

c'eût été pitié pour un poète, ou pour  
une femme au coeur exceptionnel passant  
par là, que de voir avec l'oeil que  
tous n'ont pas cette agonie immonde  
mystérieusement.

These two poems, which reveal in their appropriation of ideas and terminology from Baudelaire, Verlaine's attempt to 's'engager sur la voie du poème en prose Baudelairien',<sup>26</sup> are also significant in that they show Verlaine drawing on his own personal 'fréquentation des villes énormes',<sup>27</sup> at an early stage and making use of the city's objects and characters for poetry. In the realm of prose they help confirm a developing interest in the city theme which the poet had briefly allowed to spill over into his verse poetry in the Poèmes Saturniens (1866). Two poems from this, Verlaine's first published collection, indicate clear urban importance by their revealing titles. Apart from the derivative pieces, they form the basis on which his assessment as a city poet might be based. They are 'Croquis parisien' and 'Nocturne parisien' (the latter reputedly written when Verlaine was still at school). Although they are very early poems, a point underlined by experimental elements in form and expression, Verlaine himself was satisfied enough with their content to dedicate them to close friends. 'Croquis parisien' is dedicated to François Coppée, and 'Nocturne parisien' to Edmond Lepelletier. This seems justification enough for taking them as a fairly sincere expression of Verlaine's relationship with the city at its earliest stage, a point at which his germinating ambivalence towards the city is evident and from which his subsequent treatment of the urban theme in poetry was to grow.

'Croquis parisien' was possibly inspired for its title by Baudelaire's 'Tableaux parisiens'. It shows Verlaine acutely aware of what Jacques Robichez calls the 'charmes pittoresques de la ville moderne'.<sup>28</sup> The poem begins with a black and white backdrop of an urban scene reminiscent of Gros' 'Insomnie' where the stark rooftops are silhouetted against the dull Parisian sky:

La lune plaquait ses teints de zinc  
Par angles obtus.

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<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Bernard, p.348.

<sup>27</sup> Preface to Petits poèmes en prose, Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.276.

<sup>28</sup> Oeuvres poétiques de Verlaine, edited by Jacques Robichez (Paris, Garnier, 1969), p.514.

Des bouts de fumée en forme de cinq

Sortaient drus et noirs des hauts toits pointus.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever is our total impression of this poem we must admire Verlaine's unconventional use of vocabulary and form in the first four lines. He could hardly have chosen a less traditionally 'poetic' phrase for his second line yet chooses to emphasise it by typographical isolation and a short syllabic count. 'Zinc' is similarly unromantic yet is also heightened by forming the rhyme with 'cinq'. The odd detail of line 3 'Des bouts de fumée en forme de cinq' finds a parallel in 'Nocturne parisien' where the stars and lanterns 'font des zigzags fantasques'<sup>30</sup> and in VII of La Bonne chanson ('Le paysage dans le cadre des portières .....')<sup>31</sup> where the telegraph wires take on the form of a signature. It is further underlined by the use of syllables in multiples of this number five, ten and five respectively in the poem's title and lines.<sup>32</sup> The first stanza of 'Croquis parisien' where Verlaine is unabashed at finding inspiration in the urban scene undoubtedly proves his interest in the city around him. By stanza II however, impetus seems to have been lost as auditory images (the howling of the wind and cat's cries) replace the visual scene and banal phraseology 'le ciel était gris' and so on, replaces the originality of stanza I:

Le ciel était gris. La bise pleurait

Ainsi qu'un basson.

Au loin, un matou frileux et discret

Miaulait d'étrange et grêle façon.

This middle stanza where specifically urban references evaporate, effectively forms a transition between a concentration on the angularity of the external landscape in stanza I and the poet's inner reflections which form the basis of stanza III. It thus separates him in his imagination from the real city world around him represented by the sly Apollinairesque image of the 'oeil clignotant des bleus becs de gaz' of the poem's final line:

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<sup>29</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.65.

<sup>30</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.85.

<sup>31</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.146.

<sup>32</sup>This rhythmic detail is especially significant given Verlaine's acute sensitivity to rhythm displayed in other city poems such as the thirteen-syllabled 'Sonnet boiteux'.



Moi, j'allais rêvant du divin Platon  
Et de Phidias,  
Et de Salamine et de Marathon,  
Sous l'oeil clignotant des bleus becs de gaz.

Whether Verlaine is wholly serious in the classical allusions in the closing stanza of 'Croquis parisien' is a debatable point. Taken with the 'matou frileux' which recalls the cats of 'Spleen et idéal' these four references could be a comic attempt at mimicking Baudelaire's cry in 'Le Cygne', 'Andromaque je pense à vous'. In that they perpetuate the pendulum swing of this poem towards and away from the present city, from the 'toits pointus' to 'Platon' and back to the 'bleus becs de gaz', the classical allusions also help indicate on a small scale the ambivalent trend persistent over Verlaine's entire career towards the city motif. This ambivalence often led to Verlaine's personal emotions and imaginary flights vying with the city for poetic space.

The vacillating movement of 'Croquis parisien' renders Verlaine's evocation of detailed city décor in this poem sketchy and impressionistic as its title suggests. 'Nocturne parisien', on the other hand employs a different technique and presents a lengthy section of descriptive comment on Paris reminiscent of Cros' 'Le Fleuve'. In its 'réverie obstinément déportée vers la mort'<sup>33</sup> 'Nocturne parisien' also hints at Verlaine's main obsession in his city poetry, the constant presence and threat of death in the urban scene. In the opening lines of this poem which suggest by their repetition and enumeration the continual rhythm of a flowing river, Verlaine evokes the Seine:

Roule, roule ton flot indolent, morne Seine.--  
Sous tes ponts qu'environne une vapeur malsaine  
Bien des corps ont passé, morts, horribles, pourris,  
Dont les âmes avaient pour meurtrier Paris  
Mais tu n'en traînes pas, en tes ondes glacées  
Autant que ton aspect m'inspire de pensées.<sup>34</sup>

As in Cros' river poem 'Le Fleuve' where the death theme imposes itself immediately the city is mentioned (in the 'profondeurs glauques du suicide' and 'celui qui se noie') so in this poem the macabre aspects of the

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<sup>33</sup>Jacques Borel in Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.1154.

<sup>34</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.83.

Seine most strike the poet: 'vapeur malsaine', 'corps [...] pourris', 'ondes glacées' and so on. The morbidly fascinating omnipresence of death ensures that the Parisian river, above all others, has a magnetic attraction for the poet's imagination. Its 'quais' with their profusion of 'affreux bouquins moisis' firstly have picturesque appeal. Its water possesses daytime amusement value for a 'foule insigne/ Qui fait dans l'eau des ronds et qui pêche à la ligne', while its bridges possess a romantic ambiance and provide the ideal position from which a dreamer might meditate on the sunset over Notre-Dame:

Oui, mais quand vient le soir, raréfiant enfin  
Les passants alourdis de sommeil ou de faim,  
Et que le couchant met au ciel des taches rouges,  
Qu'il fait bon aux rêveurs descendre de leurs bouges  
Et, s'accoudant au pont de la Cité, devant  
Notre-Dame, songer, coeur et cheveux au vent!

This poetic fascination with the river extends to further elements of the urban scene, for example a discordant barrel organ whose sound pierces the 'air bruni', suggests a wealth of ennobling sensations in Verlaine's mind:

C'est écorché, c'est faux, c'est horrible, c'est dur,  
[...]  
Mais qu'importe! l'on pleure en entendant cela!  
Mais l'esprit, transporté dans le pays des rêves,  
Sent à ces vieux accords couler en lui des sèves;  
La pitié monte au coeur et les larmes aux yeux,  
Et l'on voudrait pouvoir goûter la paix des cieux,

On the approach of night the evocative sound of the 'orgue de Barbarie' fades, with it the city's attractiveness, and the poem resumes its initially openly pessimistic tone. The river's colour now 'plus noir que le velours des masques' suggests inconstancy and deceit, the 'vents néfastes de l'abîme' rising from the water's depth threaten to engulf the hypnotised observer. Human sentiment, here represented by *Pensée*, *espoir serein*, *ambition sublime* and *souvenir*, disappear as if carried away by the flowing Seine:

On allume les becs de gaz le long des murs;  
Et l'astre et les flambeaux font des zigzags fantasques  
Dans le fleuve plus noir que le velours des masques;

Et le contemplateur sur le haut garde-fou  
Par l'air et par les ans rouillé comme un vieux sou  
Se penche en proie aux vents néfastes de l'abîme.  
Pensée, espoir serein, ambition sublime,  
Tout, jusqu'au souvenir, tout s'envole, tout fuit,  
Et l'on est seul avec Paris, l'Onde et la Nuit!

Only the 'ministre trinité'<sup>35</sup> of 'Paris, l'Onde et la Nuit' remain preying in turn on their human victims. By this point the poem has turned a full circle and we are brought face to face with death for the second time; nightfall in the city not increasing the possibility of rêverie for Verlaine as it does for Charles Cros, but rather presaging drowning in the 'eau sourde' or submission to the 'bras fardés' of the courtesan 'reine du monde', Paris.<sup>36</sup>

Though 'Croquis parisien' may in part illustrate Verlaine's receptiveness to the city world and his capacity for creating brief and picturesque visual images out of the immediate scene around him, the poem is nevertheless not fully committed to the 'monde de comparaisons, d'images et de correspondances' which Verlaine had observed in his article on Baudelaire, to be offered by urban life. This can partly be explained by the poem's early date of composition and experimental nature. 'Nocturne parisien' on the other hand reveals keen fascination with the city but dwells largely on the pessimistic and morbid aspects of the theme. It would on the whole be true to say that Verlaine's urban poetry is embraced within these two limits implicit in 'Croquis parisien' and 'Nocturne parisien', two of his earliest city poems. His poetry henceforth varied in range from ambiguous appreciation of the city on one hand to forceful and outright critical condemnation on the other. Verlaine's chequered career as a sober young husband, a contravener of law, a penitent sinner,

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<sup>35</sup> 'Nocturne parisien', line 89.

<sup>36</sup> The obsession with death running through 'Nocturne parisien' was not uniquely the priority of Verlaine's city poetry. One of his first known poems (1858) was entitled 'La Mort' (see Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.11) and one of his last 'Mort!' (1895) relies on the same theme, (see Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.1039-40). Linked as it is here to Paris as a 'meurtrier' however, it obviously takes on a new meaning and sheds new light on Verlaine's attitude towards his urban environment and its way of life.

a French teacher in rural Lincolnshire and a legend in the Latin Quarter naturally ensured a wealth of vastly different, often contradictory poems within these guidelines where the city plays a significant role.

In 'Fêtes galantes' (1869) Verlaine abandoned the city theme completely in favour of a landscape 'hors de toute réalité' with a décor of 'le rêve de l'âme'.<sup>37</sup> He renewed his earlier interest in his urban environment in the volume of love poetry La Bonne chanson (1870). As in 'Nocturne parisien' however the city's more negative aspects are brought to the fore in this collection. Poem XVI of La Bonne chanson for example emphasises urban chaos and disorganisation through a technique of cumulative enumeration of the city's visual aspects:

Le bruit des cabarets, la fange du trottoir,  
Les platanes déchus s'effeuillant dans l'air noir,  
L'omnibus, ouragan de ferraille et de boues,  
Qui grince, mal assis entre ses quatre roues,  
Et roule ses yeux verts et rouges lentement,  
Les ouvriers allant au club, tout en fumant  
Leur brûle-gueule au nez des agents de police,  
Toits qui dégouttent, murs suintants, pavé qui glisse,  
Bitume défoncé, ruisseaux comblant l'égout,  
Voilà ma route - avec le paradis au bout.<sup>38</sup>

Many details are uncomplimentary such as the 'platanes déchus', 'murs suintants' and 'bitume défoncé', while others are colourful and reveal

Verlaine's close observation of the scene around him, if not his approval of it. The 'omnibus, ouragan de ferraille et de boues/ Qui grince, mal assis entre ses quatre roues/ Et roule ses yeux verts et rouges lentement' and the 'ouvriers allant au club, tout en fumant/ Leur brûle-gueule au nez des agents de police' are examples. Though Verlaine is clearly sensitive to the literary potential of his surroundings in 'Le bruit des cabarets' as he allows them almost wholly to occupy his poem, it is primarily the poet's personal considerations which determine the final emphasis of this work on the 'image, à jamais chère'<sup>39</sup> of his 'bien-aimée' rather than on the city scene. As a lover, Verlaine dismisses the raucous scene around him completely: 'Voilà ma route - avec le paradis au bout'. His oblique reference to Mathilde Maute (his fiancée at the time of composition of this poem) as 'le paradis' takes his mind away from the

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Borel in Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.1011.

<sup>38</sup> Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.152.

<sup>39</sup> La Bonne chanson XV, Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.151.

chaotic urban scene and renders the poet's mundane existence in Paris tolerable. A similar example of where Verlaine's use of the city as a poet is affected by his attitude to it as a man (or more specifically as a man in love) is VII of La Bonne chanson, 'Le paysage dans le cadre des portières'. This poem is set in a moving railway carriage and though Verlaine is aware of the extravagant and unpleasant mixture of train sounds and smells ('Une odeur de charbon qui brûle et de l'eau qui bout', 'le bruit que feraient mille chaînes au bout/Desquelles hurleraient mille géants qu'on fouette,' 'des cris prolongés de chouette') he is able to brush it aside in favour of his own emotional situation:

Que me fait tout cela, puisque j'ai dans les yeux  
La blanche vision qui fait mon cœur joyeux,  
Puisque la douce voix pour moi murmure encore,  
Puisque le Nom si beau, si noble et si sonore  
Se mêle, pur pivot de tout ce tournoisement.  
Au rythme du wagon brutal, suavement.<sup>40</sup>

The dismissive tone of the final line of 'Le bruit des cabarets' shows the city abandoned in favour of Verlaine's own emotional life. The subtle infiltration of Mathilde's 'douce voix' and 'nom si beau' into the sound of the rattling railway carriages in 'Le Paysage dans le cadre des portières' similarly illustrates how Verlaine's relationship with the city and its aspects was frequently dependent on his state of mind at the time of writing. It was therefore susceptible to contradictions and ambiguities over the years. In 1862, for example, Verlaine had regretted his separation from Paris because the city represented at that particular moment the possibility of furtherance of his nascent literary aspirations. Conversely, at the end of the 1860s when his poetry revealed a tendency to dismiss the physical presence of the same city environment this was partly because his mind was permanently focused on things of a totally different and personal nature, his love affair with Mathilde Mauté. In their turn, the poems of Verlaine's Belgian period (1872), and in particular 'Charleroi', revealed a traveller's reawakened enthusiasm for unfamiliar objects of the city scene around him resulting from the presence of a stimulating alert and sensitive fellow poet, namely Rimbaud.<sup>41</sup> Verlaine's London poetry especially the innovatory 'Sonnet boiteux' of

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<sup>40</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.146.

<sup>41</sup>See p.129 et seq. of the present study.

1873 subsequently expressed a disillusionment with the metropolis directly inspired by Rimbaud's stormy departure from the English capital in the November of the previous year.<sup>42</sup>

A little-known poem written over twelve years later than La Bonne chanson and under the influence of an emotional upset of a depressing rather than an exhilarating nature, reinforces the persistent effect of personal emotion on Verlaine's appreciations of the external world such as is especially common in this early collection. The poem in question is 'Cheval de retour' (Mémoires d'un veuf) and it dates from Verlaine's lonely return to Paris after the catastrophic 'essai de culture' with Lucien Létinois and his family in 1880.<sup>43</sup> Influenced by feelings of self-pity and failure Verlaine wretchedly describes himself as a 'sombre citadin qui ait perdu langue'. He is both a Parisian newly alienated in the urban environment which was once his home, and a literary man who has lost contact with his previous mode of expression. Retaining memories of those corrective virtues of the countryside which are now increasingly attractive because of his separation from them ('la bonne curiosité, les saines médisances villageoises qui vous font comme une maison de verre et nous forcent à la correction de la vie'<sup>44</sup>), Verlaine is overwhelmed on his return to the capital by its immorality and artificiality, a 'discorde d'intérêts factices et de plaisirs fous'. Where in the 1860s at the height of his love affair with Mathilde, Verlaine's emotions could distance him from the deafening noise of his surroundings, here his depression has the effect of anchoring him more securely in the sordid, physical world. He is horribly aware of 'bruit jamais fini des fiacres [...] des fardiens et des camions et des charettes chargés de ferrailles, de meubles cassés

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<sup>42</sup>See p.158 et seq. of the present study.

<sup>43</sup>Verlaine purchased a farm in Juniville (south of Reims) in March 1880 in the hope of establishing himself there in an idyllic rural existence with his most recent protégé Lucien Létinois. His attempted return to nature was a failure and after Lucien's forced absence from the farm from Autumn 1880-81, Verlaine who had himself lost interest in the project, was forced to sell the property in an attempt to recuperate his losses.

<sup>44</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, pp. 67-8.

et de boues'.<sup>45</sup>

The perceptible lack of consistency in Verlaine's attitude to the city resulting from his variable psychological states which makes a compatible thematic and chronological study of his poetry as was undertaken with Coppée impossible, is further underlined by the poet's equal leaning towards banal terminology and traditional technique when referring to the city in other poems. For example one senses occasionally that Verlaine's pessimism in connection with Paris and the city in general rests on nothing more than a decadent cliché arising from some vague belief that civilization is necessarily false and corrupt. This is nowhere more evident than in poems where Verlaine's thematic intentions appear to bow to the vagaries of rhyme and in those where a heavy reliance on the Rousseauesque antithesis between country or province and the city (where the latter is shown up in an unfavourable light) is to the fore. In illustration of this first group one might quote poem VIII of the first section of Sagesse (1881) where the word 'puériles' is paired with 'villes' while the suggestive rhyming word 'viles' also appears in close proximity in such a way that its unattractive connotations colour our understanding of the word 'villes':

Etre fort, et s'user en circonstances viles;

N'entendre, n'écouter aux bruits des grandes villes  
Que l'appel ô mon Dieu, des cloches dans la tour,  
Et faire un de ces bruits soi-même, cela pour  
L'accomplissement vil des tâches puériles;<sup>46</sup>

In poem XXIII of the same collection 'servile' is used as a rhyme word to a similar deprecatory end: Verlaine is 'Né l'enfant des grandes villes/ Et des révoltes serviles'.<sup>47</sup> Verlaine's random adhesion to the dictates of tradition in these two references becomes more apparent when one remarks that still in Sagesse 'villes' or 'ville' is teamed twice with 'tranquille', another favourite adjective, whose more complimentary connotations tend to neutralise the negative ones of previous examples.

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<sup>45</sup>The onomatopoeic effect of these final lines conveying city noise can be compared with that of lines from Cros' 'Effarement' where the poet speaks of 'les brouettes ferrées [qui] roulent avec des colis qu'on arrime dans les voitures du train'.

<sup>46</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.248.

<sup>47</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.262.

In Sagesse section III poem IV Verlaine writes:

Je suis venu, calme orphelin,  
Riche de mes seuls yeux tranquilles,  
Vers les hommes des grandes villes  
Ils ne m'ont pas trouvé malin

and Sagesse section III poem VI,

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,  
Simple et tranquille.  
Cette paisible rumeur - là  
Vient de la ville.<sup>48</sup>

Verlaine's juxtaposition of the two contrasting orders of provincial or rural and the urban and metropolitan to a critical end can be excused more than his use of hackneyed rhyme in references to the city as this former technique at least is rooted in Verlaine's own experience

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<sup>48</sup> Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.279 and p.280. The wide popularity of the 'tranquille', 'servile', 'vile' and 'ville' combinations is clear in that they feature both in Vigny's 'La Maison du berger' and Baudelaire's 'Recueillement'.

Pars courageusement, laisse toutes les villes;  
Ne ternis plus tes pieds aux poudres du chemin;  
Du haut de nos penses vois les cités serviles  
Comme les rocs fatals de l'esclavage humain.

( 'La Maison du berger' )

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.  
Tu réclamais le Soir, il descend; le voici:  
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,  
Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.

Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,  
Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,  
Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,  
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici.

( 'Recueillement' )



as well as in literary tradition.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless his use of the accepted antithesis in poem XX of section III of Sagesse beginning 'Parisien mon frère à jamais étonné' still reveals a distinct lack of originality on the poet's behalf. The poem involves an exaggeratedly complimentary description of the provincial settlement in terms reminiscent of those employed in Coppée's more sentimental city poetry in relation to Parisian inhabitants. The sincerity of Verlaine's attitude towards city and province in this poem is thus thrown into doubt.

'Parisien mon frère' describes an inhabitant of Paris coming to the provincial town of Arras and in a sense is an autobiographical piece inspired by Verlaine's own visit to Arras in 1880. In the poem's opening lines the Parisian, a brother in humanity but not in spirit to his provincial counterpart, is invited to climb upon a hill overlooking the town to view it in its entirety. He then descends and feasts his eyes during a guided tour of the community.<sup>50</sup> As if in an attempt to impress on the reader the superiority of the province over the metropolis, almost every aspect of the décor is qualified by an emphatically ameliorative adjective. The houses are 'si blanches [...] si bien faites', their courtyards 'si doux et sinueux', the inhabitants, 'naifs avec leurs yeux de matois', speak with a local accent 'si gentil'. Arras has also remained faithful to its history by conserving its originality in characteristic buildings and interesting streets 'Au lieu dulong ennui' of what Verlaine calls the 'haussmanneries' of the capital. In fact the whole of the urban turmoil seems to have passed the town by. In contrast to the rampant activity of Paris suggested in 'Le bruit des cabarets', for example, in Arras 'rien ne fourmille', 'tout vit et meurt calme'. Its adherence to the past and the 'esprit des aïeux' also means the province has made only selective use of the advances of the modern world, 'Les fruits bien mûrs/De ce fameux Progrès que vous mangez en herbe' and therefore its inhabitants live contented. The superiority of Arras over

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<sup>49</sup> Reflecting on his arrival in Paris at the age of seven for example Verlaine had criticised what he viewed as the capital's disorder as compared to the regularity of his native town Metz, a 'ville en échiquier'. In 'Confessions', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p. 455.

<sup>50</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.289-90.

the capital is seen as springing from its close proximity to the natural world and therefore what is healthy and good. The sun, 'si glorieux qu'il fait comprendre l'idolâtre' rises from the hill overlooking the town and shines down benevolently through the trees, bathing the town in light to throw the bell towers and other high buildings into relief against the clouds opposite. The town's streets are attractive because of their simosity likened to that of 'un ruisseau parmi de vagues frondaisons/ Profilant la lumière et l'ambre en broderies', its squares are appealing because they are 'ivres de lumière et de cris d'hirondelles'. A criticism of Paris, the area around Montmartre especially, with its pseudo 'campagne', a mixture of unattractive 'vert de plaie' and 'blanc de dartre' is implied.

Central to 'Parisien mon frère' is a feeling of distaste for urban life. This is matched by the often exaggerated adulation of the provincial setting in the same work. Since a similar preference for life in the natural world is reaffirmed in 'Cheval de retour' and even the early 'Nocturne parisien' reveals a primarily negative stance towards the city, critics such as James Lawler have concluded from the evidence of such poems that Verlaine had an 'innate feeling for the gentleness of certain landscapes' (i.e. rural ones) and therefore that 'the country was the atmosphere in which Verlaine was most plainly at ease'.<sup>51</sup> The reality of the poet's personal situation, with his abortive 'essai de culture' and brief period of exile in Stickney (1875-6) being his only significant breaks from city life, nevertheless suggests the contrary to be true. Writing in the Garnier edition of Verlaine's Oeuvres poétiques Jacques Robichez makes a statement which helps to clarify this apparent confusion surrounding the poet's variable commitment to urban and natural worlds. Speaking specifically of the works set in Paris, London or Belgium, Robichez says:

Ni la ville, ni la campagne, ne  
comptent d'abord, ne comptent  
comme sujets, mais bien l'âme  
obscur du poète.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> James Lawler, 'Verlaine's Naivety', Essays in French Literature 2 (1965) pp.66-102 (p.70).

<sup>52</sup> Robichez, p.xxxi.

He thus suggests that Verlaine's use of both rural and city themes was purely incidental to a real purpose of revealing his own hopes and aspirations through a poetry concerned primarily with his own emotional life. Though we have seen Verlaine's state of mind was a major determining factor in his treatment of the city, either pessimistic or optimistic, to assume all Verlaine wrote was by way of baring his soul to the reader rather than attempting to comment at all on external phenomena would seem to be rather overstating the case. Nevertheless, Robichez's comment does help distract attention from a search for urban references used in a descriptive sense (as in Coppée) to pinpoint the city as a recognisable aspect of the real world around which Verlaine's imagination is exercised, on which it elaborates and from which in the course of some poems it ultimately departs. The manner and extent to which the point de départ of the city is transformed through poetry illustrates Verlaine's sensitivity and wide-ranging poetic talent and in this sense serves as a pointer to the 'âme obscure du poète'.

In some of the poems where a city scene acts as a stimulus for the poet, Verlaine's imagination remains suspended between the visual dimension of the scene around him and its more secret aspects perceptible only to his poetic sensibility. On other occasions he quickly abandons a point of focus in the real world to be 'transporté dans le pays des rêves'.<sup>53</sup> Like Cros' dream in 'Effarement' however, these dream landscapes are often shot through with urban references drawn from Verlaine's experience and contemporary life.

'Charleroi' (Romances sans paroles) and 'Auteuil' (Mémoires d'un veuf) both take as their point de départ a city scene. As their titles suggest they have the advantage for the reader of being set in a recognisable nineteenth-century city landscape spotted by Verlaine on his travels or known to him on his day-to-day life in Paris. The poet's impressionistic skill is such that though the visual essence of the two different panoramas is captured unadulterated, Verlaine's own interpretation of the scene still remains discernible and intact. 'Charleroi' (1872) belongs to the 'Paysages belges' section of Romances sans paroles, a series of six poems evoking Verlaine and Rimbaud's 'conquête des Pays-Bas'.<sup>54</sup> These 'Paysages belges' involve an odd mixture of tone and scenery wherein enthusiastic, epicurean visions of the province ('Walcourt')

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<sup>53</sup>'Nocturne parisien', line 69.

<sup>54</sup>Robichez, p.588.

rub shoulders with scenes reminiscent of Fêtes galantes ('Bruxelles simples fresques' I and II) and noisy and picturesque descriptions of a city fairground ('Bruxelles chevaux de bois') contrast with the silent meditations and observations of a railway traveller passing through the rural scene ('Malines').<sup>55</sup> 'Charleroi' stands apart in this small collection and indeed in Verlaine's city poetry, by being inspired by a city of industrial rather than cultural or political importance such as London or Paris, namely the Belgian mining community of Charleroi:

Dans l'herbe noire  
Les Kobolds vont.  
Le vent profond  
Pleure, on veut croire.

Quoi donc se sent?  
L'avoine siffle.  
Un buisson gifle  
L'oeil au passant.

Plutôt des bouges  
Que des maisons.  
Quels horizons  
De forges rouges!

On sent donc quoi?  
Des gares tonnent,  
Les yeux s'étonnent,  
Où Charleroi?

Parfums sinistres!  
Qu'est-ce que c'est?  
Quoi bruissait  
Comme des sistres?

Sites brutaux!  
Oh! votre haleine,  
Sueur humaine,  
Cris des métaux!

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<sup>55</sup>See Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.197-201.

Dans l'herbe noire  
Les Kobolds vont.  
Le vent profond  
Pleure, on veut croire.<sup>56</sup>

Firstly, the form of this poem is visually striking and contributes to the sense of the piece. Short, four-syllable lines arranged in four line stanzas pile in blocks calligrammatically into the shape of a foundry chimney or plunge suddenly like a deep and narrow mine shaft down the length of a page. Immediately reinforcing this latter suggestion is the mythical reference to 'Les Kobolds' in line 2 which (unlike 'Platon', 'Phidias', 'Salamine' and Marathon' which could appear incidental to 'Crépuscule parisien'), has a clear link with the theme in question. The Kobolds, heroes of German folklore, were at the outset guardian spirits of a household and then became associated with the protection of subterranean places such as mines. Verlaine's allusion thus suggests in a general sense some mysterious superhuman force inhabiting Charleroi and more particularly in relation to the industrial theme, provides a magical counterpart for the miners working underground. The keen fascination of this alien industrial scene for the poet is also brought out by further enigmatic details in the description and by the persistent questioning on which the poem is based. Elements of the man-made and natural worlds for example are humanised to create a Dantesque nightmare scene of haunting imagery:

Le vent profond  
Pleure on veut croire.

[...]

L'avoine siffle  
Un buisson gifle  
L'oeil au passant.

[...]

Sites brutaux!  
Oh! votre haleine  
Sueur humaine,  
Cris des métaux.

Concurrently a dialogue is set up between two voices, one puzzled and inquiring and the other (possibly Verlaine himself) transfixed by the

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<sup>56</sup>Verlaine, *O.C. poétiques*, pp.197-8.

scene before him yet inspired with sufficient comprehension to reply:

A: Quoi donc se sent?

On sent donc quoi?

B: Parfums sinistres!

A: Qu'est-ce que c'est?

Quoi bruissait/Comme des sistres?

B: Sites brutaux!

Cris des métaux!

As the typographical disposition had helped to suggest the industrial scene visually, so the use of language adds to the auditory effect by conveying the irregular sounds of a mechanical site. One might quote the blunt questioning words 'Quoi' in lines 5, 13 and 19, the use of onomatopoeia in 'siffle', 'gifle', 'tonnent', 'bruissait'. Abrupt syntax also occurs in the verbless explanatory phrases 'parfums sinistres!', 'sites brutaux !', and 'cris de métaux'. These various factors render 'Charleroi' undoubtedly one of Verlaine's most memorable and successful achievements in the field of modernist verse.

A similar movement back and forth from the evident, visual scene to a more subjective vision of personal significance to the poet distilled by his imagination inspired 'Auteuil', a late prose piece from Mémoires d'un veuf. As 'Charleroi' had biographical significance in the context of Verlaine's travels with Rimbaud in 1872 so 'Auteuil' can be pinpointed in relation to a specific period in Verlaine's life notably his close friendship with Lucien Létinois in 1882. At this point in time Lucien Létinois was teaching in Boulogne-sur-Seine and Verlaine had moved there to be near his friend. It was on his weekly visits to the Café Voltaire, place de l'Odéon in search of literary acquaintances, that the poet would have passed through Auteuil.

Though Verlaine states categorically at the beginning of this piece that his subject is not to be the traditional 'Auteuil' of the classical idyll but rather that of the present day complete with modern décor and urban allusions: 'Non point l'Auteuil classique, l'Auteuil rimant avec chevrefeuille. Non. Il est question de l'Auteuil moderne, de l'Auteuil moderniste',<sup>57</sup> he continues by picking on details in which the provincial origins of classical Auteuil persist or where its splendid heyday in

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<sup>57</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.76.

the seventeenth century is suggested. This tendency is further underlined by the two sentences, rhetorical at the beginning of the work: 'O l'Auteuil classique, comme il vous revient tout de même' and familiar at the end: 'Crampon décidément, l'Auteuil classique' which frame this prose poem. If some cheap defective outward signs of the modern, urban world are present (one might quote the 'abominables maisons de rapport qui s'élèvent là comme des oies, dressant leur cou jusqu'à des étages tolérés', the 'becs de gaz obscur' and 'macadam absolument dérisoire et gluant'), other aspects align Auteuil with a different era or culture. The blurring of outlines between present city décor and its people and its past inhabitants and historical origins has the effect of aligning this particular area with the appealing province which possesses a sense of history as revealed in 'Parisien mon frère'. Auteuil's womenfolk for example with their lack of discretion in matters of dress appear to have more in common with their old-fashioned provincial counterparts than with the Parisiennes whose territory is the 'Pays latin, Boulevard des Italiens' and the 'Champs Elysées'.<sup>58</sup> The cafés, where Verlaine suspects absinth drinking would be frowned upon, are similarly described as 'un peu province' with their white and gold colouring as opposed to the usual dark wood and zinc-topped counters of the metropolis.<sup>59</sup> These details separating Auteuil from the brashness of the city centre also form a link in Verlaine's imagination with previous centuries, like the Seine, unchanged through the years, they would not be foreign to the masters of French classicism, as represented by Boileau, Racine and Molière, were they to return to the area of the capital they knew as a spa and intellectual centre in the seventeenth century. Though the pervasive influence of 'Auteuil classique' on 'Auteuil moderne' in Verlaine's prose poem is interesting and persistent and reveals the poet's

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<sup>58</sup> Arsène Houssaye, 'Quelques opinions avancées sur la Parisienne', L'Artiste (1 August 1869), p.148.

<sup>59</sup> In 'Café des Lettres', a piece forming part of the Supplément des Mémoires d'un veuf, Verlaine sets the scene in a café 'pas du tout comme les modernes caboulots' in a 'ville imaginée'. Interestingly he describes the inn sign of this cabaret, the Envol, as being 'invraisemblablement blanc et or'. See Verlaine, O.C. en prose, pp.127-9.

imagination absorbing real details of a physical city into a wider historical and cultural vision, the central lyrical image of the piece is built around an aspect unique to Auteuil and deeply rooted in contemporary reality: the area's railway viaduct over the Seine.<sup>60</sup> For Verlaine this represents Auteuil's most redeeming feature in the nineteenth century, both worthy of the demanding ancestry of the quartier and symbolic of the great achievements of modern architectural technology. Vague compliments on this edifice, it is 'assez beau' and 'sans pair au monde' only 'probablement', give way to lyrical enthusiasm as Verlaine describes in exceptionally glowing terms the view of the countryside towards Sèvres and Saint-Cloud framed in its man-made arches:

Ce viaduc [...] tourne vertigineux et  
fuit sans fin sur le ciel nu,  
laissant voir un peu plus loin à  
travers la massive élégance de ses  
piliers l'adorable panorama de Sèvres  
et de Saint-Cloud!

This unexpected eulogy of the viaduct paves the way for a final celebrative comment on an associated facet of contemporary life recurring in Verlaine's city poetry - the railway itself. In that it shows how Verlaine's imagination is not only capable of straining beyond the present scene to a mythical or alien dimension, but is also able to work on the immediate environment without dismissing it and can thus transform inherently unpoetic objects into poetry, the final passage of 'Auteuil' is significant. Whereas other details in 'Auteuil' are selected for their affinities with time past, the railway motif provides an emphatic assertion of the immediate. Verlaine's uncondescending treatment of it is also strikingly original and marks him out in an age still very much given over to periphrasis and classical allusion in attempts to poeticize aspects of the modern world. As in Charles Cros' poem 'Effarement' written over ten years earlier where the setting is also a railway station, towards the

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<sup>60</sup> Perhaps because Auteuil was still relatively near to the outskirts of the city in 1882 (it was a south-western suburb with a station lying on the chemin de fer de ceinture between Passy and Pont du Jour) it may have appeared to Verlaine's mind to have been less contaminated by the more negative values of civilization and therefore more worthy of consideration by the poetic imagination.



end of 'Auteuil' the descriptive sentences become shorter and in certain circumstances verbless, in an attempt to convey the brusque noise of machinery:

Le chemin de fer. Un escalier  
vertigineux dont les marches  
commencent à se creuser au milieu  
sous tant de pieds. Amusante  
l'arrivée des trains toutes les sept  
minutes ou tous les quarts d'heure  
selon le moment de la journée. Ça  
grince et ça crie quand ça s'arrête!  
Les nouveaux freins, vous savez.

Also like the former poem which appears to describe at one point a series of ritualistic actions, Verlaine's scene conveys a sense of ordered activity governed by an exterior force: the regular arrival of trains the repeated emptying and refilling of carriages, the swarming of passengers, over well-worn paths and so on. This impression of clockwork movement, mimicking on a small scale the methodical harmony and organisational potential of the city environment contrasts with the discordant and confused picture of Paris given in earlier poems ('Le bruit des cabarets' from La Bonne chanson for example). It thus reinforces the variety central to Verlaine's concept of the city in poetry.

A further fascinating link with another poet in our study is provided by one of the auditory images, which prevail over the visual in this section of the prose poem, wherein the noise of a train shrieking to a halt in the station at Auteuil is likened to 'toute une meute écrasée à loisir'.<sup>61</sup> In a prose piece by Germain Nouveau, 'Le Square des Batignolles' (Petits tableaux parisiens) we find an image used in connection with the chemin de fer de ceinture so arrestingly similar to Verlaine's that it cannot be ignored, that of a train's noise being 'positivement semblable à celui d'une meute de chiens, à qui on marche sur la patte'.<sup>62</sup> Because

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<sup>61</sup> The hyperbolic comparison which rather detracts from the final serious effect of this poem is paralleled in VII of La Bonne chanson where a train mimicks the noise of 'mille chaînes au bout/Desquelles hurlerait mille géants qu'on fouette' and in XVI of the same collection where an omnibus is likened to an 'ouragan de ferraille'.

<sup>62</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.456.

of Nouveau's unquestionable primacy (his composition was published in La Nouvelle lune, 15 October 1882 and Verlaine's in Le Reveil on 31 December of the same year) Verlaine's position in relation to this exaggerated if realistic image is dubious and enigmatic. The possibility that Verlaine simply borrowed his friend's image in a rather obvious manner is feasible but unlikely. A more probable explanation is that the two poets spontaneously arrived at this image as a result of hearing a deafening train noise from the Parisian chemin de fer de ceinture when they were together and resolved to use the metaphor in their poetry. This hypothesis, while deepening the literary ties between Verlaine and Nouveau at a time when they were both close friends,<sup>63</sup> also opens up an interesting interpretation of the Nouveau poem (a description of two ageing men discussing memories of the past during a walk in a Paris park), as an ironic transcription of a real episode experienced with Verlaine in 1882. Verlaine's repetition of the comparison could thus be explained as a private joke with his friend.

To the extent to which they are inspired by real urban panoramas and rely on actual details of a city landscape, notably architectural motifs in a pictorial sense or city sounds such as machinery and the railway, both 'Charleroi' and 'Auteuil' can be used to deepen our knowledge of Verlaine in a biographical sense and illuminate his relationship with the social scene in which he lived. In that they also show a real urban scene used as raw material for poetry, as a point de départ for the poetic imagination, they also begin to illustrate Verlaine's attitude towards the actual cities he knew and lived in as a poet. Additional poems, though still distinctly urban in character, refuse to distract by this former technique of specific, contemporary allusions however and offer a greater challenge to the modern reader in terms of comprehension and assessment. These works are set in a 'nulle part',<sup>64</sup> or in a 'ville

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<sup>63</sup> After receiving Nouveau in Juniville in 1880 for a period of spiritual repose, Verlaine had renewed acquaintance with Nouveau in Paris after the failure of his essai de culture in July 1882. It was as a direct result of Verlaine's encouragement at this time that Nouveau decided to offer texts from his Petits tableaux parisiens for publication in Le Réveil and La Nouvelle lune.

<sup>64</sup> 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.66.

inconnue, absurde',<sup>65</sup> 'de rêve' or 'magique'.<sup>66</sup> They show Verlaine completely rejecting a technique of objective realism tied to one particular city and serve to expose more fully the artistic and psychological dimension. This is especially the case with 'Kaléidoscope' for example, written only slightly after the Belgian poem 'Charleroi' but in very different personal circumstances.<sup>67</sup> The poem relies heavily on an 'unreal city',<sup>68</sup> not just as a landscape to be appreciated for itself, but as a symbol for the multiplicity of human experience and the all-pervasive nature of past experience from which it is impossible to escape in dreams of the future. 'Kaléidoscope' was first destined for the prison collection Cellulairement but finally become part of Jadis et naguère (1884). It stands apart from many of Verlaine's city compositions firstly because of its unique use of future time as well as past and present and also on account of its vast technical and thematic superiority over them:

Dans une rue, au coeur d'une ville de rêve,  
Ce sera comme quand on a déjà vécu:  
Un instant à la fois très vague et très aigu...  
O ce soleil parmi la brume qui se lève!

O ce cri sur la mer, cette voix dans les bois!  
Ce sera comme quand on ignore des causes;  
Un lent réveil après bien des métempsychoses:  
Les choses seront plus les mêmes qu'autrefois

Dans cette rue, au coeur de la ville magique  
Où les orgues moudront des giges dans les soirs,  
Où les cafés auront des chats sur les dressoirs,  
Et que traverseront des bandes de musique.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.62.

<sup>66</sup> 'Kaléidoscope', Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.321.

<sup>67</sup> The manuscript of 'Kaléidoscope' is dated October 1873 which was during Verlaine's incarceration in Mons prison subsequent to the desperate and unsuccessful attempt on Rimbaud's life in Brussels in July of the same year.

<sup>68</sup> From 'The Fire Sermon', 'The Waste Land', T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems (London, Faber, 1954). p.59.

Ce sera si fatal qu'on en croira mourir:  
Des larmes ruisselant douces le long des joues,  
Des rires sanglotés dans le fracas des roues,  
Des invocations à la mort de venir ,  
  
Des mots anciens comme un bouquet de fleurs fanées !  
Les bruits aigres des bals publics arriveront,  
Et des veuves avec du cuivre après leur front,  
Paysannes, fendront la foule des traînées  
  
Qui flânent là, causant avec d'affreux moutards  
Et des vieux sans sourcils que la dartre enfarine,  
Cependant qu'à deux pas, dans des senteurs d'urine,  
Quelque fête publique enverra des pétards.  
  
Ce sera comme quand on rêve et qu'on s'éveille,  
Et que l'on rendort et que l'on rêve encor  
De la même féerie et du même décor,  
L'été, dans l'herbe, au bruit moiré d'un vol d'abeille.<sup>69</sup>

A brief consideration of the poem's suggestive title gives some indications of how to interpret the notions expressed in the work itself. The kaleidoscope was first invented in England in 1815 and swiftly became high fashion in French bourgeois households. The suggestions of variety and fragmentation conveyed by the image of the kaleidoscope ensured it was soon employed in comparisons involving the city. Balzac can be found using the term in a figurative sense in connection with Paris in a short story entitled 'Les Voisins' published in La Caricature (4 November 1831):

O civilisation! ô Paris! admirable  
kaléidoscope qui toujours agité nous  
montre ces quatre brimborions, l'homme,  
la femme, l'enfant et le vieillard, sous  
tant de formes, que ses tableaux sont  
innombrables. O! Merveilleux Paris.<sup>70</sup>

By speaking of 'formes' and 'tableaux', Balzac draws our attention to the

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<sup>69</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.321-2.

<sup>70</sup>Quoted by Pierre Citron in La Poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1961), Vol. II, p.190.

term in the visual sense of changing and confused images. Baudelaire's emphasis, a generation later, is rather different. He can be found applying the term to the perceptive individual in the modern world in 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne'. Here the 'amoureux de la vie universelle' is described as a :

kaléidoscope doué de conscience,  
qui, à chacun des mouvements,  
représente la vie multiple et la  
grâce mouvante de tous les  
éléments de la vie.<sup>71</sup>

In the Verlaine poem both Balzac's notion of urban complexity and changeability and Baudelaire's concept of the versatile poetic imagination forever striving to reflect the plurality and 'grâce mouvante'<sup>72</sup> of a city's dazzling, kaleidoscopic designs are implicit. Verlaine also brings to the kaleidoscope image, as suggested by his interweaving of tense, an original temporal dimension unexploited by his predecessors yet which assures the uniqueness of his poem. The visual and temporal elements inherent in the kaleidoscope image and central to Verlaine's poem are succinctly evoked in Confessions where the poet describes his memories of the hypersensitive if confused mental state brought about by a childhood attack of fever:

Rien de délicieux comme un commencement  
de fièvre; c'est volatile, les idées (de pensée  
on n'en a plus et quel bon débarras!)  
tourbillonnement en s'entrelaçant et se  
désenlaçant sans cesse et toujours. On ne  
sait plus où on en est, sinon qu'on s'y  
en trouve bien et mieux. C'est un peu  
comme certain moment de l'ivresse où  
l'on croit se rappeler qu'on a vécu  
le moment où l'on est, et le vivre  
ce moment-là.<sup>73</sup>

The first lines of this quotation from 'Rien de délicieux' to 'mieux' illustrate as Paul Soulie suggests in his article on 'Kaléidoscope'<sup>74</sup> the

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<sup>71</sup>Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. II p.692.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.462.

<sup>74</sup>Paul Soulie, 'Les Clés de la perception verlainienne d'après un commentaire de Kaléidoscope', L'Information littéraire 24 (1972), pp.118-22.

kaleidoscope's pictorial dimension, one of movable and ever-changing patterns. The final sentence from 'C'est un peu comme' to 'ce moment-là', I would suggest, provide the poem's key in the more original temporal sense. What Verlaine is describing in this sentence is a feeling of déjà-vu to which in youth his childlike sensibility seemed particularly attuned. In 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' for example, he describes how as a boy, in Metz, he would frequently visualise a city scene with a street corner and 'une remise de voitures accotée d'une interminable caserne'.<sup>75</sup> He was consequently shocked years later in Paris by the sight of this very street corner first perceived in his dreams and now very definitely part of the real world. In déjà-vu experiences as a whole and even on this exceptional occasion, despite Verlaine's apparent familiarity with a scene he was only witnessing for the first time, the feeling of having done or seen it all before is a mistaken one; in connection with the kaleidoscope however, the feeling is in some respects true. Even when individual patterns may appear strikingly different to the eye in arrangement and coloration, in terms of constituent elements each successive pattern is identical and has already been seen. As fragments of past designs in the kaleidoscope reassemble to form patterns of the future, so in life, past experiences have relevance for and an effect on those to come. This intricate mechanism of fragmentation and renewal in time is what Verlaine is trying to capture in 'Kaléidoscope', not simply in a visual sense, but in terms of total experience.

In the poem itself the future era in a 'ville magique' is composed of reorganised, disparate fragments of the poet's past experience in cities, by means of the poetic imagination and the literary form which is in the present. Some details of this future era like 'le soleil parmi la brume qui se lève', (line 4) the 'ori sur la mer', the 'voix dans les bois' (line 5) will be symbolic, mysterious or 'vague'. Others such as 'les cafés', 'des chats sur les dressoirs', and 'des orgues' (lines 10-11), drawn from Verlaine's life in Paris and London, will be 'très aigu' with the familiarity of experience.<sup>76</sup> As his life will be 'comme quand on a déjà vécu', as if it had already been lived though at some former time,

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<sup>75</sup>Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.65.

<sup>76</sup>This point is underlined by Robichez, p.632, V.P. Underwood in Verlaine et l'Angleterre (Paris, Nizet, 1956), p.178 and by Eléonore Zimmermann in Magies de Verlaine (Paris, Corti, 1967), pp.146-7.

so Verlaine himself will be similar but transformed; he imagines himself waking in the future era rich with the experience of many different existences ('bien des métempsychoses') yet essentially the same. Circumstances in general in the 'ville de rêve' are destined to be 'plus les mêmes qu'autrefois', a perfect repetition of the past but somehow rendered more intense in its sameness. Repeatedly we are brought back to the image of the kaleidoscope whose new images are merely composed of rearranged fragments of the past despite their illusion of change. Thus Verlaine's claim that dreams of the future (in his case at least) are hampered at the outset because of our imagination's dependence on memory and break down completely on account of the all-pervasive nature of past experience, is reinforced. Verlaine's sudden realisation of this bitter truth is conveyed in stanza IV of the poem where his previous elation conveyed in terminology reminiscent of Rimbaud's 'Villes' poems<sup>77</sup> dissolves into despair, 'Des larmes ruisselant douces le long des joues' (line 14). In this same stanza the adjective 'fatal' in the sense of deadly and inevitable, combines with hysterical laughter ('rires sanglotés') and a death wish ('des invocations à la mort de venir') to form a transition between Verlaine's awakening in the 'ville de rêve' after a personal transformation ('bien des métempsychoses') in stanzas I-III and the shattering of this harmonious vision of a futuristic world in stanzas V-VI. The tuneful 'orgues' and 'bandes de musique' and mystical 'cri sur la mer' and 'voix dans les bois' of earlier lines thus give way to a 'fracas des roues' and the 'bruits aigres des bals publics'. The personalised 'Ville magique' created in Verlaine's imagination is suddenly peopled with a crowd of depressing characters 'des traînées', 'd'affreux moutards', 'des vieux sans sourcils' and 'des veuves' (which replaced the original and less depressing 'femmes' of the manuscript). These underline the poet's feelings of dejection while sordid details also become apparent ('des senteurs d'urine) to evoke the worst in a city environment.

Up to the end of stanza VI, the movement of 'Kaléidoscope' is relatively clear and could be summarised as follows. Verlaine in the present, muses on some future personal existence in an imaginary city. His perception of this 'ville magique' relies mainly on recognisable

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<sup>77</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.135.

elements from urban settings familiar to him in his past life, reordered like fragments in a kaleidoscope pattern. It also involves idealised aspects impossible to tie in with known biographical detail. Verlaine's imagination is however not powerful enough to preserve his vision intact as sordid details generated by his memory (stanzas V, VI) insinuate themselves into his 'ville de rêve' and fragment this future existence before it becomes a reality. The final summarising stanza however with its syntactical complexity and oscillating movement between sleep and waking ('on rêve', 'on s'éveille', 'on se rendort' and 'on rêve encore') defies such straightforward interpretation and explanations can only be tentative. Apparently realising the impossibility of freeing himself from the memory of past experience, Verlaine returns to the philosophic tone of the first two stanzas and repeats their hypnotic 'ce sera comme quand...' refrain. He seemingly imagines himself lying in a grassy field in summertime listening to the somniferous sound of a bee. Like the ambivalent state of mind induced by this setting and occurrence, life in the 'ville magique', which now re-emerges in his consciousness, will involve a variability. Dream, (the 'vague' of line 3) will be pursued by a harsh and inevitable awakening ('aigu', line 3), followed in turn by renewed somnolence, 'on se rendort et [...] l'on rêve encor' (line 26). Like the constant fragmentation and renewal of an endlessly gyrating kaleidoscope image the future in the dream city will be persistently self-destructive and self-perpetuating ('même féerie' [...] 'même décor') revealing its dependence on the poetic imagination and past experience.

In that the poem integrates the harsh realism of an observer of the sordid urban scene with the traditionally dominant Verlainian mood of indeterminate rêverie and so is able to support several interpretations, 'Kaléidoscope' is rare in Verlaine's city verse. With 'Charleroi' it could be considered as belonging to his greatest achievements in this sphere. The poetisation of the intricacy of city life carried out in 'Kaléidoscope' through a display of the multiplicity of human experience bound up in Verlaine's visionary 'ville de rêve' also underlines the great extent to which the city dominated his existence on a mental as well as a physical plane despite poems which provide evidence to the contrary. This insidious influence of urban life on Verlaine's poetic consciousness, discernible also in the person of Charles Cros, is particularly evident in Verlaine's prison compositions composed between 27 August 1873 and



16 January 1875 of which 'Kaléidoscope' is one. Anthology pieces dating from this period, 'Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,/Si bleu, si calme' for example also reveal his freely-moving imagination being drawn towards the city especially to noises:

Cette paisible rumeur-là  
Vient de la ville.<sup>78</sup>

A lesser known poem, 'Tantalized' (intended for Cellulairement but finally published in Parallèlement) wherein Verlaine is fascinated on a sleepless night in prison by the piercing sounds of shunting trains at a nearby railway station, also reveals the influence of city noise:

L'aile où je suis donnant juste sur une gare,  
J'entends de nuit (mes nuits sont blanches) la bagarre  
Des machines qu'on chauffe et des trains ajustés.<sup>79</sup>

One particular poem of this unusual period in Verlaine's life however exhibits this filtering of city sights and experiences into the poet's mental processes more than any other; it is 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', the first piece of Mémoires d'un veuf. It was described by Verlaine himself as 'comme des notes d'un voyage à des pays fous'.<sup>80</sup> The poem illustrates the free play of Verlaine's imagination during sleep and, in that the dreams described are all centred on or anchored in cities, reveals the potentially hallucinatory nature of urban life as well as its inspirational value.

As an introduction to the fantastic world of 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' Verlaine explains, 'Sauf le cas de Londres toutes mes nuits se passent à Paris, ou alors nulle part'.<sup>81</sup> Though clearly bearing the marks of nineteenth-century living in its 'restaurants', 'chaussée bordée d'arbres extrêmement hauts' and mysterious 'passage voûté très noir, très long, humide et étroit comme un tunnel', this 'nulle part', like the 'ville de

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<sup>78</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.280.

<sup>79</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.501.

<sup>80</sup>This description comes from an unpublished paragraph of 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' quoted by J.H. Bornecque in 'Le Dessus des Mémoires d'un veuf', Revue des sciences humaines 66 (April-June 1952), 117-129 (p.128).

<sup>81</sup>'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.66.

rêve' of 'Kaléidoscope', is not discernibly any one town in particular.<sup>82</sup> Conversely, those dreams he claims to be expressly Parisian in nature, (though specific in their allusions at times), themselves contain details contradicting the contemporary reality of the capital. Paragraph II of the poem admits this fact, 'Je vois souvent Paris. Jamais comme il est. C'est une ville inconnue, absurde de tous aspects'. Verlaine's first dream of Paris thus visualises the city as a combination of a totally fictive, brilliantly coloured 'paysage paysan', ('Je l'entoure d'arbres quelconques. Des toits rouges luisent entre des verdurees très vertes') and contradictory details reminiscent of the 'hideous perspective' of 'vrai Paris suburbain' ('horribles maisons de plâtre', 'cours et cités où sèchent des linges' and so on).<sup>83</sup> Though the setting is in Verlaine's mind vaguely reminiscent of a 'canal Saint-Martin fantomatique' and the whitewashed houses 'rappellent assez la plaine Saint-Ouen et toute cette rue militaire du Nord', links with reality still remain tentative. The city is 'plus clairsemée' and 'en plus d'accidents' than anything witnessed by Verlaine in real life. This mixture of deliberate vagueness and puzzling detail is pursued in the second dream Verlaine recounts in which he is whisked magically through a succession of identical squares before landing alone in the heart of an oddly deserted city:

Je ne sais comment on pénètre dans  
la ville proprement dite et c'est sans  
transition que me voici sur trois places  
successives toutes la même, petites,<sup>84</sup>  
carrées, maisons blanches à arcades.

To supplement this bizarre occurrence Verlaine finds himself approached by an official figure and invited into one of the nearby buildings, the

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<sup>82</sup> J.H. Bornecque believes this description of a 'passage voûté' refers<sup>to</sup> the Towers subway in London described by Verlaine in a letter of 23 November 1872 to Ernest Lepelletier. (art. cit., p.128).

<sup>83</sup> Unlike Coppée, whose poetry juxtaposes the banlieue with the city centre as a desirable ideal, Verlaine feels no particular attachment, nostalgic or emotional to this particular area of the city.

<sup>84</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.65.

English Embassy in fact, where he witnesses a boisterous scene of song and dance presented by semi-naked Scots! At this point, Verlaine's strange awareness of the situation and characters around him, an odd mixture of indistinctness and precision, matches the incongruous nature of events. Phrases such as 'Je ne sais comment', 'Je ne sais pourquoi', 'Je ne me souviens plus' and 'J'oublie' proliferate, yet on the other hand extremely accurate visual descriptions occur. The uniform of the grenadier guarding the entrance to the Embassy for example receives detailed treatment:

Un grenadier rouge monte la garde:  
bonnet à poil sans rien après, plumes,  
cocarde ou orfèvreries. Courte tunique  
à parements blancs, pantalon noir à  
liséré rouge mince.

Similarly eccentric are those dreams in 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' where 'le vrai Paris' struggles to retain its identity against the modifications of Verlaine's imagination and its 'innocents travaux d'édilitéé [qui] viennent y fourrer du baroque et de l'imprévu'. On one occasion, for example, Verlaine's dream begins with a recognisable train journey in Paris (probably on the chemin de fer de ceinture), and ends in a hallucination wherein his original point de départ is lost:

Une centaine de places. Beaucoup  
de grouillement. La rapidité extraordinaire  
de notre course brouille un peu les  
objets et les faces, en même temps  
que le ronflement des roues sur les  
rails couvre tous bruits, pas et voix.

Half-blinded by the speed of travel, deafened by the noise of the rails, Verlaine is assailed by the unpleasant smell of food recalling to his confused mind the rancid confectionery of the siege and stimulating a surrealist vision of multi-coloured cakes whirling and evaporating in his imagination:

pains de graisses roses et jaunes, bandes de  
caramel rouge à demi fondu qui piquent  
des moitiés d'amandes rances, tas violet  
de gelées innommées et de galantines  
innommables, amoncellement poussiéreux de  
French-rocks, tea and coffes cakes et muffins

avariés, - tournoient, s'effilent, s'évaporent  
dans la distance alacrement accrue et  
dans les brouillards du rêve qui s'efface.<sup>85</sup>

Elsewhere the architecture of a real city is transformed in part through the additions of features borrowed from a different culture or simply springing from Verlaine's fertile imagination:

C'est ainsi qu'à la hauteur du  
bazar Bonne Nouvelle, entre le  
boulevard de ce nom et une rue qui  
s'y jette, j'installe un passage vitré,  
qui fait un coude, par conséquent.  
[...] Je dote aussi les rez-de-  
chaussée de grilles-barrières et les  
sous-sols - extérieurs alors - de  
balustrades transversales, comme à Londres.

Such allusions to aspects of city décor, especially to arcades, in a poet not normally concerned with architectural motifs is significant. Firstly, it reveals a general nineteenth-century absorption with buildings of transit: railway stations, exhibition halls, shopping arcades and so on wherein the revolutionary combination of iron, glass and gas-lighting could be used to its greatest effect.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, it suggests the possible influence of Rimbaud who speaks in his 'Villes' ('L'acropole officielle...'), a piece packed with architectural references, of 'Le quartier commerçant' as 'un circus d'un seul style, avec galeries à arcades'.<sup>87</sup> Where English fashions decorate Paris, London on the other hand becomes in Verlaine's dreams 'une ville de province aux rues étroites en colimaçon avec des enseignes en vieux français'.

In these particular examples the fantasies of 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' illustrate how the diversity of life in a metropolis and its potential as an inspirational source can conjure up in the poet's imagination heterogeneous visions set in an urban environment. These visions betray in their mixture of actuality and hallucination the city's

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<sup>85</sup> This passage bears a remarkable similarity to that from Confessions which illuminates the kaleidoscope image, 'les idées [qui] tourbillonnent en s'entrelaçant et se désenlaçant sans cesse et toujours'.

<sup>86</sup> See Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', La Vie urbaine 1 (1971), pp.34-48.

<sup>87</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.138.

role as physical presence providing memorable visual images and as a psychological activator stimulating rêverie. These dreams are also for the most part lighthearted in tone and frequently incongruous in content as we have shown. Their frivolity is undermined however by the infiltrating presence of death in this poem, apparent in macabre aspects of city scenery spotted by the poet and reinforced by Verlaine's memories of his deceased father. Verlaine's anxiety on this subject is a key characteristic of his city poetry. In 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', though barely perceptible in his first dream of Paris (there is a passing reference to 'attaques nocturnes'), the theme soon becomes obsessive. In illustration of the real presence of death as a threat 'en pleine ville vivante' in this poem Verlaine describes in paragraphs VII and VIII two cemetery scenes persistently occurring in his dreams. Though implicitly not wholly real, these landscapes are temptingly reminiscent of actual Parisian burial grounds. The first, a gothic cemetery filled with a miscellany of urns, crosses and tombs hidden among overgrown grasses and trees recalls, in its hill setting and vegetation, the Père-Lachaise cemetery in north-eastern Paris:

vers l'autre bord se creuse une vallée dont les  
arbres, - des arbres de forêt - hêtres, chênes  
et frênes - viennent faire gémir et  
craquer leurs cimes juste à ma hauteur.

The second, more classical in character with tombs resembling Greek or Sicilian temples and greenery providing a refuge for birds and a refreshing oasis in the semi-baked city, suggests (thanks to Verlaine's geographical references 'Au plein coeur d'un joli quartier, Auteuil ou Neuilly, sans commerce mais assez passant') the Vieux Cimetière de Neuilly situated in the north-west of the city. In both dreams the city inhabitant's inability to avoid contact with death even, and especially, in his day-to-day life is brought out clearly by the poet. On the first occasion the poet is hurrying distractedly to an evening rendez-vous when he realises his short-cut through the city has led him into a cemetery. On the second he is enjoying a cab ride through Paris on an early summer's morning when his attention is drawn to a high wall embracing a cluster of marble tombs. To the inhabitants of the busy quartier 'où tout respire l'insouciance de mourir' where the cemetery is situated, it is merely an accepted aspect of the décor; to the poet it serves as a chilling reminder of his own mortality.

The final dream wherein death plays a prominent role in the scene involves Verlaine's participation in a more personal sense. The poet, in the company of his dead father, hurries on foot behind an anonymous funeral procession weaving its way through the dusty and depressing streets of a re-development area in Paris, possibly Montmartre:

le sommeil me retrouve arpentant à  
toutes jambes une de ces rues nouvelles  
et non pas neuves, vous savez? larges,  
à peine bâties, pas pavées par endroits,  
sans boutiques, et qui portent des noms  
d'entrepreneurs en ier ou en ard: [...]  
Elle monte, cette rue, et la cause de  
ma hâte est un enterrement que je suis,  
en compagnie de mon père, mort lui-  
même depuis longtemps et que mes rêves  
me représentent presque constamment.

Unexpectedly the cortège mysteriously disappears from sight 'au haut de la rue dans une étroite avenue qui coupe à droite. A droite et non à gauche' (a further odd exactitude) and the poet's perception of events is blurred momentarily ('Une lacune d'une seconde dans ma mémoire'). On recovery Verlaine finds himself a passenger on the 'impériale' of a futuristic 'voiture qui va sur rails sans que l'agent de locomotion soit aucunément apparent'.<sup>88</sup> To his horror this contraption is following swiftly behind a macabre 'train pour le cimetière' packed with coffins ('des boîtes oblongues, hautes d'environ deux mètres, peintes en bleu clair sali').<sup>89</sup> To intensify Verlaine's mounting terror at this point is the preponderance of potentially morbid detail crowding into the picture. 'De grandes tranchées dans de la terre glaise [qui] baillent, vertes et jaunes' provide possible material for funeral urns, spectral 'terrassiers' perceived through a fog are reminiscent of gravediggers, the temperature suddenly

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<sup>88</sup>This means of transport provides an interesting comparison with Rimbaud's 'chalets de cristal et de bois qui se meuvent sur des rails et des poulies invisibles' of 'Villes' ('Ce sont des villes!') in Illuminations.

<sup>89</sup>In Cros' 'Effarement' similar coffin-like objects are packed into a train, 'des colis qu'on arrime dans les voitures du train'.

drops and so on. Syntax is in tune with a sense of panic as sentences become more abrupt ('Ces hommes sont grisâtres sur l'air grisâtre. Il fait froid. On doit être en novembre,'). This culminates in the final phrase 'Nous roulons toujours' where Verlaine realises with nightmarish perception his inevitable fate as the only living occupant of the fearful 'voiture'.

The move from detached observation of a scene to distinct personal involvement in it by means of detailed reflective comment or intervention as an actual protagonist (as occurs in 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves') seems fairly typical of those poems suggested to Verlaine by the constant reminders of death present in a normal urban scene and more apparent to him because of his macabre imagination. To the rich in their 'élégants hôtels où tout respire l'insouciance de mourir' these reminders of death posed little threat. To the poor man, flâneur or indeed poet, the relationship was of a different order. He was in daily contact with the streets of Paris where cemeteries were never far away to remind him of the dead 'en pleine ville vivante',<sup>90</sup> and where funeral processions were a 'spectacle si commun'.<sup>91</sup> Death therefore had a distinct, real presence for him. A further piece from Mémoires d'un veuf, 'Jeux d'enfants' clearly demonstrates the city dweller's vulnerability to unexpected and macabre incidents occurring in day-to-day life and the gruesome reflections on death evoked in the mind by these incidents.<sup>92</sup> The poem's setting is in real Paris, this time Coppée's 'terrains vagues',<sup>93</sup> of the outskirts of the city; Verlaine says 'Je me promenais rêveur à travers les champs pelés et blafards de l'extrême banlieue parisienne'.<sup>94</sup> The poet's attention is captured on his flânerie by the sound of children's voices singing a familiar melody (most likely a hymn as what happens afterwards shows) which fills him with a sense of foreboding. He comes

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<sup>90</sup> 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.65.

<sup>91</sup> 'Corbillard au galop', Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.96.

<sup>92</sup> 'Jeux d'enfants' is an undated piece from Les Mémoires d'un veuf but its similarity with other works, 'Par la croisée' for example and Baudelairian influence tempt us to situate its composition around the turn of the decade (1869-1870).

<sup>93</sup> The phrase is from Coppée's 'Noces et festins' (Le Cahier rouge).

<sup>94</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p. 94.

upon a group of children acting out a burial scene, ('c'étaient des enfants de cinq à dix ans qui jouaient à "l'enterrement", un jeu comme un autre, après tout') and stands aside to observe their game as a spectator at a theatrical performance. One small boy is lying on the ground with a handkerchief covering his face as a corpse whilst his friends form a shaky choir or gather round a milestone, representing the altar, as priest and acolytes in the ceremony. Verlaine's reaction to this sight illustrating the ubiquitous nature of death as well as its fatal attraction for even the youngest of city inhabitants, is to smile. 'Ce spectacle fit faire à mes lèvres un mouvement auquel mes pensées ne les ont guère habituées'. His reaction is not one of amusement or contempt but rather of sympathy with and understanding of the Parisian children's fearless familiarity with such an often avoided subject. Encouraged by their infantile wisdom Verlaine changes the tone of his poem from narrative to philosophic, expands in Baudelairian rhetoric on the idea of death, especially its links with poetry, and demands why this great theme has been overlooked in the genre by recent generations:

[...] pourquoi le poète, lui aussi ne jouerait-il  
pas à "l'enterrement"?

[...] pourquoi ne se distrairait-il pas  
à manier les choses funèbres de  
ses innocentes mains sacrilèges?

[...] pourquoi ne prendrait-il pas des  
familiarités avec cette grande pince-  
sans-rire qu'on appelle l'Horreur?

In an uncharacteristically vehement sequel Verlaine calls on his fellow artists to defy the 'méprisant rictus' of their contemporaries and set themselves apart from the sentiments of an age 'qui paraît avoir à jamais répudié la mélancolie, et ne songe plus qu'à rigoler' by taking a direct approach to death in their works. Verlaine's tone here is one of contempt for his fellows' wish to 'se conformer à l'esprit d'un siècle'. He also criticises Rabelais and Gavroche (the archetypal Parisian street urchin) for their 'plant ureux vocabulaire' from which sprang the verb rigoler. Clearly he believed himself, however erroneously, to be something of a pioneer in Parisian death poetry and considered it an important part of his production as a whole.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Verlaine was somewhat mistaken in this opinion as the Romantics naturally provided a precedent for his obsession with death as did Baudelaire for his treatment of it in a city setting. Constant personal fascination



An earlier example of Verlaine's prose poetry (first published in Le Hanneton on 8 August 1867 under the stark title 'Corbillard' then introduced into Les Mémoires d'un veuf as 'Corbillard au galop') provides a key illustration of Verlaine's narrowing the gap between himself as a poet and death, and cultivating 'cette grande pince-sans-rire qu'on appelle l'Horreur'. As in 'Jeux d'enfants', the scene opens in Paris with a description in splenetic vocabulary of the poet wandering aimlessly in the north of the city:

J'étais dans le haut de la rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, que je descendais la tête basse et fumant un cigare, sans penser à rien, ainsi qu'il m'arrive les trois quarts du temps. Dix heures du matin sonnaient partout. Il faisait un de ces soleils mouillés du dernier été. L'air, tiède et lourd, disposait à l'ennui. Les passants, assez nombreux, allaient d'un pas lourd, tandis que la voix des marchands ambulants montait, lente et grêle, parmi la fumée ouateuse des cheminées et la puanteur molle des ruisseaux, vers le ciel bas.<sup>96</sup>

Verlaine is suddenly shocked out of his abstract rêverie by the sight of what he takes (because of its poor ornamentation) to be a pauper's coffin borne in a swiftly moving hearse to the cemetery. What strikes him most, apart from the breakneck speed at which the procession is travelling, 'comme un fiacre payé à la course' as he irreverently remarks, is the fact that there are no followers in its wake, only four pall bearers running to keep up with the frantic pace. This salient detail especially, marks the happening as a specifically urban occurrence for only in a metropolis where individuals are more often than not strangers to each other could

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with its varying aspects and repeated personal involvement in, rather than observation of, the phenomenon mark out Verlaine's contribution however.

<sup>96</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, pp.95-6.

such an unmourned departure of a faceless personality take place.<sup>97</sup> In a sense Verlaine is reworking here in a more sombre key the urban passant theme. This is characterised by the appearance and disappearance of an entrancing figure in a city landscape and was used by Baudelaire in the 'Tableaux parisiens'<sup>98</sup> and later by Nouveau in one of his earliest Parisian poems.<sup>99</sup> As the glimpsed female figures in Baudelaire and Nouveau's erotic poems arouse the imagination of these respective poets, so here the strange appearance and disappearance of the hearse excites Verlaine's imagination. He allows his thoughts to wander to the dead person as he imagines the body lying in its coffin and debates on the identity of a character whose passing could go so unnoticed. By<sup>3</sup> process of elimination he concludes that the dead man is most likely a poet, which leads him onto a horrific vision of himself in the place of this 'misérable':

est-ce tout à coup je ne me vis  
point, moi, vieilli, dans une bière  
de cent sous, bouche ouverte, poings  
crispés, - crispés? - entortillé à la

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<sup>97</sup> Certain details of this poem could also have been drawn from Balzac, in particular the burial of Goriot in Le Père Goriot where the scene is described in the following words,

Eugène revint vers trois heures à la pension bourgeoise, et ne put retenir une larme quand il aperçut à cette porte bâtarde la bière à peine couverte d'un drap noir, posée sur deux chaises dans cette rue déserte. Un mauvais goupillon, auquel personne n'avait encore touché, trempait dans un plat de cuivre argenté plein d'eau bénite. La porte n'était pas même tendue de noir. C'était la mort des pauvres, qui n'a ni faste, ni suivants, ni amis, ni parents.  
[...] Rastignac et Christophe accompagnèrent seuls, avec deux croque-morts, le char qui menait le pauvre homme à Saint-Etienne-du-Mont.

<sup>98</sup> 'A une Passante', Baudelaire, O.C., Vol I, p.92.

<sup>99</sup> 'Hier, par une après-midi...', II in the 'Fantaisies parisiennes' from Nouveau, O.C., pp.360-1.

diable d'un linceul trop étroit laissant  
passer les pieds maigres et, les cahots  
du corbillard me secouant terriblement,  
mes dents s'entrechoquent, ma tête  
bat les voliges de çà de là, mes cheveux  
gris s'emmêlant sur mon front  
jaune et de ma poitrine s'échappe  
une manière de gémissement sourd.<sup>100</sup>

The confession in the final paragraph that as a result of his absorption with the macabre scene Verlaine had neglected to pay his respects to the dead man indicates the extent to which, when death is suggested, Verlaine is transfixed with equal horror and fascination. The weighty implications of the situation and his own morbid hallucinations generated by it transform the poet from a spectator of, to a participant in the scene. The real world is dismissed and replaced by an imagined predicament more terrifying and immediate in its effect.

'Par la croisée', also from Mémoires d'un veuf opens with what appears, like 'Corbillard au galop', to be a perfectly ordinary Parisian scene with Verlaine and a friend looking down from a third floor window onto a scene below. Tone and emphasis soon change however, with the poem becoming a bleak reflection on death and the human condition:

La fenêtre de mon ami ne donnait  
point sur la rue, en sorte qu'un  
beau matin d'été, nous nous amusions  
beaucoup, tout en fumant, à considérer  
les choses comiques intimes que nous  
dominions de la hauteur de son  
troisième étage.<sup>101</sup>

As in 'Jeux d'enfants' where Verlaine had watched the 'spectacle' of children play-acting a funeral, here the two characters' vantage point has the effect of isolating them from the rest of humanity and making the action they witness unfold like a mime on stage. A small building decorated

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<sup>100</sup> The horrible self-identification with the object of his attention which Verlaine practices in 'Corbillard au galop' also occurs at the end of Cros' 'L'Heure froide' where the poet imagines himself dying alone at night.

<sup>101</sup> Verlaine, O.C. en prose, p.75.

by an eccentric 'magot de la Chine en fer peint de toutes les couleurs' standing in a small, typically Parisian garden ('une allée', 'un arbre' set in asphalt and 'une corde à faire sécher le linge') becomes the focus of their attention. A first hint that all is not what it should be in this peaceful scene comes in the suggestion of sickness conveyed by the freshly washed bed-sheet, 'qui nous sembla sale' steaming on the line. The sharp tongue of the decorative gargoyle decorating the roof and rendered 'luisante comme une aiguille' by the ravages of the weather is also suggestive. As they observe, a man emerges from the building and rinses his hands in a bowl of water which tints pink with the presence of blood. When this anonymous figure reappears with a helper bearing a heavy coffin Verlaine's jovial badinage on the ridiculous pretensions of inner city gardens and on the complacencies of a 'monde grotesque où il eût été plaisant de vivre sans craintes ni amours' is swiftly replaced by morbid reflections on human existence 'qui a toujours le mot pour rire et sait comme un acteur consommé préparer ses effets sans trop d'emphase'. Like an actor whose experience allows him to change tone swiftly from comedy to pathos before his unsuspecting audience, so everyday life, especially in the infinite variety of a city, provides the individual with a series of contradictory situations and emotions. The transformatory effect on the poetic mind of unexpected contact with death in the city and the grief of a mourning fellow Parisian ('une vieille femme en chemise, qui pleurait') is implicit in Verlaine's final reaction to the 'magot de la Chine' ending the poem. This object which had provoked his ridicule in the opening section of the poem as an unnecessary and idiosyncratic addition to the pavillon's banal 'toit plat de zinc' makes a final gesture of defiance to the poet. 'En grinçant [il] nous tira la langue'. This action generates not laughter from Verlaine as might previously have been expected but anxious contemplations on 'cette misérable vie humaine' gratuitously offered to man yet more gracelessly snatched away.

Significantly in this poem it is through the medium of water, that used to purify the undertaker's hands, that the proximity of death in the city is transmitted to Verlaine and his companion. This link between the motifs of the city, water and death, first testified in the trilogy of 'Paris, l'Onde et la Nuit' of 'Nocturne parisien' is reinforced on other separate occasions within Verlaine's writings and poetry and could also be considered a distinguishing mark. Where the Seine is central to

Verlaine's vision of Paris and the river helps to betray the omnipresence of death in the city by the constant threat of drowning in its dark waters, in Verlaine's London poetry, water and the links it provides with the death theme are equally important. Writing shortly after his first arrival in London with Rimbaud in September 1872 Verlaine gives his impressions on the English city to his schoolfriend Edmond Lepelletier. Though the following quotation manifests exaggerated surprise at the enormity of London and its unfamiliar sights and is typical of Verlaine's correspondence in its tone of dramatic hyperbole it nevertheless provides us with some interesting comments from Verlaine's own mouth on the Thames.<sup>102</sup>

La Tamise est superbe: figure-toi  
un immense tourbillon de boue, quelque  
chose comme un gigantesque gogueneau  
débordant. Ponts véritablement babyloniens,  
avec des centaines de piles en fonte,  
grosses et hautes comme feu la colonne  
et peintes en rouge sang.<sup>103</sup>

Underlining the hyperbole of 'immense', 'gigantesque', 'véritablement babyloniens' and so on is the ironic description of the river as a poisonous open sewer ('gogueneau débordant')<sup>104</sup> and the macabre reference to its bridges painted a 'rouge sang', which link it with the death theme. If the English river is no more sensitive to the human dilemma than its Parisian counterpart the Seine, it has still clearly captured Verlaine's imagination at this point and promises to recur as an inspiration in his verse.

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<sup>102</sup> Germain Nouveau, writing to Jean Richepin from London in March 1874 interestingly picks on the same aspect of the English landscape for comment:

Le second soir, nous nous sommes égarés en passant  
la Tamise, pour avoir voulu seulement passer par un  
autre pont; n'en finissent pas, les ponts, et combien  
plus hauts de parapets qu'aux bords fleuris de la  
Seine; je me fais l'effet d'un môme ici, moi pas  
grand là-bas.

(Nouveau, O.C., p.817)

Vitalie Rimbaud also writes significantly to her sister on the subject during a trip to London in July 1874. See Rimbaud, O.C., p.285.

<sup>103</sup> Van Bever, Vol. 1, p.43.

<sup>104</sup> A goguenot or a gogueneau is a familiar term for a chamber pot.

'Streets II' of the suggestively entitled 'Aquarelles' section of Romances sans paroles betrays in its English title its place of composition and reveals Verlaine's interest in death and water imagery displayed in poetic form:

O la rivière dans la rue!  
Fantastiquement apparue  
Derrière un mur haut de cinq pieds,  
Elle roule sans un murmure  
Son onde opaque et pourtant pure,  
Par les faubourgs pacifiés.

La chaussée est très large, en sorte  
Que l'eau jaune comme une morte  
Dévale ample et sans nuls espoirs  
De rien refléter que la brume,  
Même alors que l'aurore allume  
Les cottages jaunes et noirs.<sup>105</sup>

Despite Verlaine's reference to a 'rivière', it is unlikely that he is describing the Thames in this poem. The startled opening lines with their exclamatory tone and forged adverbs ('fantastiquement') suggest the sight Verlaine is witnessing is new to him and quite unexpected even in an alien city environment. That Verlaine was inspired by Regent's Canal as V.P. Underwood claims in his book Verlaine et l'Angleterre is a distinct possibility.<sup>106</sup> This view is supported by concrete, physical details, 'Derrière un mur haut de cinq pieds' and 'Elle roule [...] /Par les faubourgs pacifiés', as well as by the term 'chaussée' in stanza II, which suggests a transport waterway rather than a natural geographical feature. Verlaine's initial reaction of astonishment at the sudden appearance of water unheralded by noise ('sans un murmure'), or vegetation as a river might have been, turns at the end of stanza I to absorption with the canal itself and its privileged position as a man-made edifice wholly integrated into the urban scene. Lines 3-6 where the waterway's total assimilation into the landscape emerges, reveals a distinct similarity between this poem and 'Auteuil' where the railway viaduct emerges as a praiseworthy element in the urban scene or 'Malines' where silent railway carriages passing through the rural scene have a parallel fascinating effect on the poet:

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<sup>105</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.206-7.

<sup>106</sup>V.P. Underwood, Verlaine et l'Angleterre (Paris, Nizet, 1956), p.104.

Elle roule sans un murmure

[...]

Par les faubourgs pacifiés.

('Streets II')

Les wagons filent en silence

Parmi ces sites apaisés.

('Malines')

Where the train in 'Malines' merely crosses a landscape without disturbing its animal life ('Dormez les vaches. Reposez/Doux taureaux de la plaine'), the stealthily flowing 'rivière dans la rue' in 'Streets II' has a dangerously numbing effect on the surroundings of the 'faubourgs pacifiés'. The potential threat posed by the water's soporific nature and hinted at in its appearance, 'son onde opaque', is heightened in stanza II of the poem where suggestions of death proliferate. Where previously the water, if opaque, was 'pourtant pure' now it is 'jaune comme une morte'. Where before it was contained and channelled between walls now it appears 'très large' even 'ample' as it unfolds impassively and flood-like between the houses suffocating all hope of resistance between itself and a hanging fog.

From the evidence of this later series of poems in prose and verse set in an urban 'nulle part', in Paris or in London alike, death in the city emerges as a stark reality for Verlaine. When combined with the water motif it stands as one of the major themes of his urban works. While being present as a fact in real, familiar aspects of the city landscape forming points de départ for the poet's imagination: cemeteries, funeral processions, rivers and the like, death also casts a bewitching web over Verlaine and frequently embraces him as a participant in the macabre events to which he is a witness. Thus it illustrates the important emotional and imaginative links between the real world and the poet. Hence in 'Jeux d'enfants', 'Corbillard au galop' and 'Par la croisée' where Verlaine is confronted with death on his innocent wanderings in Paris, his poems move from a straightforward evocation of the scene around him to highly personalised, reflective conclusions on his own or the human condition in general. On other occasions one can sense a movement in the opposite direction occurring and a subjective stimulus to inspiration heavily colouring Verlaine's appreciation and perception of external reality causing him to notice only its more macabre and squalid aspects as in 'Le bruit des cabarets' it had permitted him to dismiss the noise and

chaos of the city around him. While broadly symptomatic of a penchant towards the macabre (possibly inherited from Baudelaire) and of a general pessimism towards the city evident in his earliest evocation of Paris as a rapacious and murdering courtesan in 'Nocturne parisien', Verlaine's reliance on sordid and macabre events in the city also reflected specifically, as we have remarked with other works, his mental state at the time of writing. This is the case in 'Kaléidoscope' where sordid details and unattractive human characters underline and provide a visible extension of Verlaine's disillusionment with his dream of a future 'ville magique'. As regards London, Verlaine's pessimism was tied specifically to the figure of Arthur Rimbaud with whom he lived intermittently in the English capital during 1872 and 1873 and whose unpredictable behaviour contributed to Verlaine's ultimate disenchantment with life in this particular city. Verlaine's disillusionment is best conveyed in the innovatory 'Sonnet boiteux' of 1873 with its eccentric, limping thirteen-syllable lines and unrhymed tercets:<sup>107</sup>

Ah! vraiment c'est triste, ah! vraiment ça finit trop mal.

Il n'est pas permis d'être à ce point infortuné.

Ah! vraiment c'est trop la mort du naïf animal

Qui voit tout son sang couler sous son regard fané.

Londres fume et crie. O quelle ville de la Bible!

La gaz flambe et nage et les enseignes sont vermeilles.

Et les maisons dans leur ratatinement terrible

Epouvantent comme un sénat de petites vieilles.

Tout l'affreux passé saute, piaule, miaule et glapit

Dans le brouillard rose et jaune et sale des sohos

Avec des indeeds et des all rights et des haôg.

Non vraiment c'est trop un martyr sans espérance,

Non vraiment cela finit trop mal, vraiment c'est triste

O le feu du ciel sur cette ville de la Bible!<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>In view of Baudelaire's statement that 'la fréquentation des villes énormes' suggested to him 'une prose poétique, musicale, sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience', it is significant that one of Verlaine's major breaks with traditional form and versification should have come in a city poem.

<sup>108</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, pp.323-4.



Written in memory of the fragmentation of his relationship with Rimbaud this poem reveals, in its technique of incantation; 'Ah! vraiment' (line 1), 'Ah! vraiment' (line 4), 'Non vraiment' (line 12) and 'Non vraiment' (line 13), an individual tortured by self-pity. The use of these incantatory syllables as a poetic frame for the sonnet and their hypnotic repetition also shows the poet focused on his own emotional plight to the detriment of the external world around him. When the city world does intrude in stanzas II and III (briefly broadening the poem's relevance to include all suffering individuals in an urban environment) Verlaine's view of it is so influenced by his personal despair that only negative and un-attractive elements appear clearly. Urban décor consists of broken-down houses, luminous inn signs and eerie gaslight. This latter, unlike Coppée's attractive gaslight which emanates warmth and friendliness, merely casts a mysterious and lurid glow over human activity. Its presence also recalls unpleasant memories of the past further debased by the animalistic allusions and sense of frenzied activity conveyed by the enumeration of line 9. While providing a symbolic exteriorisation of Verlaine's confused mental state, one can also sense a bitterness in Verlaine's attitude to the urban scene as also a real phenomenon partly responsible for his despondency. Like Charles Cros in 'Saint Sébastien', Verlaine uses Biblical imagery to reinforce the link between the city and his own spiritual death. In the hallucinatory image of lines 3-4 he describes himself as a sacrificial lamb witnessing his own death 'la mort du naïf animal/ Qui voit tout son sang couler sous son regard fané', In line 12 he is a 'martyr sans espérance' the victim of a corrupt metropolis. In this latter image Verlaine equates London with a 'ville de la Bible', most probably Babylon or Sodom, as it mirrors his wretchedness in its physical sordidness. Verlaine's calling on Divine intervention in the poem's final line thus heralds a dual attempt to eliminate or purify by means of celestial fire both the implicit reflections of and constant material reminder of his own mental state.

The openly condemnatory approach towards the city expressed in 'Sonnet boiteux' whereby the sinful nature of urban life is exposed and accentuated by Verlaine's biased perception of events was applied to Paris in 1877 in a poem from Sagesse beginning 'La "grande ville"!'. This poem probably represents the climax of Verlaine's fascination with, yet pessimism towards the city to which the early criticism of 'Nocturne parisien' and the constant emphasis on death, especially in the prose writings, had been leading:

La "grande ville"! Un tas criard de pierres blanches  
Où rage le soleil comme en pays conquis.  
Tous les vices ont leurs tanières, les exquis  
Et les hideux, dans ce désert de pierres blanches.

Des odeurs. Des bruits vains. Où que vague le coeur,  
Toujours ce poudrolement vertigineux de sable,  
Toujours ce remuement de la chose coupable,  
Dans cette solitude où s'écoeure le coeur!

De près, de loin, le Sage aura sa Thébaïde  
Parmi le fade ennui qui monte de ceci,  
D'autant plus âpre et plus sanctifiante aussi  
Que deux parts de son âme y pleurent, dans ce vide!<sup>109</sup>

Verlaine begins his poem with a caustically ironic celebration of Paris supposedly a "grande ville", but now reduced in his mind to a 'tas' or 'désert de pierres blanches' stripped of historical landmarks and artistic heritage and devoid of cultural or literary importance. Once darkly mysterious and appealing to the poet's imagination here the city with its brilliant illuminations from which there is no escape ('où rage le soleil') offends even Verlaine's senses. It is also deeply offensive from a moral point of view as it provides a breeding ground for sin ('tous les vices', line 3 and 'ce remuement de la chose coupable', line 7) living reptile-like in the crevices of the dried-up urban landscape. Where in other poems water was used to represent the city's destructive potential, here its spiritual threat to mankind is conveyed by the very absence of that element. Paris is reduced to a 'désert' a 'poudrolement vertigineux de sable' (line 6), a 'solitude' (line 8) and a 'vide' (line 12). The city bakes in a dry heat evaporating positive human emotion (line 5) and rendering normal communication between individuals impossible. This sterility and desiccation of Paris finally alienate the poet from an environment which had previously impressed him by its vitality and kaleidoscopic variety yet which now emanates no more than a 'fade ennui'.

Though the criticism of 'La "grande ville"! must be viewed in the light of Verlaine's emotional conversion to Catholicism suffered in Mons prison in 1874 which undoubtedly contributes to the poem's religious tone, it nevertheless stands as a sincere and probably his most bitingly critical account of urban life carried out for its own sake. Compared to the diluted

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<sup>109</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.286

criticism of other Sagesse poems which reveal Verlaine pandering to the dictates of traditional terminology and poetic devices in his treatment of the city theme, its tone is vehement and ironical. This clearly undermines Verlaine's wide reputation, based on evaluations of Fêtes galantes and other early pieces, as primarily a creator of escapist poetry made of 'l'étoffe même du songe' wherein the immediate environment of the nineteenth-century world was of little relevance. It also refutes Jacques Robichez's opinion that Verlaine used Paris as a poetic subject only incidentally and 'sans jamais [...] s'y vraiment intéresser.'<sup>110</sup> A.E. Carters claim that when Verlaine looked at Paris 'he saw little beyond surface detail'<sup>111</sup> is also called into question as are unfair comments on other city poems such as Diana Festa-McCormick's dismissive description of the clearly urban 'Kaléidoscope', as a poem where 'rien n'est dit' and of which 'il n'existe nulle explication'.<sup>112</sup>

One of the chief difficulties in assessing Verlaine's attitude towards the city and ultimately in judging his contribution as a city poet arises from his apparent reluctance to commit himself fully to the urban theme. Despite the promising article on Baudelaire in the mid-1860s, which shows Verlaine aware of the poetic potential of his environment and the highly entertaining letters to Lepelletier from London in the early 1870s<sup>113</sup> where he is clearly receptive on a personal level to the anomalies of city life, the city does not fully occupy his poetic imagination. Intensifying this problem is the poet's interest in broad, general themes such as that of death in the city on one hand, yet fascination with minute

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<sup>110</sup>Robichez, p.xxi.

<sup>111</sup>A.E. Carter, Paul Verlaine (New York, Twayne, 1971), p.27.

<sup>112</sup>Diana Festa-McCormick, 'Y-a-t-il un impressionisme littéraire, le cas Verlaine', Nineteenth-Century French Studies 2 (1974), 142-53 (p.152).

<sup>113</sup>See Van Bever, Vol. I, especially pages 43-98.

detail and personal favourites of urban décor such as the railway on the other. Verlaine's influential personal life and his susceptibility to strong emotions while writing also played a significant role in his urban works since when emerging in his verse and prose they tend to suggest ambiguity and lack of consistency in the poet's attitude towards the city. This characteristic vacillation between the external, visible scene and Verlaine's personal reflections on it in his poetry was already apparent in one of Verlaine's earliest city compositions, 'Croquis parisien' which manifests a pendulum swing towards and away from present reality. It remained a persistent trait both within individual poems and from collection to collection in Verlaine's works. In poems such as 'Charleroi' and 'Auteuil' it manifests itself as a departure from or progression beyond the external scene by means of Verlaine's imagination. In other poems such as 'Kaléidoscope' and 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves', where Verlaine refuses to distract by realist description of an actual metropolis, it is apparent in his complete evocation of an urban 'pays des rêves' or 'ville magique', highly personal yet still impregnated with identifiable elements from a real world. The link between Verlaine's psychological realm and his external city surroundings reaches its climax in his poems of death in the city which are frequently intensified by his use of the water motif. These poems represent a highly personal contribution to the wider urban theme. In these poems, death is present as a real phenomenon likely to be encountered in nineteenth-century Paris but also as a symbolic extension and exteriorization of Verlaine's personal fears of mortality.

Through the evidence of these poems it can be shown that the city represents not only a powerful subject of interest for Verlaine as a man but also a consistent source of inspiration for him as a poet. Though one cannot reserve for him the position of a city poet with the same exclusive standing as Baudelaire since his urban works (with the possible exception of 'Charleroi' and 'Kaléidoscope') do not plumb the full depths of his poetic talent, the city must still remain an important aspect of Verlaine's literary output which cannot be ignored. As a theme it is significant in Verlaine's first published piece 'Monsieur Prudhomme' which evokes a pompous bourgeois official and also in the Coppesque 'Sites urbains' written during his dotage.<sup>114</sup> It is however particularly apparent

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<sup>114</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.1034.

in Verlaine's most active literary years from the mid-1860s to the mid-1880s and might be best viewed as a persistent thread giving continuity to a period of life anything but stable. The city passes through collections as vastly different as La Bonne chanson and Sagesse and is particularly effective in welding together contemporary prose and verse compositions throwing the former, which have largely been ignored or dismissed by critics to date, into relief.<sup>115</sup> In the work of a poet whose best known pieces tend to vagueness and musicality the appearance of city poems concerned with a material world provides a refreshing change and by reinforcing the link with his contemporaries, emphasises the hold of Paris (and other big cities) upon the sensibilities of men of letters in general and poets in particular in the years following Baudelaire's death.

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<sup>115</sup>A.E. Carter in Verlaine, a study in Parallels, underestimates the value of Verlaine's prose poems by refusing to consider them as independent works but rather as attempts to rival Baudelaire's prose poems which fall lamentably short of their mark. The conclusion reached after reading three of the most uncharacteristic pieces from Mémoires d'un veuf: 'Bons bourgeois', 'A la Mémoire de mon ami' and 'Du Parnasse contemporain', is that Verlaine had 'no idea how to handle prose' (p.211). Significantly however, it was in connection with Mémoires d'un veuf, in a letter of 1882 to Lepelletier, that Verlaine registers himself specifically as an urban writer. He claims his prose collection possesses 'quelque chose de parisien'. (Van Bever, Vol. I, p.183).

## CHAPTER 4

### GERMAIN NOUVEAU: PARISIANISM AND LA PARISIENNE

Germain Nouveau has suffered perhaps more than any other poet through having lived and worked in the shadow of two outwardly more colourful and illustrious fellows, namely Verlaine and Rimbaud. Consequently studies of this poet have often been undertaken primarily in the light of Nouveau's contemporaneity with, similarity to, or difference from these and other men of letters. This tendency to group Nouveau with his contemporaries was first initiated by the persuasive arguments of André Breton in the 1920s<sup>1</sup> and, perpetuated by the anecdotal reminiscences of Ernest Delahaye<sup>2</sup>, has persisted almost unabated until the present day in articles where the poet is concerned. Characteristic of the genre are

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<sup>1</sup> André Breton, 'Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau d'après des documents inédits', Les Nouvelles littéraires, 23 August 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Delahaye, 'Deux Poètes, Verlaine et Germain Nouveau', Le Figaro, 9 June 1923.

Ernest Delahaye, Souvenirs familiaux à propos de Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau, (Paris, Messein, 1925).

Jean Richepin's 'Germain Nouveau et Rimbaud' (1927),<sup>3</sup> Jacques Patin's 'Germain Nouveau et Paul Verlaine' (1931),<sup>4</sup> Louis Aragon's 'De Baudelaire, Nouveau ou Rimbaud, qui est le plus grand poète?' (1948)<sup>5</sup> and Jacques Brenner's 'Le Centenaire de Germain Nouveau, compagnon de Rimbaud et de Verlaine' (1951).<sup>6</sup> Georges Emmanuel Clancier has similarly referred to Rimbaud, Verlaine and Nouveau as a 'trinité' or 'système planétaire poétique' in an article published in 1953.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Paoli in 1967 talked of the three forming a 'triade exceptionnelle dans la poésie française',<sup>8</sup> while finally, the Italian critic, Giorgio Sozzi, has insisted on a 'correspondance' or 'liaison' linking the three poets.<sup>9</sup> Though the drawing of parallels between fellow poets is a justifiable practice in that it often helps to clarify obscure contemporary allusions and can help to reveal the tendencies or spirit of an age by pointing to similar undercurrents in the works of otherwise vastly differing personalities, it is nevertheless a practice to be exercised with caution. Firstly, the technique of lateral criticism can eventually draw attention away from the minor to the major poet in a comparison and the former suffers as a result through his work not being accorded the detailed interest it also deserves. Secondly, and more seriously, excessive cross-reference can contaminate the interpretation of individual poems by guiding the reader's attention in a predetermined direction which may contradict the author's original intention. A case in point in connection

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<sup>3</sup>Jean Richepin, 'Germain Nouveau et Rimbaud', Revue de France, 1ère année, 1, (1927), pp.119-143.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Patin, 'Germain Nouveau et Paul Verlaine', Le Figaro, 31 January 1931, pp.5-6.

<sup>5</sup>Louis Aragon, 'De Baudelaire, Nouveau ou Rimbaud, qui est le plus grand poète?', Les Lettres Françaises, 7 October 1948.

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Brenner, 'Le Centenaire de Germain Nouveau, compagnon de Rimbaud et de Verlaine', Arts, 26 October 1951, p.8.

<sup>7</sup>Georges Emmanuel Clancier, 'Germain Nouveau poète de l'innocence et de l'amour', Arts, 28 August 1953, p.5.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Paoli, 'Le poète Germain Nouveau' in Les Amis des villages varois, (Toulon, April 1967).

<sup>9</sup>Giorgio Sozzi, 'Germain Nouveau poète oublié', Connaissance des Hommes, 39 (1971) pp.10-12.

with Nouveau is probably the poet's most successful verse poem, 'Mendiants' (of early 1875), which describes a love experience between Nouveau and an unnamed second person.<sup>10</sup> Though clearly female because of physical characteristics alluded to in the text, ('ton sein', line 7, 'ton attifement de boucles et de ganses', line 21) the 'toi' of the poem has been repeatedly equated with Rimbaud. Maurice Saillet for example states categorically that the portrait of this other person, though a 'martyre' and an 'innocente', 'ne peut être que celui de Rimbaud'.<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Sozzi agrees, similarly skating over contradictions in the text, to conclude that 'il Vieux Bébé, non puo essere altri che il grande e terribile amico Rimbaud'.<sup>12</sup> A second Italian critic Guido Saba similarly describes 'Mendiants' erroneously, as 'la lirica confessione della meravigliosa e terribile avventura vissuta con Rimbaud'.<sup>13</sup> As will be shown by a detailed study of the poem in question, 'Mendiants', as a love poem, is rather characteristic of Nouveau's Parisian verse and is strictly revealing of his attitude to the female sex in general.

As regards the city theme, the practice of expansive comparisons between Nouveau and his contemporary poets has tended to divert attention away from such particular motifs as that of Paris, as well as to present a biased picture of the poet himself. One of the most exhaustive works on Nouveau in recent years is F.R. Smith's The Life and Works of Germain Nouveau<sup>14</sup> and as a semi-biographical study it is liberally seasoned with lengthy references to Nouveau's literary companions and acquaintances. The section entitled 'The Important Years', for example, contains primarily chapters on Nouveau's friendships with Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine and his poetic debts to the latter two. Dr Smith's persistent reference to literary osmosis and constant cross-reference (most often to Nouveau's detriment), though admittedly necessary to a study of Nouveau's life and works, is nevertheless directly responsible for the prejudicial assessment of Nouveau as a 'minor poet' expressed in the final chapter of his thesis:

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<sup>10</sup> See Nouveau, O.C., p.380.

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Saillet, 'Sur Germain Nouveau', Les Lettres nouvelles 8 (1953) 1025-27 (p.1027).

<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Sozzi, Germain Nouveau (Urbino, Argalla, 1969), p.54.

<sup>13</sup> Guido Saba, 'La Poesia di Germain Nouveau' in Déjeuners de lune (Bologna, Cappelli, 1961), p.243.

<sup>14</sup> F.R. Smith, 'The Life and Works of Germain Nouveau', (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1965).



Nouveau's work could all be classed under  
heads which emphasise his unoriginality:  
poems produced as a friend of Rimbaud,  
poems produced as a friend of Verlaine,  
poems produced as a friend of his less  
distinguished contemporaries: Richépin,  
Cros, Ponchon, Nina de Villard.<sup>15</sup>

As Nouveau's individuality is finally sacrificed in this damning statement so the Parisian element in his writing is discounted by Dr Smith's dismal list of twenty-one poems chosen as being least likely to offend the uninformed reader. Though the validity of such a list is in itself questionable, more significant is the fact that those poems mentioned as Nouveau's more successful compositions include only one of his serious city pieces i.e. 'Mendiants'. This omission is due to a double error on Dr Smith's part. Firstly, he shows an evident preference for works influenced by Verlaine. Secondly, he reveals an over reliance on poetry in verse. This latter point is especially important in view of the considerably higher proportion of Nouveau's city pieces belonging to the realm of prose: the Notes parisiennes and Petits tableaux parisiens for example.

More important than the general argument as to whether Nouveau is best studied in depth individually or merely as a star in some famous poetic constellation however, is the real personality at the centre of this controversy. Nouveau was a fascinating and puzzling individual responsible in part for the multitude of contradictory legends surrounding him, an enigmatic character difficult to categorise under traditional headings. In the words of a contemporary witness he possessed a basically unpredictable personality, a 'humeur indéfinissable passant en un clin d'oeil de la brume au soleil et du beau temps au verglas',<sup>16</sup> and this elusive nature has been a constant subject of interest in critical circles. For A. Meterie, Nouveau is a 'poète mystérieux',<sup>17</sup> for Raymond Dumay a 'poète caché',<sup>18</sup> for

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<sup>15</sup>Smith, p.339.

<sup>16</sup>From a letter of Ernest Delahaye to Paul Verlaine in December 1881. Quoted by J. M. Carré in Autour de Verlaine et de Rimbaud (Paris, Université de Paris, Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, 1949), p.20.

<sup>17</sup>A. Meterie, 'Un poète mystérieux: Au Tombeau de Germain Nouveau', Revue hebdomadaire 15 August 1925, pp.295-310.

<sup>18</sup>Raymond Dumay, 'Germain Nouveau poète caché dans le soleil', La Gazette des lettres 7<sup>e</sup> année No 14 (15 November 1954), pp.67-70.

Paul-Albert Glastre 'un poète méconnu'.<sup>19</sup> His changeability is expressed by Howard Sutton in an article outlining contrasting stages in Nouveau's career, those of 'poet, vagabond and saint'.<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, as in the studies of J.H. Bornecque, A. Messaien, and G.E. Clancier, the poet's ambivalence is demonstrated by a study of contradictory notions discernible in the poet's life and works: damnation and salvation, servility and greatness, innocence and experience.<sup>21</sup> Most significant for our study however is the connection between Nouveau's changeable personality and instability and the parallel changing city personalities and environments with which he came into contact in his everyday life and travels. The possibility that his own erratic personality made him more receptive to the infinite variety and contrasts of Parisian life must not be overlooked. The complexity of Nouveau's reactions to urban life and its characters in poetry will emerge naturally from investigation.

Unlike Coppée, the 'parisien pur sang',<sup>22</sup> or even Cros and Verlaine who moved to the capital in early life, Nouveau's childhood and late adolescence was dictated by family and personal circumstances. Born in Pourrières (Var) in 1851 Nouveau moved almost immediately to Paris where his father established a small business for the manufacture of nougat. From the evidence of brief but nostalgic reminiscences in the poetry, these earliest years spent in the city in the security of a caring family ranked among the happiest of Nouveau's life. Speaking of the Avenue de l'Observatoire in 1882, by then merely a pale reflection of what it had been in the 'époque glorieuse', Nouveau is tempted to recapture the area as he knew it as a child:

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<sup>19</sup> Paul-Albert Glastre, 'Découverte d'un poète méconnu: Germain Nouveau', Les Nouvelles littéraires, 31 December 1970, pp.6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Sutton, 'Germain Nouveau: Poet, Vagabond and Saint', French Review, Vol XXXIII, No 4, (February 1960), pp.325-333.

<sup>21</sup> See J.H. Bornecque, 'Un poète maudit sauvé, Germain Nouveau', Le Monde, 28-29 October 1951, p.5.

A. Messaien, 'Servitude et Grandeur de Germain Nouveau', Le Goëland, (April-June 1955).

Clancier, op.cit.

<sup>22</sup> Souvenirs d'un Parisien, p.258.

Autrefois dans mon enfance, c'était  
un luxe inouï de phénomènes,  
d'acrobates, de bateleurs, de  
charlatans, de montreurs de rats, de  
montreurs de riens.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly in 'Notes d'un réserviste' (a prose tale in diary form published in 1878) he speaks with regret of the Place des Vosges, which he presumably associated with happy memories of childhood, as a 'pur bijou resté intact, heureusement oublié au coeur du Paris moderne'.<sup>24</sup> Though evocative, as in these two examples, nostalgic comment on the city of his youth is comparatively rare in Nouveau (as opposed to Coppée for example). Temperamental differences aside, in a practical sense Nouveau had only a few vaguely remembered scenes and incidents to refer to while the latter poet, because of his uniquely Parisian upbringing, had a whole childhood of experience.

The second stage of Nouveau's youth was spent away from Paris in the South of France at Aix where his family re-established itself in 1859. The poet was not to return to Paris <sup>to live there</sup> for twelve years, then alone and in dramatically different personal circumstances. The period extending from 1859 to 1872 was a chaotic experience for Nouveau. It began with his mother's death from consumption followed by his father's remarriage and subsequent death with the poet's seven-year-old sister in the smallpox epidemic of 1864. In this emotional trauma the city of early childhood was forgotten and the comforting permanence of the natural world in the form of Pourrières asserted itself in the poet's imagination. The influential nature of the countryside at this stage should not be underestimated as it clearly answered the poet's profound need for security in a personal crisis. The emotional and sentimental links established between Nouveau and the rural world at this stage ensured that he never completely broke the ties with this environment, seeking its refuge in times of depression and uncertainty throughout his life. It also meant that the opposition between city and country or provincial and their respective values formed a significant and regular feature of his poetry. Although he associated the capital with happy memories of early childhood, the countryside and provinces, having provided a welcome solace after the double bereavement, were therefore also guaranteed a special place

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<sup>23</sup> From 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' (Petits tableaux parisiens) Nouveau, O.C., p.459.

<sup>24</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.448.

in Nouveau's heart and imagination. Finally, the third phase of Nouveau's early life (beginning with his crucial and solitary move back to Paris in 1872) re-focused his attention on the city. Coinciding as it did with the blossoming of his own literary talent this ensured that Nouveau's interest in his urban environment was extended to its poetic potential. It paved the way for the city theme gaining comparative prominence in his works in later years.

In less than a generation during 1853-70 as a result of Haussmann's redevelopment of the capital, in an architectural and geographical sense the visual aspect of Paris was drastically changed. It was thus less as a prodigal son than in the guise of a provincial intruder that Nouveau returned to the altered setting of his early childhood in 1872. An ironic reflection on his situation in the summer of that year is offered in the Dixain réaliste beginning 'Cheminant Rue aux Ours' where Nouveau paints a colourful and comic picture of an awkward 'jeune homme arrivant de province' complete with flower-embroidered waistcoat, well-darned cotton socks and dialect words fresh on his lips.<sup>25</sup> A more serious poeticisation of the feelings of isolation and loneliness no doubt occasioned by such a change in lifestyle is provided by 'Le Manoeuvrier' of 1878, one of Nouveau's rare pieces of social criticism.<sup>26</sup> Though concerned with the plight of a provincial labourer come to Paris to seek his fortune, obvious sympathy with the young created character, bewildered in his first contact with the metropolis, ('Le kaléidoscope parisien [qui] tourne comme dans une ivresse') suggests that Nouveau was drawing in part on his own memories for this composition. The spectacle greeting the eyes of the 'manoeuvrier' waking on one of his first mornings in Paris is certainly one which must have welcomed many young men seeking employment in the capital or with literary pretensions as they looked out onto the city from their inexpensive attic accommodation,

il ouvre la lucarne: les toits de Paris,  
une mer; les cheminées, des mâts, les  
églises, les cloches, les oiseaux, l'horizon  
de vapeur.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.421. See also Appendix I.

<sup>26</sup> Nouveau, O.C., pp.444-7.

<sup>27</sup> This aerial picture of Paris presented in 'Le Manoeuvrier' bears a distinct similarity to the opening lines of Baudelaire's 'Paysage' from the 'Tableaux parisiens' section of Les Fleurs du Mal where this poet observes the city from the vantage point of his own attic window:

The potential for success suggested by the multiple upward pointing aspects of the panorama forms a contrast with the confusion and apprehension experienced by the character and serves only to accentuate further his feelings of loneliness.

In contrast to the city's propensity as a vast and changed environment for creating feelings of insecurity as shown in this poem, was Paris' equal capacity as a rich, artistic milieu for the nurturing of a young poet's embryonic talent. This talent in Nouveau's case awaited only the encouragement of fellow aspirants to manifest itself. Encouragement came for Nouveau in the first instance from Jean Richepin, an ebullient and well-known figure of the Parisian bohemia, who quickly introduced the provincial intruder into a wide circle of prominent and rising literary and artistic figures: Mendès, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Forain the painter, Charles Cros and his brother Antoine included. Though Nouveau's initial launching onto the Parisian literary scene was effected with startling rapidity through the publication of 'Sonnet d'été' in La Renaissance littéraire et artistique of 30 November 1872 shortly after the poet's arrival in the city, this début was only a partial success.<sup>28</sup> As Jean Richepin reports (revealing a first manifestation of the lack of self-confidence which was to beset Nouveau throughout his life), the poet failed to exploit the connotations of his own name (fast becoming the envy of fellow poets because of its connotations of novelty and germination) and signed his sonnet with a pseudonym:

Donc Nouveau, au lieu de signer ses vers  
de son nom si coquet, si pimpant, qui  
était déjà, à lui seul, comme une promesse  
de célébrité et de gloire, n'avait-il pas  
imaginé de prendre un pseudonyme! Et

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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.

<sup>28</sup>'Sonnet d'été' is not a city poem but is rather reminiscent in its vocabulary ('boudoir', 'mandoline', 'une blonde frêle' and so on) of the early love poems of Intimités.

quel! P. Néouvielle! C'était à le battre à  
coups de poing ou à coups de canne.  
J'étais furieux, il y avait matière. Et je  
lui fis comprendre à quoi il s'exposait  
s'il ne se nommait pas par son nom,  
qui était à faire envie.<sup>29</sup>

By early 1873 Nouveau's initial feelings of inadequacy in relation to Parisian life appear to have somewhat abated as the poet, in the wake of his contemporaries, began to exploit the inspirational potential of the urban world around him. Apart from 'Un Peu de musique',<sup>30</sup> which like 'Sonnet d'été' makes extensive use of derivative vocabulary (mostly words characteristic of Fêtes galantes and reminiscent of 'C'est l'extase langoureuse'),<sup>31</sup> all Nouveau's verse compositions published in the first six months of that year were connected to a greater or lesser degree with the city theme. 'Fin d'Automne' (L'Artiste, 1 May 1873) combines a geographical setting of the Jardin du Luxembourg with a temporal setting of

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<sup>29</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.1171. Despite the forceful advice of his friend, Nouveau never abandoned the use of pseudonyms and never felt confident enough to stand as the clear author of all his works, a fact surely indicative of a certain temperament which gains a sense of security from hiding behind an assumed name, character or ideology. In the field of poetry Nouveau's pseudonyms were particularly frequent ranging from the incongruous Duc de la Mésopotamie to Humilis, the attributed author of La Doctrine de l'amour Nouveau's volume of religious verse. A study of Nouveau's recorded correspondence also reveals an astonishing collection of false names used in his daily life including the Comte de N., Imbert Dupuis, Bernard Marie and most frequently after 1904, La Guerrière. This final pseudonym (being the female equivalent of his grandfather's nickname 'le guerrier') like Néouvielle, significantly shows Nouveau assuming what are in fact feminised pseudonyms.

<sup>30</sup> 'Un Peu de musique' was first published in La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 24 May 1873.

<sup>31</sup> Although belonging to Romances sans paroles 'C'est l'extase langoureuse' was first published in La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 18 May 1872.

autumnal twilight ('Le jour qui meurt à l'horizon/Semble un dernier adieu de la douce saison') to produce a poem very Coppesque in tone.<sup>32</sup> Also the first of the significantly entitled 'Fantaisies parisiennes' (though not concentrating on contemporary décor as the poem's original title was 'Style Louis XV') seems in its references to Boucher and Watteau to have been possibly suggested by a visit to the Louvre.<sup>33</sup> The remaining two poems, II of 'Fantaisies parisiennes', beginning 'Hier, par une après-midi' and 'Retour', though still revealing traces of Baudelaire and Coppée, mark Nouveau's first determined steps as a city poet.

'Hier, par une après-midi', first published in L'Artiste, 1 May 1973, is especially significant in treating as it does themes ' [qui] ne pourraient absolument naître, ni être sentis, dans une vie de village ou de petite ville'.<sup>34</sup> (It is also the first manifestation in Nouveau's poetry of the obsession with La Parisienne, later to inspire his Notes parisiennes). The poem, like Baudelaire's 'A une Passante', considers the problem of hopeless and transient love, that of a man for a mysterious woman glimpsed momentarily in the city landscape. The urban relevance of this poem is clear for whereas in a rural environment of close communities it is difficult for a sense of mystery to surround any particular individual, in the city, 'où les hommes vivent ensemble, l'un près de l'autre étrangers, et l'un près de l'autre voyageurs',<sup>35</sup> brief communion between two unknown individuals is a feasible possibility. As the concrete organization of the city can play a role in the formation of relationships (one could quote Frederic Moreau's stumbling on a plaque bearing the name of Arnoux in Flaubert's Education Sentimentale) so it can contribute to the breaking up of such short-lived acquaintances through offering an ample source of hiding places for the pursued 'fugitive beauté',<sup>36</sup> or 'Idéal qui passe',<sup>37</sup> in its crowds and buildings. Firstly, the backdrop of the 'froide capitale' is sketched in Nouveau's poem through the eyes of the 'flâneur naïf et savant' using carefully chosen physical details: 'la rue', 'l'asphalte', 'un trottoir', 'la foule', 'l'éblouissant magasin'. The real centre of his attention however is the typically graceful yet coquettish female inhabitant of the city: La Parisienne.

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<sup>32</sup> See Nouveau, O.C., p.363.

<sup>33</sup> See Nouveau, O.C., pp.359-360.

<sup>34</sup> A. Thibaudet, Intérieurs (Paris, Plon, 1924), p.22. (This is a reference to Baudelaire's 'A une Passante').

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> 'A une Passante' in Baudelaire, O.C., Vol I, p.92.

<sup>37</sup> 'Hier, par une après-midi', line 37.

Comme j'errais, le nez au vent,  
Dans la rue au tableau mouvant,  
En flâneur naïf et savant,

Je vis sur l'asphalte élastique  
D'un trottoir aristocratique  
Une vivante et fantastique

Parisienne au pas léger,  
Type dont rêve l'étranger!<sup>38</sup>

Where Baudelaire is attached to the noble and tragic figure of the 'passante', perceiving an affinity between his own state and her 'douleur majestueuse', 'O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais' ('A une Passante', line 14), Nouveau is simply fascinated by the lively Parisienne. He evokes her as effectively through the sinuosity of his verse as in actual details of dress and physique. Nevertheless he visualises no shared relationship possible between himself and such a clearly unattainable figure. As well as suggesting the visual richness of the city scene, the cinematic image in line 8 of the 'rue au tableau mouvant', also assists in conveying the poet's passivity at this stage. City life and its characters pass before the observing poet in pictorial form as if on a screen, suddenly coming into focus and gradually moving out of his range.<sup>39</sup> Though only glimpsed momentarily, Nouveau's enchantress nevertheless lacks none of the qualities traditionally associated with Parisian women. The possessor of much natural beauty and grace, ('Mise, par ma foi! comme en mise/De bal, aussi bien qu'en chemise,/Elle seule sait être mise', lines 22-4) she is also

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<sup>38</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.360.

<sup>39</sup> Nouveau's image also possibly owes something to the mid nineteenth-century fashion for 'panoramas' as popular forms of entertainment. Invented in the late years of the eighteenth century by the Scottish artist Robert Barker, these visual shows were at the outset painted on the inside of a circular drum where the spectator stood and turned to view in all directions as if observing a real landscape. More sophisticated models in vogue in Paris in the 1870's were real 'tableaux mouvants' unrolled with complementary sound effects before a seated audience. Significantly most popular were those panoramas featuring battle and city scenes.



supremely self-confident and anxious to reveal this fact to society. Aware of her fatal attraction for the whole of mankind, Nouveau included, ('on devient ivre/La voyant se mouvoir et vivre', lines 17, 18), her display reaches into the bounds of the theatrical for the benefit of her fascinated audience:

Dans la foule, au milieu du bruit,  
Sous la voilette où son oeil luit,  
Discernant très bien qui la suit,

Et sachant que d'elle on s'occupe,  
Feignant de soulever sa jupe,  
Un jeu dont on est toujours dupe;

Just as swiftly her self-confidence extends to narcissism, as Nouveau reveals in his reflections on the possible motives and destination 'Plaisir ou Devoir?' of his 'vivante et fantastique/Parisienne'. Perhaps she is engaged in a humanitarian mission taking bread to the poor of Paris, or is she simply enjoying the spring sunshine? Perhaps she is en route for an amorous adventure or merely preparing to satisfy her coquetterie by a shopping spree,

Dans l'éblouissant magasin  
Où l'étoffe au riche dessin

Dans mille glaces se reflète,  
Irait-elle, pour sa toilette,  
Faire quelque importante emplette;

The value of this 'éblouissant magasin' lined with mirrors in satisfying the Parisienne's vanity and self-esteem is evident.

By this point in the poem, (line 48) through his speculations, Nouveau has raised the object of his attention through his imagination far beyond the sphere of the immediate city surroundings; she is an 'Idéal qui passe, rêvé/Longtemps' (lines 37-8) and so when she finally vanishes into a side street or group of onlookers he believes some magical subterfuge to have taken place. 'Tout à coup, je ne sais comment [...] Je perdis tout à fait sa trace' (lines 68 and 72). This sudden disappearance, though in the mould of Baudelaire's 'Un éclair ... puis la nuit!' of 'A une Passante', also draws for its supernatural dimension of the Parisienne as a 'fée au pas plein de grace' (line 71), on the myth of the 'Willis parisienne' perpetuated by Charles Cros in Le Coffret de santalof 1873.<sup>40</sup> Derivative details

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<sup>40</sup> 'Madrigal. Sur un carnet d'ivoire', Cros, O.C., p.88.

aside, in this poem there are also salient indications of the direction which Nouveau's poetry will take independently in the future. Firstly, 'Hier, par une après-midi' reveals an interest in city people, especially city women, and their relationships with the poet. Secondly, Nouveau's self-effacement in the poem points to a timid, retiring attitude to the female sex substantiated elsewhere in his early city works.<sup>41</sup> Finally, an awareness of the city as a visual and theatrical milieu with a potential for offering widely varied tableaux and performances to the spectating poet in the future is evident. This aspect will be taken up later by Nouveau especially in connection with his Petits tableaux parisiens of 1882.

Nouveau's second important city work of early 1873, 'Retour', is a heptasyllabic sonnet. As such it presents a startling contrast in terms of form to 'Hier, par une après-midi' with its 26, octosyllabic, three-lined stanzas. 'Retour' was also privileged in being the first city composition to be published under Nouveau's real name.<sup>42</sup> The poem takes the familiar form of a poet's search for inspiration which in itself constitutes the subject of his poem.

Nous avons fait une lieue  
L'oeil en quête d'un sonnet;  
Où le hasard nous menait  
Nous errions dans la banlieue.

La matinée était bleue,  
Et sur nos têtes sonnait  
La rime, oiseau qu'on prenait  
D'un grain de sel sur la queue.

Tout à coup, le ciel changea:  
Il plut. Retournons - déjà -  
Et nous aperçûmes, l'âme

Attristée, au loin, Paris,  
Et, grises sur le ciel gris,  
Les deux tours de Notre-Dame!<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See comments on 'Mendiants' and Notes parisiennes p.183 et seq. of the present study.

<sup>42</sup> The poem was published in La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 15 June 1873, the same edition which included a review of Cros' Le Coffret de santal.

<sup>43</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.364.

Nouveau's search for the elements of poetry as if they were concrete phenomena (a sonnet a rare plant growing hidden on the outskirts of the city, rhyme in stanza II, a 'oiseau qu'on prenait/D'un grain de sel sur la queue') invites comparison with Baudelaire who in 'Le Soleil' (Les Fleurs du Mal) describes a similar personal encounter with poetry in its physical form in the city:

Le long du vieux faubourg, où pendent aux mesures  
Les persiennes, abri des secrètes luxures,  
Quand le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés  
Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés,  
Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,  
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,  
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,  
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas Baudelaire's journey 'le long du faubourg' in 'Le Soleil' results in a solitary meeting with poetry, Nouveau's wanderings in 'la banlieue' are more of a quest undertaken with a second person. The poet speaks of 'nous' to reveal the presence of a like-minded literary friend or possibly an accompanying poetic muse. As in 'Hier, par une après-midi', the notion of flânerie is significant in 'Retour'. It is important in sustaining the relaxed yet observant state of mind of the poet and his companion in the poem's first two stanzas. After line 8 however, the tone changes dramatically from carefree optimism to depression. In a physical sense the sky darkens and rain begins, bringing the poet's explorations to a premature end, 'Tout à coup, le ciel changea:/Il plut. Retournons - déjà -'. In the same instant the poet's feet are inevitably re-directed towards Paris and his imagination, liberated by escape from the city, refocused on the metropolis, 'Et nous perçûmes, l'âme/Attristée, au loin, Paris'. Hence return or 'retour' is not a joyful experience but rather a reluctant action forced on the poet by the beckoning drabness and regularity of the city in the form of the silhouetted twin towers of Notre-Dame, 'grises sur le ciel gris'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.83.

<sup>45</sup>A similar movement to the banlieue and back towards the city is evident in Intimités IX, beginning 'A Paris en été, les soirs sont étouffants'. (Coppée, Poésies 1864-67, pp. 109-110).

Published slightly later than the 'Fantaisies parisiennes', 'Retour' is more pessimistic in its attitude to the city and clearly reveals Nouveau's view of his surroundings after a year living in the capital. His partial sense of disenchantment with his new environment (conveyed in the sonnet's final six lines) is reaffirmed in a letter written at about the same time to Léon Valade from Marlotte, a rural community in the environs of Fontainebleau. Despite those intentionally parodic elements in Nouveau's letter to his friend: the trite reference to the 'air pur des champs', the deliberate mis-spelling of 'campagne' as 'campeigne' for rustic effect, sincere relief at brief escape from the pressures of city life is discernible at this stage in his life:

Me v'là à Marlotte; c'est drôle, Marlotte. Ça  
me botte assez: on man-ange, on dort, on  
se promène, on fume, on s'abêtit, tout  
doucement, lentement, sans s'en apercevoir;  
on oublie tout - et tout le monde, - le  
monde des indifférents, bien entendu. - Bref;  
la brute se retrempe là délicieusement; à  
la campeigne!<sup>46</sup>

Conversely, the description of the rural environment as the place where on 's'abêtit [...] sans s'en apercevoir' or where 'la brute se retrempe', suggests that though country life may contrast favourably for a time with the constraints of Parisian society, through being essentially tied to man's sensual and animalistic desires it can only ultimately bring sterility in intellectual terms.<sup>47</sup> Though Nouveau's personal literary ability seems as yet unimpaired ('je fais des vers', he says), separation from his fellow poets and the artistic milieu of the capital is already being sensed as a distinct deprivation:

Je n'ai aucune nouvelle de Paris; nous  
ne lisons absolument aucune feuille  
[...] - que se passe-t-il?  
Ah! si vous avez un numéro de trop  
de La Renaissance, où il y ait de jolies  
choses, - de vous surtout, - je vous serais  
très reconnaissant de me l'envoyer.

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<sup>46</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.816.

<sup>47</sup> This is the same feeling expressed by Coppée in his letter of 1862 from St Gratien and by Verlaine in his letter of 16 September 1862 from Lecluse.

Underlining his early childhood experiences, this impossibility of reaching a permanent human compromise between the calm and tranquility of the countryside and vitality of the city necessary to him as a poet partly accounts for the puzzling alternation between city and country marking his adult life. Though in Marlotte in mid-1873 Nouveau returned to Paris for the autumn and winter of that year and early months of 1874. From March to June 1874 followed a period in London with Rimbaud then an abrupt return alone to Paris. A second period in London in April and May 1875 culminated in a flight back to Pourrières, necessary on account of financial difficulties but also in order to discuss his recent religious conversion with his closest family. Returning to Paris in the autumn of 1875, he tolerated city life for almost a year, seeking the repose of Provence again in August 1876. This period of recuperation in 1876 lasted several months, as Nouveau and his family celebrated his sister's engagement and wedding, prior to his return to the capital at Easter 1877. The final stage of Nouveau's active literary life in Paris (after 1877) was similarly fractured by retreats into the country, notably periods of spiritual repose with Verlaine in Arras in September 1877 and in Juniville in 1880.

Such vacillating movements perpetuating the spiritual and sentimental links with the rural and provincial environments of Nouveau's youth and at the same time highlighting the real advantages of urban life, caused him to postpone final commitment to city or country and therefore ensured that his poetry was punctuated with works contrasting or portraying their two, very different ways of life. These poems are not merely in deference to the Rousseauesque notion of corrupt and corrupting civilization but were felt on a personal level by a poet with intimate knowledge of both areas. Probably the clearest example of a composition where the two areas are contrasted is the 'Dizain (sérieux celui-là! pour faire oublier affreuses plaisanteries REALISTES)' (1876) which was later interpolated with occasional alterations into a lengthy poem of 1876 'La Maison'.

La Province! Eh bien oui, poète, qu'en dis-tu?  
T'y voilà. Ton Paris, était-ce rebattu,  
Avoue? Etait-ce vieux, hein? Et s'il faut tout dire,  
Tu riais d'y pleurer, et tu souffrais d'y rire!  
Comme tu vas dormir! comme tu vas veiller,  
Sagement! Et qui sait? peut-être aussi prier  
Car la province, au fond, est conseillère et sainte,  
Car elle garde, aux champs où ton enfance est peinte,

La tombe de ta mère et la voix de ta soeur!

Pour rallumer un peu ton coeur. Ton coeur, ton coeur!<sup>48</sup>

This dizain bears the mark of a split personality with Nouveau evident as a creator of the poem existing in the real world as well as a questioning individual alive only within the lines of verse. This curious feeling of dédoublement intensifies as the two figures, one actual and one invented confront each other in the context of the poem. Nouveau character speaks to Nouveau creator challenging him as to the value of his recent urban way of life compared to the serenity of life in the provinces and countryside: 'La Province [...] /T'y voilà. Ton Paris, était-ce rebattu,/Avoue? Etait-ce vieux, hein?' As opposed to Paris which stands for darkness and confusion in 'La Maison', ('ombre épaisse' in contrast to the 'clair paysage'<sup>49</sup> of the provinces) and for conflicting emotions in the dizain (conveyed in the chiasmus of its fourth alexandrine: 'Tu riais d'y pleurer, et tu souffrais d'y rire'), the province offers a sense of consolation and comfort. Being 'conseillère' and 'sainte' this consolation is offered in a personal and a religious sense. The province likewise promises the character a fitting environment where he belongs as his birthright on account of family ties and memories, 'Car elle garde, aux champs où ton enfance est peinte, / La tombe de ta mère et la voix de ta soeur'.

This tempting, if regressive appeal of a return to the naivety of childhood (in a sense a return to the womb as 'La province' as a feminine noun is opposed to the masculine 'Paris'), is re-employed in the sonnet 'Pourrières' which presents a picture, both visually and emotionally of Nouveau's native village. Although not mixing the themes of Paris and the province this poem, where the rural world is idolised to a certain extent, implies a critical attitude towards the city as representative of the opposite values:

Un vieux clocher coiffé de fer sur la colline.  
Des fenêtres sans cris, sous des toits sans oiseaux.  
D'un barbaresque azur la paix du Ciel s'incline.  
Soleil dur! Mort de l'ombre! Et Silence des Eaux.

Marius! son fantôme à travers les roseaux,  
Par la plaine! Un son lent de l'Horloge féline.  
Quatre enfants sur la place où l'ormeau perd ses os,  
Autour d'un Pauvre, étrange, avec sa mandoline.

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<sup>48</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.391.

<sup>49</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.393.

Un banc de fer chaud comme un pain dans le four,  
Où trois Vieux, dans ce coin de la Gloire du Jour,  
Sentent au rayon vif cuire leur vieillesse.

Babet revient du bois, tenant sa mule en laisse.  
Noir, le Vicaire au loin voit, d'une ombre au ton bleu,  
Le Village au soleil fumer vers le Bon Dieu.<sup>50</sup>

As though seen through the mists of time details of the real landscape in 'Pourrières' are conveyed through ingenious metaphors. The church tower is 'coiffé de fer', an elm shedding its leaves 'perd ses os' while a park bench is 'chaud comme un pain dans le four' in the midday sun. These images are effective in conveying the poet's desire for a return to the innocence of earlier years and to a naive world peopled by old men, peasants and children.

These latter works, 'La Maison', 'Dizain' and 'Pourrières' where the countryside or province is eulogised to the detriment of the city are clearly tied to specific periods or events in Nouveau's life which took his attention, personal and poetic, away from the capital. The 'Dizain' was enclosed in a letter sent to Jean Richepin from Dijon on August 1876 and 'La Maison' dates from Nouveau's sister's marriage in October 1876. 'Pourrières' was also probably composed during Nouveau's protracted stay in the South of France from late August 1876 to Easter 1877. In a converse manner, happy and exciting months spent in the stimulating environment of the city in 1874 and in the early 1880s also cast their aura over the poet's imagination and produced works where the urban scene and its characters play a central and attractive role. These works notably the Notes parisiennes and the Petits tableaux parisiens<sup>51</sup> as their titles suggest, concentrated on Paris rather than any other city.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nouveau, O.C., pp.396-7.

<sup>51</sup> Nouveau mentions a third urban collection 'Les Villes' in a letter to Jean Richepin from London on 17 April 1875. This group of poems, if ever completed, appears to have disappeared without trace.

<sup>52</sup> Despite two periods spent in London, from March to June 1874 and between April and early June of the following year Nouveau, unlike Rimbaud and Verlaine, seems to have been unmoved to convey his impressions of the English city in poetic form. His known comments are restricted to the field of correspondence; in March 1874 he complains to Jean Richepin: Londres, à l'arrivée, m'a produit une impression d'étouffement physique et moral: lumières d'éclipse,

Nouveau's first major city collection, the Notes parisiennes written around 1874-5, was roughly contemporary with Nouveau's first series of regular visits to the salon of Nina de Villard at 82 Rue des Moines. His composition 'A Mme Nina de Villard' also belongs to this period and has a certain similarity with the Notes parisiennes in terms of reliance on an enchanting female figure for inspiration. In this adulatory poem Nina, poetess and generous patron of the arts, is captured presiding over one of her literary soirées. Her voice, characterised by a prophetic 'parfum rêveur de Décadence', easily penetrates the epicurean atmosphere of her gathering to reach her fascinated listeners:

Le Souper se colore à la flamme qui danse  
D'un punch que vous avez reconnu pour le sien;  
Je trouve humble, et muet comme un musicien,  
A ses mots, un parfum rêveur de Décadence.<sup>53</sup>

Intrinsic to Nina's powerful presence and responsible for the poet's abashed silence before her, (he is 'humble, et muet comme un musicien') is the aura of parisianisme radiating out from her enigmatically posed, reclining figure,

Dans sa chaise, avec maint détail parisien,  
Elle a l'air, en-allée en toute l'indolence  
(L'heure est parisienne aussi par excellence)  
D'écouter son petit doigt, ce physicien.

Whether Nina herself was the inspiration for the Notes parisiennes as well as this poem is unsure, yet undeniable affinities do exist between her and the various female characters portrayed in the collection not least in respect of this central notion of parisianisme, a quality accessible both to city and country inhabitants (as Arsène Houssaye explains in an article

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odeur de musc et de charbon dans les rues, têtes  
d'Anglais sans expression, un grand mouvement sans  
bruit de voix. Charmants, les cabs!

Yet in July of the following year he writes cheerfully and with evident enthusiasm to the same recipient (himself then in England) with a catalogue of personal experiences and advice on London life (see Nouveau, O.C., pp.825-8).

<sup>53</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.386.



of 1869)<sup>54</sup> yet intensified by existence in the capital. It is those women who by an apprenticeship in Paris ('Le pays des métamorphoses et des transfigurations')<sup>55</sup> have cultivated the art of parisianisme to its highest degree that Nouveau evokes in his Notes parisiennes.

In this latter collection Nouveau refrains from tying his Parisiennes down to any one particular individual or individuals and thus heightens the aura of mystery surrounding these figures. The first is 'l'inconnue' or simply 'Madame',<sup>56</sup> the second is referred to as 'Niniche',<sup>57</sup> a pet-name covering her real identity. The third is an anonymous 'princesse',<sup>58</sup> while the fourth, somewhat of an exception, is the 'ex-connaissance d'un maçon de Montrouge'.<sup>59</sup> Indelibly printed on the reader's imagination however are the unique frivolities and extravagances characterising each of the women. The Parisienne of Notes parisiennes I for example, adores shopping; 'Au "grand Louvre" elle règne, au "Printemps"'. She is also irresponsible with money, 'elle dépense en cravates les appointements d'un chef aux Finances' and assiduously follows fashion, now with an exotic 'coiffure [...] javanaise', now modelling the creation of a 'coiffeur de Ninive'. The subject of Notes parisiennes II, satisfies her vanity in turn by ensnaring men and living in the sensuous and opulent luxury necessitated by her dubious profession and no doubt provided at the expense of her benevolent patrons and clientèle:

Elle "s'est mise à elle". Ses appartements  
sont bien un drôle de ciel. Le plafond  
s'effondre en fleurs idéales; de sombres  
paysages, qui s'épanouissent sur les  
écrans. Sur la mousse d'or du tapis,  
"le chien de Pericles" a laissé des  
poils longs comme les cils de la gazelle.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Arsène Houssaye, 'Quelques opinions avancées sur La Parisienne', L'Artiste 3 (August 1869), pp.147-164.

<sup>55</sup> Houssaye, Art.cit., p.147.

<sup>56</sup> Notes parisiennes I, Nouveau, O.C., p.441.

<sup>57</sup> Notes parisiennes II, Nouveau, O.C., p.441.

<sup>58</sup> Notes parisiennes III, Nouveau, O.C., p.442.

<sup>59</sup> Notes parisiennes IV, Nouveau, O.C., p.443.

<sup>60</sup> These lines from Notes parisiennes II are re-employed in the ambiguous 1879 poem 'Cadenette'.

The Parisienne of Notes parisiennes III is a truly cosmopolitan figure, 'Elle est née au bord du Volga, à moins que la Suède ne la revendique, ou que la Grèce ne la réclame'. She enjoys a full existence of cultural and erotic stimulation through theatre visits, excursions, literature, love affairs, perfume and wines. The Parisienne's natural reluctance to lead a quiet or cloistered existence, being 'toute au spectacle des choses et des hommes',<sup>61</sup> is also adequately represented in the figures of Nouveau's imaginative women. They are introduced in the open air: in I 'Madame est sortie', in II 'Niniche' is 'aux boulevards', in III 'La princesse gagne le Bois'. Thus they are all preparing to act out their 'comédie de l'amour' in the man-made amphitheatre afforded by the streets and avenues of the capital.

The Parisienne's self-display is also inextricably linked to her status as an object of love, admiration and desire for the male population of the city, a fact that Nouveau, as one of Paris' male inhabitants, does not fail to emphasize in the Notes parisiennes. In Notes parisiennes I the world observes 'quand elle fait trois pas en levant un peu la sous-jupe', in II, East and West follow in servile devotion to 's'embarrasser les pieds dans ses traînées'. In line with their inaccessibility to the common man the Parisiennes in the first three pieces of the collection are portrayed as exaggeratedly beautiful and regal characters: 'Les reines des autres pays seraient ses bonnes' (I), 'Le souvenir de sa cigarette fume dans les cours étrangers' (II) and in III the heroine is 'la princesse' or a 'reine des contes bleus'. As in the case of the heroine of 'Hier, par une après-midi' the flattery of audience attention swiftly leads to narcissism in two of the notes. In II the tendency is visible in the concentrated meditation of 'Niniche' who assumes the pose and attitude of the Delphic oracle when alone in her room: 'Sa pensée habite un Mabile de rêve. Accroupie, le regard perdu, son immobilité évoque un trépied, à Cyrrha'. In I, in a repetition of the mirror motif of the poem from 'Fantaisies parisiennes', a penchant for self-admiration is also revealed; 'La petite Madame, elle va ce soir, l'oeuvre d'un coiffeur de Ninive, multiplier son profil dans les glaces "au bal des Victimes"'. Also in line with the reflections of 'Fantaisies parisiennes' I, the Parisienne's supreme self-confidence (hence her effortless superiority over her fellow

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<sup>61</sup>Houssaye, Art.cit., p.148.

men and, by implication, over Nouveau himself) successfully prevents a shared relationship between herself and the poet. The projected title of Notes parisiennes, 'L'Amour féerique' clearly reveals Nouveau's mind centred on this key concept of inaccessibility. His effective use of the women as Parisian muses in the collection also helps in raising a barrier between himself and them in a sense, as the possibility of contact on a human level with his inspirational source could only involve a defilement of his poetic ideal.

In Notes parisiennes IV, an interesting reversal of the theme of regal inaccessibility occurs with the female figure becoming an ironically mediocre 'grisette' and her suitor an exotic 'monarque roussi'. Despite his superior rank and eloquent and romantic offers of transforming her into a primitive fertility goddess, this enigmatic figure still fails to win over his minor Parisienne:

Toi vouloir, dis, être la femme? moi  
donner palais de roseaux, et payer kaolin et  
utensiles d'arêtes de poisson. Moi porter  
toi sur les épaules et toi croiser les  
pieds dans le dos. Toi caresser moi, du  
bout de l'ongle, entre les deux sourcils.  
Et toi être la Reine à eux. Eux faire  
la prière en regardant le ventre à toi,  
s'élargissant comme la lune en travail à  
la fête d'automne.

"Sire, bas les pattes."

Though evidently comic in its use of pidgin French and the abruptly colloquial final line, Notes parisiennes IV hints through its irony at a real fear of rejection by the female sex experienced by Nouveau and displayed elsewhere in the same collection.

Where the Notes parisiennes expose in their portrayal male figures as inevitably insignificant, self-effacing or ridiculous they display aspects of Nouveau's own personality and reveal his attitude to the worldly women encountered in his Parisian life.<sup>62</sup> Nouveau's timidity is

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<sup>62</sup> Nouveau never married and rarely refers to women in his letters, then only briefly. 'Une certaine Maud qui m'apprend à dire: Love you me' mentioned to Richepin in the letter of 17 April 1875 from London is a case in point. Although it is possible to cast doubts on Nouveau's heterosexuality (his relationship with Rimbaud and penchant for feminised pseudonyms could be quoted), the most probable reason for Nouveau's reticence was his close attachment to his elder sister Laurence. Through

first projected into the figure of 'Jean, sous sa livrée d'Elboeuf' the footman of the third Note parisienne. Without hope, on account of his status as a servant, this character passively accepts the punishment of his idolised mistress as preferable to remaining unnoticed by her. In an ironic comment by the poet this means that the romantic vision of her hands as "frêles comme des fleurs" is consistently contradicted by the harsh reality of her 'coup de poing'.

Les mains "frêles comme des fleurs";  
pourtant de son coup de poing, Jean;  
sous sa livrée d'Elboeuf, garde, autant  
que l'épaule, l'âme meurtrie. Elle  
cravache ses amants.

This timid figure is elaborated in the self-effacing personage of Jacques Coeur in Notes parisiennes I who appears similarly resigned to his fate at the mercy of his Parisienne. Aware he can never be granted her exclusive attention because of his own inadequacy and because of her natural fickleness, he is prepared to recede into the background and allow her to shine independently. After the aptly named 'bal des Victimes' where 'Madame' leaves a disarray of broken hearts, the faceless Jacques Coeur 'à la sortie [...] l'attendra sous le péristyle', his very attitude of concealment being symptomatic of his reticent nature.

A similar tone of ambiguity and indecision in the poet's relationships with women permeates what is probably Nouveau's most successful and memorable contribution to nineteenth-century urban poetry, the 1875 piece 'Mendiants'. Though not actually set in an urban environment, 'Mendiants' is shot through with elements characteristic of Nouveau's Parisian poetry not least its obsession with female figures as displayed in the Notes parisiennes and therefore justifies inclusion in our study. The picture Nouveau gives at the beginning of the poem is that of a pair of figures on the boundary of two environments, beggars, if we take the poem's title literally, whom we apprehend as they prepare to leave the 'mur de mousse grise' which has provided a sense of direction for the latter part of their journey and which might represent a city wall of the outer banlieue:

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directing his filial needs and devotions onto Laurence, Nouveau tended to idolise other women or, as in 'Mon Coeur stupide', see them as mother substitutes.

Pendant qu'hésite encor ton pas sur la prairie,  
Le pays s'est de ciel houleux enveloppé.  
Tu cèdes, l'oeil levé vers la muagerie,  
A ce doux midi blême et plein d'osier coupé.

Nous avons tant suivi le mur de mousse grise  
Qu'à la fin, à nos flancs qu'une douleur emplit,  
Non moins bon que ton sein, tiède comme l'église,  
Ce fossé s'est ouvert aussi sûr que le lit.<sup>63</sup>

The milieu they prepare to encounter is that of the natural world suggestive of richness and fecundity in 'la prairie' yet threatening in its 'ciel houleux'. The female figure's hesitation on the boundary of this new rural environment (line 1) suggests that she is to be associated with the urban principle but also provides an early foreshadowing of her subsequent feigned reluctance in the face of the male protagonist's sexual advances later in the poem. Similarly the union of land and sky in embrace (line 2 of this first section) presages the woman's ultimate succumbing to the man's physical contact. The two characters' separation in the poem's final stanza is hinted at in the symbolic detail of 'osier coupé' in line 4. The willow, a traditional symbol of fidelity because of the lack of knots in its wood, here represents fidelity severed like the broken or fallen branches of a tree. In the opening lines of 'Mendiants' the tenuous narrative thread supported by the poem's seven stanzas is thus suggested and the two characters at a critical stage of their literal journey and of their developing emotional relationship are sketched for the reader. As on a practical level the two characters are forced to leave the relative security and protection of the known urban environment (as represented by the wall and possibly later in stanza II by the 'église') and cross the open and exposed land of the 'prairie', on an emotional one they are forced to come to terms with their mutual attraction which seems on the point of turning from mere friendship into sexual commitment. The 'fossé', (line 8) which appears suggestively 'aussi sûr que le lit' as it beckons the lovers towards it, emphasises this point as does the emotional water imagery, 'l'eau de tes lèvres' (line 13) and 'coeurs noyés' (line 4). This latter detail is intensified by the actual layout of the landscape with a river present in the distance and heavy black stormclouds hanging over the scene waiting to dispel their contents. It is in the space between stanzas II and III that we must assume the sexual adventure takes place as the scene reopens in the imperfect tense with

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<sup>63</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.380

the characters immobilised in an embrace fraught with moral and religious symbolism:

Dédoublement sans fin d'un typique fantôme,  
Que l'or de ta prunelle était peuplé de rois!  
Est-ce moi qui riais à travers ce royaume?  
Je tenais la martyre, ayant ses bras en croix.

Line 9 involves a repetition of the hall of mirrors image ('multiplier son profil dans les glaces') of Notes parisiennes I, with the two lovers perpetuating their own images by looking into their partner's eyes. Also in the curious mixture of banal and imaginative in 'typique fantôme' the line forms a link back to 'fossé' and suggests death. The theme of mortality is in turn extended to the female protagonist (described as a 'martyre' lying in crucifixion posture) who appears to have suffered some corruption against her will. This point is borne out by the reference to her in line 17 as 'l'innocente' and by the moral connotations of 'yeux dévoyés' of line 16. To view 'Mendiants' as a straightforward account of female seduction and male disillusionment after conquest would be wrong however and contrary to Nouveau's intentions in writing and to his attitude towards women expressed elsewhere in his city poetry. Though in 'Mendiants' the woman at first appears to be reticent and therefore matches a stereotyped female figure, as in the Notes parisiennes she finally emerges as the dominant partner leaving the male protagonist the victim of the experience.

Stanza IV is crucial to this interpretation of the poem as it reveals the tears of the female figure, linked to the wateriness of the natural world, forming a 'trilogie amère' for the 'coeurs noyés' among which we must include the poet though, as F.R. Smith rightly suggests, not necessarily his female companion:

Le fleuve au loin, le ciel en deuil, l'eau de tes lèvres,  
Immense trilogie amère aux coeurs noyés,  
Un goût m'est revenu de nos plus forts genièvres,  
Lorsque ta joue a lui, près des yeux dévoyés!

After the physical comfort provided for the poet by the female breast (lines 7 and 17) and the woman's 'ventre gentil' (line 19) and after the elation he feels on seeing himself reflected in her eyes, 'Est-ce moi qui riais à travers ce royaume?', the female form becomes associated with death by drowning and bitterness. Tears tasted on the cheek of his female partner remind Nouveau of the acrid taste of juniper berries (betrayal) and bring home to him the deception of her love, wherein experience has belied

innocence and feigned naivety and reluctance have given way to worldliness.<sup>64</sup>

Et pourtant, oh! pourtant, des seins de l'innocente  
Et de nos doigts, sonnant, vers notre rêve éclos  
Sur le ventre gentil comme un tambour qui chante,  
Dianes aux désirs, et charger aux sanglots,

De ton attifement de boucles et de ganses,  
Vieux Bébé, de tes cils essuyés simplement,  
Et de vos piétés, et de vos manigances  
Qui m'auraient bien pu rendre aussi chien que l'amant,

Il ne devait rester qu'une ironie immonde,  
Une langueur des yeux détournés sans effort.  
Quel bras, impitoyable aux Echappés du monde,  
Te pousse à l'Est, pendant que je me sauve au Nord.

In the agonised outcry of line 17, 'Et pourtant, oh! pourtant' the poet finally realises his own predicament and previous images of potential and richness ('seins', 'ventre', 'désirs') give way to a sense of futility. The woman's seeming innocence is also counteracted by her now apparent 'manigances' and the impression of familiarity with the sexual experience suggested in the 'langueur des yeux détournés sans effort' (my underlining) and the artificiality of 'ton attifement de boucles et de ganses'. This final detail especially remains problematic in the context of a literal reading of the poem's title: after all was a beggar likely to be as concerned with her appearance as to curl her hair and wear ribbons? On the other hand, by linking her to the vain and artificial women of Notes parisiennes, it gives the reader a clue as to the possibly profane identity of the female figure in the Nouveau poem. She is clearly an urban character, only temporarily 'échappée du monde' or exiled from civilized existence like the poet himself.

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<sup>64</sup>The Album Richepin (a slim volume of maxims and humorous comments invented by Nouveau, Richepin, Ponchon and Bourget around 1875) contains a similar image of the bitterness of love, though expressed in a lighthearted vein which might have come from Nouveau's pen and forms an interesting comparison: 'Le second amour d'une femme ressemble au vin d'une bouteille mal rincée'.

Possibly like the heroines of Notes parisiennes who display dubious moral standards, she is a courtesan or even simply a Parisian prostitute. This interpretation of 'Mendiants', more akin to Nouveau's other experiments in the field of Parisian love poetry, is moreover backed up by the odd term of endearment, 'Vieux Bébé' used by Nouveau to his partner, a description more suited to the false familiarity of a prostitute and her client rather than to the tenderness of two individuals genuinely committed to each other.

Marking as it does the culmination of an unhappy and disillusioning experience, 'Mendiants', though exploiting the same ambiguous love theme as the Notes parisiennes, also acts as a foil to this earlier collection in the same way as 'Retour' as a pessimistic piece had provided a dramatic contrast in tone for the more hopeful 'Hier, par une après-midi' written a few years earlier in Nouveau's career. The poem thus helps to illustrate not only the paradoxical and variable nature of the city women Nouveau had taken as subjects, but also his own vacillating and ambivalent reactions to them in different real circumstances. As Nouveau's antithesis of city and country in his poetry was marked by biographical detail and anguished personal involvement, so his sustained interest in the city woman is highly personalised. This point is reinforced by a poetic technique wherein Nouveau portrays himself within the context of the poem on the same level of reality as his observed or invented characters. Hence in the Notes parisiennes, despite the seemingly casual, objective and journalistic title of the collection, he appears in the silent male witnesses. In 'Mendiants' he is present in the more forceful 'je' figure actually participating in the action. Though flighty, irresponsible and possibly profane, the Parisienne especially in the Notes parisiennes remains an object of Nouveau's mute adoration as a man and of his idealisation and constant curiosity as a poet. Through his determined use of her as a stimulus and source of inspiration she effectively becomes his Parisian muse and ultimately represents not only the powerful embodiment of a sex towards which Nouveau was naturally reticent yet fatefully drawn, but also the female personification of 'la ville', a challenging, fascinating and varied urban society to which Nouveau also reacted ambiguously. In extending beyond the personal sphere to envisage the Parisienne in her social context (her links with the theatre, the streets of Paris and flamboyantly artistic surroundings in general) Nouveau's early urban studies also bear witness to a developing interest in the city's visual dimension, in its value as a treasure store of descriptive images and as a pictorial environment



meriting attention in its own right. An awareness of the city's visually picturesque potential, which Nouveau furthermore linked with the notion of Parisianisme which had first inspired his fascination with the capital's female population, reached its culmination in the Petits tableaux parisiens of 1882. These could be said to characterize the second and final stage of Nouveau's literary career and activity in the sphere of city poetry.

Nouveau's interest in his surroundings as a varied visual spectacle suitable for portrayal poetically can be traced to an early fascination with painting expressed in a letter to his guardian uncle, Alexandre Silvy in 1867. On 20 October of that year the young Nouveau writes of an interest in the visual arts and of his desire to train as an artist in later life,

J'ai un petit talent [...] je sais dessiner:  
je puis le cultiver. Cela me plaît, cela  
me sourit, non pas depuis quelques mois,  
mais depuis que je peux tenir un crayon. Je  
puis commencer demain et faire ce que mon  
grand-père appelle: apprendre son métier [...]  
Je connais beaucoup un peintre qui pourrait  
m'aider en quelque chose. -Encore une  
fois, ma résolution est attachée là.<sup>65</sup>

Although ultimately unable to pursue this dream to its full extent, in applying his latent artistic perception to his Parisian environment, Nouveau achieved in poetry the originality denied him in the realm of painting.<sup>66</sup> In that it sharpened Nouveau's powers of observation, the poet's artistic leaning had a discernible effect on his city poetry. Firstly, and in connection with his early verse, it convinced him of the suggestive value of visual notations in setting the tone or atmosphere of a piece. In 'Hier, par une après-midi' and 'Fin d'Automne' especially, the consequences of visual phenomena, notably effects of lighting, are brought into play by Nouveau's poetic technique. In the first case bright light falling vertically from the sky transforms a chilly Parisian scene into one worthy of 'une ville orientale', setting the scene for the poet's carefree flânerie in the warm sunshine and presaging the eventual appearance of the exotic and coquettish Parisienne:

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<sup>65</sup> Nouveau, O. C., p.814.

<sup>66</sup> Nouveau's artistic career did in fact materialise, though in a more mundane manner than he had expected, in the form of periods as an art teacher in Beirut, Bougoin (Isère), Paris, Ealing and Falaise from 1884-1897. He also made a brief excursion to southern Italy in 1908 where he drew caricatures in the streets of Rome and Naples.

le soleil regaillardi  
Luisait dans un ciel attiédi

Et dans la splendeur qu'il étale  
Comme une ville orientale  
Baignait la froide capitale.<sup>67</sup>

In 'Fin d'Automne' the opposite process of fading out of light is employed and the poem's evening crépuscule foreshadows the melancholic emptying of the Jardin du Luxembourg and the poet's consequent feelings of desolation:

le jour qui meurt à l'horizon  
Semble un dernier adieu de la douce saison

[...] <sup>68</sup>  
La nuit lente descend;

Secondly, and more importantly, in allowing him to capture varied and interesting settings of buildings and people at a glance, Nouveau's artistic bent complimented his descriptive talent and helped to produce those pieces of fascinating historical and social value, the Petits tableaux parisiens.<sup>69</sup>

One of this collection's key points of interest for the twentieth-century reader and also an aspect which displays Nouveau's painterly talent in verbal form is the preponderance of visual cameos of mid-nineteenth century Paris and its people which the Petits tableaux parisiens contain. Tantalisingly captured aspects of city décor include the newly constructed Hôtel de Ville of 1882 'blanche comme une fiancée',<sup>70</sup> the cafés-concerts with their 'ointre peint de divinités naïves',<sup>71</sup> the luxurious town houses

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<sup>67</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.360.

<sup>68</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.363.

<sup>69</sup> As well as underlining a personal tendency, the artistic notion suggested in 'tableaux' of Petits tableaux parisiens was in tune with the spirit of an age. One might think of Charles Cros' 'Sur Trois Aquatintes de Henry Cros', Rimbaud's Illuminations, Huysman's Croquis parisiens, Gautier's Fusains et eaux fortes. Nouveau's title seems especially derivative of Baudelaire, combining as it does the 'Tableaux parisiens' of Les Fleurs du Mal and the Petits poèmes en prose.

<sup>70</sup> 'L'Hôtel de Ville', Nouveau, O.C., p.453.

<sup>71</sup> 'La Rue de la Gaîté', Nouveau, O.C., p.456.

'aux belles fenêtres ornées de vitres polies comme le petit ongle des marquises',<sup>72</sup> and the impressively defiant statue of Maréchal Ney ' [qui] sabre le vent dans un geste hautain et tragique'.<sup>73</sup> Among characteristic vignettes of the Parisian population one might quote the 'nourrices coiffées d'un bonnet clair et d'un large papillon de satin jaune',<sup>74</sup> the 'boucher gras et rouge',<sup>75</sup> the 'monsieur, en vêtement de toile et un chapeau de paille d'Italie [qui] fume un vrai cigare',<sup>76</sup> or the typically mysterious female figure 'enveloppée de plis soyeux [qui] descend et se fourre, avec un claquement sonore de la portière dans une voiture qui s'ébranle'.<sup>77</sup> Though stimulated by Nouveau's artistic interest in the rich pictorial texture of city life around him, these verbal miniatures have more than passing visual interest for the poet and his audience. Like Coppée, Nouveau admits to a desire to preserve the 'pittoresque' element of Parisian life ('cette vieille chose qui est en train de s'en aller de partout, de la civilisation moderne et même de l'art',<sup>78</sup>) through his poetry. Aspects of Parisian life are not catalogued at random therefore, but carefully chosen for conservation for a future generation. For the most part these sights and occurrences seem insignificant and accessible to all, but they are retained nevertheless by the poet in the belief that this very cosmopolitanism and universality constitutes the essence of Parisian life and genius.

In his expressed intention to encapsulate Parisian social life in verbal tableaux for the delectation of present and future audiences, Nouveau does not claim originality. He admits in 'Avenue de l'Observatoire', the seventh of his Petits tableaux parisiens, a debt to his precursor Jules Vallès whose earlier journalistic articles had immortalised the Paris of the early 1860s for men and women of Nouveau's generation and had provided the rough

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<sup>72</sup> 'La Rue de la Paix', Nouveau, O.C., p.458.

<sup>73</sup> 'Avenue de l'Observatoire', Nouveau, O.C., p.459.

<sup>74</sup> 'Le Square des Batignolles', Nouveau, O.C., p.456.

<sup>75</sup> 'La Rue de la Gaîté', Nouveau, O.C., p.457.

<sup>76</sup> 'La Rue de la Paix', Nouveau, O.C., p.458.

<sup>77</sup> 'Les Grands Boulevards', Nouveau, O.C., p.462.

<sup>78</sup> 'Notes d'un réserviste', Nouveau, O.C., p.449.

mould in which his own prose compositions were cast:<sup>79</sup>

cette époque glorieuse a été chantée en  
prose bâtie à chaux et à sable par  
Vallès qui a regardé, par le gros bout  
de la lorgnette, ce même Paris que je  
regarde, moi humble, par le petit bout.<sup>80</sup>

Significantly, it is in 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' where Nouveau refers to Vallès that the general influence of this prolific elder writer and editor of Le Cri du peuple is most apparent in evidently derivative characters and turns of phrase which recur. The poem is typically Nouveau in the leitmotif of seeing hinted at in the suggestive and possibly symbolic title of the piece, in the close presence of the observatory itself 'où l'on lorgne les planètes' and in the pathetic figure of the blind beggar whose mournful song ('Dans sa douleur elle perdit la tête, / Petits oiseaux, cessez, ne chantez plus!') frames the text. The main body of the piece, however, focuses on those same figures Vallès had described in La Rue.

Visualising the carrefour de l'Observatoire (the point at which the Avenue de l'Observatoire widens out on its approach to the Jardin du Luxembourg), Nouveau evokes its colourful population of saltimbanques, strongmen and the like which provide the contemporary equivalent for the 'luxe inouï de phénomènes, d'acrobates, de bateleurs, de charlatans, de montreurs de rats, de montreurs de riens' of Nouveau's own childhood. In particular, Nouveau's summary of the 'carrefour' as 'un des rares coins de Paris où la Banque (je veux dire la banque des banquistes et non celle des banquiers), comme chante Plessis, se soit réfugiée', seems to have been appropriated from Vallès whose article on circus characters and processions (published in Le Figaro, 20 July 1865) bears the title 'La Banque et les Banquistes'. Other figures mentioned by Nouveau are also common to Vallès's evocations of fairs in the capital in La Rue. Nouveau's 'monstreur de rats' of the 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' for example recalls

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<sup>79</sup> 'Les Saltimbanques' of La Rue (Paris, A. Faure, 1866) which describes city fairs and their varied characters seems especially to have influenced Nouveau here. Though he admits the primacy of Vallès, that of Coppée and Baudelaire is also manifestly evident in the observation and description of Parisian scenery which Nouveau exploits in his turn.

<sup>80</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.459.

Vallès's 'L'Homme aux rats' (published separately in La Parodie, 12 December 1869); similarly Nouveau's 'Jules qui lève dans sa mâchoire de fer un tonneau sur lequel est placé un 'amateur' à cheval', mimicks Vallès's Herculean strongman 'L'Homme au pavé' (also republished in La Parodie, 12 December 1869). Absent from Nouveau's prose poem however are Vallès's socialist feelings (apparent in this latter author's warm and sympathetic treatment of the circus folk) and his evident pity for their exile and wretched condition:

On se sent des envies de pleurer  
devant ces pauvres gens qui  
s'époumonent à cinq sols l'heure,  
loin de la patrie aux forêts vertes  
et aux grandes cathédrales.<sup>81</sup>

If not resting on a Socialist basis as Vallès's are, Nouveau's sympathies towards the Parisian lower class are neither displayed through an accumulation of sentimental adjectives 'petit', 'naïf', 'humble' and so on as are Coppée's, nor are they dependent on an analogy to be drawn between the poor's wretched state and the poet's own circumstances as in Baudelaire. In 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' Nouveau's compassion, if any, is reserved not for the unfortunate acrobatic performers but for the 'pauvre aveugle' unable to witness the colourful array of costumed individuals milling about the square: 'de petits rentiers, d'enfants, de bonnes, d'employés, de nourrices, de saltimbanques, de soldats.' Such picturesque mixtures of humanity of which the blind woman is deprived, but which for Nouveau constitute the essence of the 'spectacle en plein air', occur regularly in the Petits tableaux parisiens in illustration of their hold on the poet's imagination. In this particular poème en prose, the acrobats, in the form of the 'danseuse de corde', merit his attention as do the ordinary Parisian individuals of the audience, her 'cercle d'admirateurs naïfs'. Similarly the 'camelot qui met en loterie le fragile échafaudage de ses verres', is balanced by the crowd of simple 'femmes d'ouvriers' and 'petites filles' lured towards his stall who also attract the poet's gaze. This all-embracing regard extending from the spectacular antics of the tightrope dancer to the pathetic immobility of the 'pauvre aveugle qu'un enfant tient par un pan de son tablier' is a clear example of Nouveau's 'âme contradictoire',<sup>82</sup> his natural openness to the variety of life which permitted him to enjoy and

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<sup>81</sup> 'La Parade' from 'Les Saltimbanques' in La Rue. See Jules Vallès Oeuvres, Volume 1, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Roger Bellet (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), p.708.

<sup>82</sup> Art.cit., Bornecque, p.5.

portray often apparently incompatible elements of city scene and population with equal interest and grace. Nouveau's versatility and openness was also advantageous in a geographical sense since it freed him from the profound sentimental and nostalgic ties of the kind which drew Coppée to the Quartier Latin or banlieue. He was thus able to take inspiration wherever he found it in 'ce Paris mêlé d'arrondissements/~~Excentriques~~'.<sup>83</sup> Hence Nouveau focuses alternately on the east of the capital and the Père-Lachaise cemetery, on the west and the Bois de Boulogne, on the south in 'Rue de la Gaîté'. He observes the prosperous Right Bank in 'Rue de la Paix', the artistic Left Bank in 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' or the heart of the capital in 'L'Hôtel de Ville' and 'Les Tuileries'. Reinforcing Nouveau's social and geographical curiosity displayed in the Petits tableaux parisiens is also the technical and thematic richness of these often vastly different pieces finally grouped under a single heading which will emerge in the course of our investigation.

Two of the earliest published Petits tableaux parisiens, 'Au Père-Lachaise' and 'L'Hôtel de Ville' (both appearing in Le Réveil, 1 October 1882) are exceptional in the collection in that they were originally suggested by specific events in Paris' history, the first by Michelet's inhumation in the capital in 1874, the second by the opening of the newly completed Hôtel de Ville in 1882. This reveals an attempt by Nouveau to appeal directly to a contemporary audience as well as to one of the future. Despite the potential for historical and political comment offered by Nouveau's choice of these two subjects for his tableaux however, the emphasis in each poem moves away from general concepts to what is visible 'par le petit bout [...] de la lorgnette'. Primarily, the poet concentrates on the material aspect of reality, on his own reflections on it and ultimately on the creation of colourful, personal images intended to convey these two aspects.

In 'Au Père-Lachaise' the opening sentence pinpoints the subject of this retrospective poème en prose: 'Michelet venait d'être ramené de Cannes à Paris, dans un double cercueil de chêne et de plomb et c'était le jour de son inhumation au Père-Lachaise'. Even at this stage in the gratuitous mention of the double coffin, one can sense Nouveau's interest being drawn away from the central historical figure of the piece to relatively minor details of the scene around him which he finds personally representative of varied city life. As the coffin distracts, so the brilliant sunshine, neutralising the sad connotations of a funeral, also draws the poet's

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<sup>83</sup> 'Cadenette' in Nouveau, O.C., p.408.

eyes away from the cortège onto the houses and rooftops of surrounding Paris:

Au-dessus du corbillard, chargé de  
fleurs et de couronnes, le soleil de mai  
ruisselait, ainsi que sur les toits, à  
l'angle des maisons, en ruisseaux d'argent  
et d'or sur la foule murmurante et  
recueillie. Ce n'était presque pas un  
enterrement, et pas tout à fait une fête.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to Verlaine's use of death in the city where the poet becomes personally involved through fear of his own mortality, Nouveau keeps death at arm's length here, proving for him it was in no way a personal obsession. Avoiding macabre alternatives he refers to Michelet vaguely as 'une ombre' or 'le fantôme', for whom death in old age ('chargé d'ans, rassasié de jours') had been neither a terrifying nor painful experience but a means to 'regagne[r] sans amertume la patrie commune et désirée, Champs-Élysées aux verts ombrages'.<sup>85</sup> In fact, through the living memory of Michelet's attractive personality and popular works ('le fantôme du mort était si tendre, son souvenir si souriant, son oeuvre si séductrice, sa gloire si vaste et si certaine') the writer and historian seems more alive than dead in 'Au Père-Lachaise'. His mass following, drawn from all sectors of Parisian society, seems more fitting for the 'couronnement du génie' than for 'des obsèques funèbres et banales'. The fact that Nouveau watches and follows Michelet's cortège in the cheering company of a 'foule énorme pleine d'enthousiasme contenu', rather than alone or with a friend as Verlaine does in the prose pieces from Mémoires d'un veuf, also points to a distinction between the two poets where death and the city are concerned. By the inclusion of the Parisian masses and the absence of a subjective 'je' in the poem, Nouveau deflects attention away from himself as a participant and focuses it on the common city figures around him. He thus displays an artistic interest in the Parisian inhabitants, an interest which for the most part Verlaine did not share. In 'Au Père-Lachaise' Nouveau displays acute observation of the figures around him capturing sections of the crowd such as the 'boutiquiers et les passants' full of idle curiosity

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<sup>84</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.452.

<sup>85</sup> Though intentionally referring to the Elysian fields of heaven, Nouveau's phrase here also calls to mind the Champs-Élysées of Paris itself. He repeats the double allusion in 'L'Hôtel de Ville' where he alludes to the 'Champs-Élysées de la Gloire et de l'Honneur'.

'[qui] se penchaient pour savoir le nom de l'homme illustre que tout Paris accompagnait ainsi', and then Michelet's most assiduous followers and Nouveau's own favourite Parisian inhabitants 'les femmes [dont] les lèvres entrouvertes [...] s'ouvraient'. This same crowd motif (repeated three times towards the end of this composition: 'la foule était énorme', 'Dans la foule on eût dit que les femmes étaient à majorité', and 'la foule rêvait') as well as conveying a sense of variety, vitality and mass activity, also helps to identify the scene Nouveau is describing as a specifically urban occurrence. Hence the position of 'Au Père-Lachaise' at the head of a series of specifically Parisian petits tableaux is justified.

As the tentative historical and narrative thread of 'Au Père-Lachaise' is broken up by Nouveau's concentration broadening out to the Parisian surroundings and its human inhabitants, so in 'L'Hôtel de Ville' objective physical descriptions of the object in question are fractured by Nouveau's subjective intrusions and lyrical outbursts glorifying this city edifice and the urban scene as a poetic subject in general. Firstly Nouveau suggests the dual status of the new Hôtel de Ville as a governmental centre and a supreme architectural achievement through visually effective images. Its political role, guaranteed to ' [faire] battre les cœurs de tous les citoyens' is concretised in the image of the official seal, 'le cachet dont les prud'hommes signent leurs décisions'. Its artistic side is suggested in the necklace image, 'réduite à la dimension d'un médaillon, elle ferait un bijou délicat pour la gorgerette des pucelles'.<sup>86</sup> The building's political and aesthetic qualities henceforth constitute the dual theme on which Nouveau's poème en prose is constructed and from which his imagery is generated. Continuing with a metaphor drawn from his own discipline, Nouveau compares the Hôtel de Ville to a 'poème en pierre'. As the written word is the visual manifestation of a poet's inner thoughts and inspirations, so the 'Maison de ville' is the physical representation of the abstract 'affranchissement des communes'. In Paragraph II of the piece Nouveau moves briefly away from the initially dominantly metaphorical tone and pictures the Hôtel de Ville in its strategic geographical position situated in an area of contrasts, in the heart of Paris between the busy 'rue de Rivoli' and the calm 'longs quais brunis de la Seine tranquille'. Reinforcing the juxtaposition of activity and calm, Nouveau makes use of the crowd motif from 'Au Père-Lachaise', firstly imagining the area in front of the Hôtel de Ville flooded by an ambivalent 'foule orageuse, gaie

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<sup>86</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.453.



et morne à la fois, avec ses remous et ses tourbillons d'océan humain',<sup>87</sup> then visualising it suddenly cleared of people 'dans le repos et le silence d'un jour ouvrable'. The impression of unpredictable movement suggested by the aquatic terms 'orageuse', 'remous' and 'tourbillons' in the crowd scene forms an effective contrast to the sense of physical torpor conveyed by the semi-erotic terminology of Nouveau's second scene wherein his originality is probably more evident than in any other part of the poem:

à midi, dans le repos, et le silence  
d'un jour ouvrable, l'asphalte vide  
se dilate au large baiser d'un grand  
soleil, il est beau de voir s'élever  
blanche comme une fiancée toute  
neuve [...] la Maison.

'Dilater', 'baiser', and 'soleil' as used here are reminiscent of pagan celebrative pieces (such as Rimbaud's early 'Soleil et chair'). Combined as they are here with urban notions: 'jour ouvrable' or 'asphalte' for example, they reveal Nouveau's attempt to poeticise the visible aspects of the city around him, an attempt which rests on a subtle combination of natural, urban, ancient and modern motifs. A further drawing together of the antique and urban themes occurs in the mythical image rounding off this central section of Nouveau's tableau, that of the 'phoenix antique'. The comparison is doubly apt since in the abstract sense of being the 'évocation du passé' and the 'vigoureux appel à un pacifique et magnanime avenir' the Hôtel de Ville is phoenix-like; also in the literal sense of having risen from its own ashes ('sortie de ses cendres') after being razed in the communard fires of 1871, it can be likened to the legendary bird.

By this stage in 'L'Hôtel de Ville' (the end of paragraph II) Nouveau has successfully substituted for objective description of the building's

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<sup>87</sup> Water imagery is not uncommon in connection with the city although frequently it is associated with the disposition of buildings rather than with the city population. In 'Le Manoeuvrier' for example, Nouveau speaks of rooftops constituting 'une mer' while chimneys are 'des mâts'. In a more general sense Balzac's wonderfully evocative image from Le Père Goriot beginning 'Mais Paris est un véritable océan. Jetez-y le sonde, vous n'en connaîtrez jamais la profondeur', springs to mind.

See Balzac La Comédie Humaine Vol. II, texte établi par Marcel Bouteron (Paris, Gallimard, 1951), p.806.

outward appearance, a long series of invented images springing from his personal imagination summarising its dual political and artistic significance. These include the warrior's helmet, the official seal, the phoenix, the necklace, the 'poème de pierre' and the 'fiancée'. Some (like the 'fiancée' suggesting the idea of whiteness and new stone) have a predominantly visual dimension, others (such as the phoenix) combine visual and philosophical elements. That of the 'poème de pierre' on the other hand would seem particularly indicative of a writer eager to reveal the poetry of the city landscape around him. In the final paragraph of 'L'Hôtel de Ville' Nouveau returns to the political theme to convey on a visual level the civic pride and potential for the future symbolised by the new 'Maison de ville'. To Nouveau's mind these abstractions are concretised firstly in the collection of famous Parisian figures whose statues decorate the building's façade.<sup>88</sup>

Hospitalière par excellence, elle est  
peuplée de spectres de pierre, génies qui  
ornèrent Paris où ils naquirent, et  
d'ombres de marbre, sorties du cerveau  
des statuaires et qui font penser à  
des Champs-Élysées de la Gloire et  
de l'Honneur.

Secondly, they are implied in the 'chevaliers d'or aux bannières héroïques' on the summit of the building. These latter two figures, products of 'l'audace naïve du vieux art ressuscité', seem especially dear to Nouveau's imagination and generate a eulogistic and lyrical flourish. Raised high above the skyline of Paris ('montés là-haut dans les nuages, et regardant au loin') they direct the poet's eyes upwards and towards the horizon, lifting him out of his material environment, straining with them to see the

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<sup>88</sup> This aspect of the Hôtel de Ville is picked up by Verlaine whose 'Nuit blanche' ( Mémoires d'un veuf ) published in Lutèce, 10-17 August 1883, imagines Villon and Musset descending from their plinths on the Hôtel de Ville and wandering around the silent capital.

as yet inaccessible light of hope for the future: 'le premier point du jour nouveau'.

This suggestive possibility and imaginative élan towards future time brings 'L'Hôtel de Ville' to an ecstatic and dramatic conclusion which the third tableau 'Les Tuileries' is ill-equipped to follow.<sup>89</sup> This composition consisting of a whimsical flashback to the original Parisian tuilerie ranks alongside 'Le Bois de Boulogne' (the description of a Parisian family's abortive trip to the countryside), as the least successful of Nouveau's Petits tableaux parisiens. Both compositions fall short on account of their fictitious content which relies too heavily on Nouveau's restricted ability as a storyteller rather than his much greater talents as an observer and painter of real action taking place around him. In the case of 'Les Tuileries', a further temporal factor also enters play. In this poem the imagined activity the poet conveys, has supposedly occurred in the past (at an undetermined era rather than within living memory as in 'Au Père-Lachaise') and thus is denied the verifiable physical detail and convincing local colour which gave the previous piece Parisian relevance. The result is a poème en prose barely connected with the real city world of nineteenth-century Paris or the urban theme as a whole. In the absence of a contemporary Parisian stimulus Nouveau's ingenuity relates his descriptions to scenes he has witnessed elsewhere, namely in the rural world, to facilitate his imagination. The tuilerie itself, for example, with

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The poem occurs in Le Réveil, 1 October 1882. The Tuileries palace was a royal residence until it was destroyed by arson in 1871 which perhaps helps to explain the tongue-in-cheek political allusion forming the first paragraph of the piece: 'Un démocrate en belle humeur dirait: bien nommées! Car il nous est tombé de là de rudes tuiles sur la tête!' Like Verlaine's reference to 'Auteuil classique' in his 'Auteuil' from Mémoires d'un veuf (which he claims is not to be his subject in the poème en prose) Nouveau's political allusion here is a red herring and has no real relevance for the description to follow. As he himself admits in the second sentence of the piece 'ce n'est pas de celà qu'il s'agit'.

its miscellaneous collection of fishing rods and broom handles leaning against its door, resembles a country peasant dwelling,

long et étroit, sans étage aucun,  
rez-de-chaussée triste et nu:  
comme on en voit en Bretagne et  
dans les plus maigres provinces  
françaises.<sup>90</sup>

In the same way the stifling sunlight and unusual calm, 'le silence chaud et lourd de la saison [qui] plane sur le pauvre bâtiment' and the 'grand silence doré et ému de la campagne inculte' seem drawn from a rural summer scene in the Midi. Strikingly similar terminology features in 'Pourrières' where Nouveau talks of 'Soleil dur! Mort de l'ombre! Et Silence des Eaux'. Even less convincing when compared to the other Petits tableaux parisiens, are the human participants in 'Les Tuileries'. The mother, especially, is not given visual portrayal, we hear only her 'voix rauque et impérative', while the children, 'sales, superbes' and 'beaux' are exaggeratedly 'au pousse écarté de statue antique' and their father with trailing hair and beard 'a l'air d'être le dieu du Fleuve'. Immediately following the balanced and relevant phoenix image of 'L'Hôtel de Ville' these mythological allusions are unconvincing and out of place. Slightly redeeming the poème en prose for posterity is its final paragraph, formed of a single sentence, wherein the phrase from 'Avenue de l'Observatoire' (describing the carrefour as one of the rare, untouched 'coins de Paris' in the nineteenth century) is repeated. In an ambiguous turn of phrase, Nouveau explains that his description of the ancient Parisian tuilerie portrays, 'Tel peut être comme autrefois, un coin de Paris, au bord de la Seine, en 1882'. That is, it shows either what the Seine area (which he as a poet witnesses in 1882) may have looked like in bygone days, or it shows simply an idyllic representation of actual scenes of work, or real human habitations and family activities observed by himself on the present Parisian river banks. In either sense Nouveau combines the themes of ancient and modern. In the first he achieves it through an exaggerated imaginary flight back in time in an effort to recapture the original flavour of an area personally familiar in 1882. In the second he succeeds thanks to a technique of elaboration and embroidery whereby real city décor and people, through Nouveau's use of corruptive rural and mythological imagery,

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<sup>90</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.454.

become distanced from their setting in nineteenth-century Paris.

'Le Bois de Boulogne' has comparable shortcomings which invite the modern reader to challenge the piece's literary value and even its inclusion in a series of Petits tableaux parisiens. Unlike 'Les Tuileries' however, criticism is not of the absence of specifically Parisian elements in the scene but of the piece's status as a tableau which is a matter of debate. As regards Parisian detail 'Le Bois de Boulogne' is tied by its title and by a wealth of accurate and topical allusions to the contemporary urban scene. The poem opens with a phrase recalling I of the Notes parisiennes where 'Madame est sortie', as it prepares the reader for a narrative tale cataloguing the disasters of a Parisian family's 'dimanche à la campagne'.

Madame s'est levée à 7 heures, par  
ce clair et bleu dimanche, avec  
l'intention bien arrêtée de faire en  
sorte que la petite famille, composée,  
sans compter le mari, d'un gamin  
de dix ans et d'une fillette de six,  
soit prête pour le déjeuner de dix  
heures, car c'est le jour de la grande  
partie tant projetée au Bois de Boulogne.<sup>91</sup>

Consequently Nouveau refers to the buses taken by his imagined family on their day excursion, 'numéros, 93, 94, 95 et 96, au bureau d'omnibus de la 'Muette-rue Taitbout', and also mentions the 'gare du Havre' and the 'chemin de fer de ceinture', both verifiable and well-known Parisian landmarks. As may already have been suggested by the journey theme central to 'Le Bois de Boulogne', this prose piece extends on a temporal axis, as opposed to the other Petits tableaux parisiens which extend spatially to visualise a city scene or a particular element of décor. Thus it rather contradicts the pictorial term tableau under which it is gathered. This stylistic difference from the norm and the use of narrative rather than of descriptive technique is even underlined by the visual appearance of the text. It is fractured into ten short paragraphs, mostly constituted of single sentences, which contrasts with the other poems of the collection which are composed of two or three lengthy paragraphs each on average and which present rather a solid block of prose. The sense of disunity is further underlined by Nouveau's frequent references to the passage of time, fragmenting both text and

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<sup>91</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.460.

narrative: 'Madame s'est levée à 7 heures (paragraphe I)' 'il est dix heures et demie' (paragraphe V) 'Il est plus de midi et demi' (paragraphe VII), 'il est maintenant quatre heures et demie' (paragraphe IX). Despite these drawbacks which suggest 'Le Bois de Boulogne' would have been more successful in the form of a prose tale like 'La Petite Baronne'<sup>92</sup> or 'Le Manoeuvrier',<sup>93</sup> rather than confined to the necessarily restrictive structure of a petit tableau, 'Le Bois de Boulogne', like 'Les Tuileries', is not wholly a negative creation. In addition to the happy picture of the woods' shady groves as 'Les feuillages où il pleut des gouttes de soleil', the piece is interesting in that it provides a rare example outside the parodies<sup>94</sup> and works of collaboration<sup>95</sup> of Nouveau attempting comic writing. Though his situations may be predictable (such as 'la petite [qui] se sent une de ces envies furieuses qui ne pardonnent à personne'), his comic description of the Bois de Boulogne as 'le classique gazon' and the amusing picture of the père de famille (observing his wife and children 'd'un oeil somnolent du fond des oreillers' convinced of his final ability to be ready first) are certainly original and reveal a latent talent which Nouveau would have been well advised to exploit.

The fourth of Nouveau's Petits tableaux parisiens in a chronological sense, 'Le Square des Batignolles' (published in La Nouvelle Lune, 15 October 1882), also reveals a slight tendency towards tongue-in-cheek humour and an episodic structure as displayed in 'Le Bois de Boulogne', yet here the symmetrical nature of certain incidents and the repetative use of enumeration which succeeds in creating a sense of balance, draw the piece together more effectively than was possible in the latter piece with its elongated time-scale. 'Le Square des Batignolles' is also more typical of the Petits tableaux parisiens in general in that it employs accurate description of real people, discernible in their minute detail, to a visually evocative end. The poème en prose relies for its subject on the figures of two old men 'le capitaine d'Hervieux', a retired military

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<sup>92</sup>See Nouveau, O.C., pp.433-6.

<sup>93</sup>See Nouveau, O.C., pp.444-7.

<sup>94</sup>See Dixains réalistes par divers auteurs (Paris, Librairie de l'eau forte, 1876), and Appendix I of the present study.

<sup>95</sup>These include 'Le Moine Bleu', a burlesque play composed in the company of Charles Cros and Nina de Villard among others in 1875. See Nouveau, O.C., pp.386-7.

gentleman and 'le vieux père Boissert', a 'retraité du ministère des finances',<sup>96</sup> and on the regular meetings between these two figures. The appearance of each character is indicative of their personality and life style: Hervieux's immaculate dress and erect bearing ('le buste en avant') illustrate an orderliness and precision instilled by his military career. Boissert's sprightly gait, white waistcoat and fascinating buttonhole ('un bouquet de fleurs variées dont les tiges trempent dans une miniscule bouteillette dissimulée par le parement de l'étoffe') betray vanity and a certain eccentricity. In synchronised movement reminiscent of the opening lines of Flaubert's Bouvard et Pécuchet, where the two main protagonists fatally converge on each other from opposite ends of a city street,<sup>97</sup> Boissert and Hervieux approach their rendez-vous in the 'square' with measured

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<sup>96</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.455. The possibility that Nouveau is describing himself and Verlaine indirectly in this piece is tempting and is suggested by similarities between it and Verlaine's 'Auteuil' (Mémoires d'un veuf). See p.135 of chapter on Verlaine. The likelihood is reinforced by the symbolic associations used by Nouveau in 'Le Square des Batignolles', 'Hervieux' (or Herr-vieux) is the German for monsieur followed by old (the opposite of Nouveau) and 'Boissert' with its suggestions of 'servir' and 'boire', possibly hinting at Verlaine's reputation as a prolific drinker.

<sup>97</sup> Bouvard et Pécuchet was first published by Lemerre in 1881. The style of the following excerpt from its opening page is strikingly similar to Nouveau's poème en prose:

Deux hommes parurent.

L'un venait de la Bastille, l'autre du Jardin des Plantes. Le plus grand, vêtu de toile, marchait le chapeau en arrière, le gilet débouton et sa cravate à la main. Le plus petit, dont le corps disparaissait dans une redingote marron, baissait la tête sous une casquette à visière pointue.

Quand ils furent arrivés au milieu du boulevard, ils s'assirent, à la même minute, sur le même banc.

deliberation and from opposite directions:

Comme d'Hervieux met le pied sur le  
seuil du jardin par une porte, Boissert  
précisément entre par l'autre. D'un pas  
égal ils se dirigent mutuellement à  
leur rencontre.

As well as creating a special visual effect (that often exploited in far-cical plays where similar or vastly differing characters emerge with split-second timing through separate doors opening onto the stage), this dramatic technique helps to underline the essential rigidity of the two characters involved and the clockwork routine of their daily meetings and memory-exchanging sessions.<sup>98</sup> This fact is emphasised by Nouveau's deliberate use of enumeration, ('ils s'interrogent sur leur santé, leurs maux de reins, leur rhumatisme, leurs gravelles') and of long adverbs ('précisément'

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<sup>98</sup>This is not an isolated example of Nouveau employing dramatic techniques in his city poetry in support of his view of the urban scene as forming a 'décor de théâtre' ('Notes d'un réserviste'). In 'Cadenette', for example, a lengthy and sentimental poem cataloguing the life of a Parisian 'traînée', Nouveau animates the scene by addressing his reader directly:

Voyez-vous cet enfant qui s'avance avec soin  
En ramassant le flot de ses robes profonds?  
C'est Cadenette!

(Nouveau, O.C., p.410)

Similarly at the end of 'La Rue de la Gaîté' (Petits tableaux parisiens), in a sudden change of tone, Nouveau directs our attention to a group of characters emerging from a dance who appear to act out their personal drama with dialogue to the milling crowds:

Tenez, voici un bal qui se vide, quel tapage  
dans l'escalier! Qu'est-ce qu'il y a encore?  
C'est une femme! Jeune, belle, les yeux ardents,  
La lèvre tremblante, elle crie: "Assassin!  
assassin! oui assassin", à une espèce d'homme  
grand, sec, fort, qui s'en va tranquillement,  
les mains dans ses poches, sans s'épater, avec  
l'indifférence d'un Olympien à longue blouse  
bleue, et en casquette à trois points!



and 'mutuellement' (paragraph III) 'impunément' (paragraph IV) and 'positivement' (paragraph V). Though concentrating primarily on these two main personalities in his poème en prose, Nouveau does not neglect the Parisian scene in general in the piece. Hervieux's 'modeste appartement composé de deux pièces [...] au quatrième étage' is located exactly in the rue des Moines. This area was known personally to Nouveau since a house in the same street provided the venue for Nina de Villard's salon. The square with its 'porte[s]', 'banca', 'allées' and 'grille', also its comfortably characteristic population of 'bonnes d'enfants' and 'nourrices coiffées d'un bonnet clair et d'un large papillon de satin jaune' is evoked. In its reassuring familiarity it provides a physical counterpart for the old men's 'souvenirs':

toujours les mêmes, que chacun des deux  
peut répéter impunément à l'autre,  
car si l'un ne se souvient pas de  
les avoir déjà racontés cent fois,  
l'autre en revanche ne se souvient  
pas davantage de les avoir entendus.

The life of the Parisian park also provides a microscopic representation of human activity in general as it is guided by routine and compatible with the rhythm of the natural world. Here, the natural world is present in the form of the sun behind whose 'quinconces en flamme' Hervieux and Boissert exchange their memories and under whose dying rays 'les petits pensionnats quittent les allées', and 'les bonnes s'en vont lentes et distraites'. It is on this latter note of silent and nostalgic departure at sunset that 'Le Square des Batignolles' draws to a close and with it that Nouveau's technique for verbal impressionism (first hinted at in an early poem such as 'Fin d'automne' and its comparable evening park setting) is reinforced.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>The shrieking of a train on the chemin de fer de ceinture is actually the last image of Le Square des Batignolles. See chapter on Verlaine, pp. 135 et seq. of the present study.

The high point of Nouveau's painterly talent in poetry and poetic description is however probably reserved for the three remaining, and undoubtedly the most successful, of his Petits tableaux parisiens: 'La Rue de la Gaîté', 'La Rue de la Paix' and 'Les Grands Boulevards'. The first two of these three texts form a contrasting pair while the final piece embodies for Nouveau the essence of Parisian variety and fascination. For the reader of Nouveau's works it stands as perhaps the poet's most successful prose achievement in the context of the urban theme.

'La Rue de la Gaîté' and 'La Rue de la Paix' were published in La Nouvelle Lune on 22 October 1882 and 29 October 1882 respectively. Besides being among the truest examples of tableaux in the collection in that they communicate what is apparent to the poet in a single sweep over his field of vision, they also reveal in their titles a metaphorical as well as a real significance. In this latter respect, Nouveau was pursuing Balzac's Parisian theory of a link between certain city streets and moral values as suggested in his short story Ferragus:

Il est dans Paris certaines rues  
deshonorées autant que peut l'être  
un homme coupable d'infamie; puis  
des rues simplement honnêtes, puis de  
jeunes rues sur la moralité desquelles  
le public ne s'est pas encore formé  
d'opinion.<sup>100</sup>

Nouveau's street names in his poems however also have a certain ironical significance, for if 'La Rue de la Gaîté' is lively and colourful, it is also dirty and sordid; conversely while 'La Rue de la Paix' may be refined and calm in some respects, it is also teeming with life and (as in the case of the 'marquis espagnol ou italien [...] et simple escroc')<sup>101</sup> not always of the most desirable variety. From the outset 'La Rue de la Gaîté' and 'La Rue de la Paix' differ in terms of the time at which they are observed by the poet, presumably the time of greatest activity and therefore interest for the spectator. The first 'est gaie [...] surtout le soir'<sup>102</sup> while the second is 'élégante à toute heure de la journée',

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<sup>100</sup> Balzac, La Comédie humaine, Volume V (Paris, Gallimard, 1952), p.17.

<sup>101</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.458.

<sup>102</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.456.

particularly in the morning 'très tard, vers dix heures'. Pursuing his fascination with the urban landscape's varied visual dimension, Nouveau expands on the appearance of the two streets under their natural or man-made illumination and during their period of greatest activity. In 'La Rue de la Gaîté', gaslight, essential to the evocation of this seedy area at nighttime, casts its eerie luminosity over the scene below and helps create a sense of overpopulation:

Elle est gaie, en effet, surtout  
le soir, quand le gaz qui éclaire ses  
nombreuses pâtisseries, établies en  
plein vent ruisselle sale, jaune et  
puant, rappelant les boucheries de  
Soho à Londres.<sup>103</sup>

The bustling activity is illustrated in the wealth of commerce and entertainment in the area open late into the night, thanks to the advantages of artificial lighting:

Outre ses nombreux marchands de vin,  
réunissant, autour de leur comptoir de  
zinc, des vieillards avinés et de petites  
Parisiennes blondes en loques, elle compte  
un théâtre, et deux cafés -concerts.

[...]

Vers onze heures du soir, la rue de la  
Gaîté est en pleine effervescence. Ça  
chauffe dur. La musique des bals,  
tout aussi nombreux dans la rue que  
les concerts, affolée, rugit ses derniers  
quadrilles.

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<sup>103</sup> Though Nouveau's use of gaslight in this poem emphasises dirt and infection in the city streets rather than actual death, the terminology he uses is very similar to that of Verlaine in his 'Sonnet boiteux' which evokes the 'brouillard rose et jaune et sale des Sohos'.

In 'La Rue de la Paix' on the other hand, it is the morning sunlight which brings out the area's large collection of wealthy aristocrats to indulge in window-shopping and its numerous, attractive fashion models and elegant shop assistants to decorate the city pavements:

Le matin (très tard, vers dix heures)  
fleurit sur ses larges trottoirs  
l'aristocratie des demoiselles de  
magasin, modistes à 12,000 francs  
d'appointement, "premières" de chez Worth.

Underlining and arising from the two areas' geographical separation are the social and human differences existing between them already hinted at in details of the visible scene. The Rue de la Gaîté is populated by society's rejects, 'des vieillards avinés', 'de petites Parisiennes [...] en loques', and the working class 'un boucher gras et rouge', 'une laveuse de vaisselle'. The Rue de la Paix is filled by a frivolous collection of women connected with the fashion trade: 'demoiselles de magasin', 'modistes' and 'premières'. Foreign aristocrats are also present in 'quelque Anglais, quelque prince', 'un marquis espagnol ou italien'. In a similar manner, the Rue de la Gaîté supports only essential commerce, 'ses nombreux marchands de vin', 'ses pâtisseries', while the Rue de la Paix favours luxury items: 'Des boutiques de fleurs, de bijoutiers, d'objets d'art'.

Overriding the visible peculiarities distinguishing these two urban tableaux for the reader however, is the notion of Parisianism which draws them together. This concept was suggested as early as 1875 in Nouveau's sonnet 'A Madame Nina de Villard' and it was elaborated on in the course of his Notes parisiennes. In 'La Rue de la Gaîté' the street's unique character is embodied for the poet in its theatre and cafés-concerts which provide a forum for talent ('la naïveté précieuse de la supériorité qui s'ignore') and affords a very necessary diversion in this otherwise depressing, down-at-heel area. The 'charme secret' of these two establishments lies to Nouveau's mind in the 'joie parisienne pure, absolument vierge de tout mélange étranger' which animates them. This 'joie parisienne pure' emanates from the kaleidoscopic mixture of humanity in the audience 'car plus d'un sculpteur illustre, plus d'un peintre, voire plus d'un poète ne dédaignent pas de s'y mêler à la cohue, et sans que leur distinction s'en offense, d'y savourer entre un boucher gras et rouge et une laveuse de vaisselle, le parfum canaille d'une scène en vers quelconques sur un air obsesseur'. It is also apparent from the cavalier confusion

of seriousness, obscenity and exaggeration on stage:

Quant au théâtre, lui, qui n'y est pas allé-  
ou dans ses pareils- ne connaîtra jamais les  
ravissements de la comédie. Outre qu'on y  
joue les meilleures pièces et que, partant, on peut  
s'y former à la bonne littérature tout comme  
ailleurs, ce spectacle est rehaussé ici par le  
piquant énorme d'un mauvais goût délicieux dans  
les gestes et le ton des acteurs. Les drames  
surtout! C'est du délire!

In 'La Rue de la Paix' the scene's specifically Parisian element is the pictorial and dramatic potential of the street's female inhabitants conveyed in an impressionistic procession of 'petits pieds grassouillets, nerveux, mutins impertinents, mystérieux' [...] 'de chapeaux de jupes et d'ombrelles'. The Parisian quality of these figures, their 'seul parisianisme' in Nouveau's words, suffices on a serious artistic level to 'ravir un peintre moderne' and on a comic human one to 'tenir en haleine pendant des heures Chérubin, c'est-à-dire le petit pâtissier blanc et bleu, venu du fond de la rue Saint-Honoré, et qui prend mille respectueuses précautions pour ne pas heurter un si beau monde avec sa béchamelle qu'il porte, en sifflotant, sur sa tête de gavroche éveillé'.<sup>104</sup> Significantly, these two elements characteristic of the Parisian scene and imparting to it a special quality of 'parisianisme' (la Parisienne and the essential variety and pictorial quality of life in a metropolis) are those which our study of Nouveau's city poetry has shown to be most frequent and successful in his usage.

Though especially significant as it is used in 'La Rue de la Gaîté' and 'La Rue de la Paix', 'parisianisme' in a general sense is essential to the whole of the Petits tableaux parisiens. Already apparent in the collection's title, 'Paris' as such also appears as a refrain at regular intervals in the individual texts. In 'Avenue de l'Observatoire', 'Paris' occurs twice, once in the piece's opening sentence. In 'L'Hôtel de Ville' it occurs three times and in 'Les Tuileries' and in 'Le Bois de Boulogne' it appears in the memorable final lines of these poèmes en prose. It is

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<sup>104</sup> This enigmatic figure of the 'petit pâtissier' could be an example of Nouveau's powers of observation and interest in the people of Paris as a visual spectacle. On the other hand it is possible he represents Nouveau himself, silent, transfixed by the procession of Parisiennes before him.

in 'Les Grands Boulevards', significantly Nouveau's final piece of the Petits tableaux parisiens, that this theme of the uniqueness of Paris reaches its climax however and with it Nouveau's treatment of the city theme in prose.

'Les Grands boulevards' begins with a stark, verbless sentence, similar to that which opens Charles Cros' 'Effarement' and which puts emphasis on the nocturnal theme which merges with that of Paris in this poem: 'Trois heures du matin!'.<sup>105</sup> In contrast to her European neighbours lulled into somnolence at this hour of the day, Paris, especially the Paris of the Left Bank and the 'Grands Boulevards' (presumably Boulevard Des Italiens and Boulevard Haussmann), is alert and throbbing with life. From the very first sentence therefore, the unique status of Paris among her contemporary cities is brought to the fore. The capital's vitality is insisted upon in Nouveau's favourite prose decoration (the enumeration) in the opening paragraph of the piece in question:

La nuit, le repos, le temps des songes et  
des rêves sont répandus sur l'Europe,  
Petersbourg dort, Berlin ronfle, Londres  
sommeille, seul Paris veille. La vie s'est  
refugiée ici, la vie intense, louche, dorée,  
nomade, bohème, la vie qui ne veut pas dormir.  
Seul le quartier remue encore, boit, mange,  
aime, se moque des polices, de la morale, de  
l'hygiène, de la pendule et du soleil.

As Paris' life is focused on her centre in the 'quartier' (and by 3 a.m. in the secrecy of buildings rather than out in the streets as in 'La Rue de la Gaîté'), so the life of Europe and the world is focused on Paris. Expanding his concentric vision of reality Nouveau imagines the different cultures and civilizations of the western world represented by America, Ireland and Norway looking and moving towards Paris as their controlling force:

C'est pour ce lieu et pour cette heure,  
qu'à tout instant, du fond de l'Amérique,  
de l'Irlande verte, de la Norvège blanche,  
du bout du monde, un désir, sous une forme

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<sup>105</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.461.

humaine, se met en marche.<sup>106</sup>

Paris' importance is not due to her geographical position or cultural heritage however, but to a particular element or individual to be found there:

les adorateurs de toutes les races, de tous les climats  
de toutes les langues, sont venus offrir leur encens,  
dans ce temple qu'on appelle le cabinet particulier,  
à cette idole parisienne, la "soupeuse".

Clearly a colloquial or fashionable euphemism (as suggested by Nouveau's use of inverted commas), 'soupeuse' is an example of a term with problematic meaning for the modern reader. Jean René Klein in Le Vocabulaire des mœurs de la "Vie parisienne" sous le second Empire helps clarify the situation somewhat through his explanation of 'soupeuse' as 'une sorte de femme galante spécialisée dans l'art de se faire inviter au restaurant'.<sup>107</sup>

She was thus a woman of easy virtue, no doubt akin to Cros' 'Circé' in 'L'Heure verte' who 'court' [...] 'vers des dîners inconnus [...] à travers l'opale/ De la brume du soir'. On certain occasions she would even be paid a bonus by the restaurateur for bringing custom to his establishment. In tune with the euphemistic term 'soupeuse', Nouveau makes only oblique reference to the profane object of his and all Europe's attention. Her boudoir for entertaining clients becomes a 'cabinet particulier' for example. He also makes use of ironic religious terminology for distancing effect: her followers are 'les adorateurs', they offer 'encens' in her 'temple', she is an 'idole parisienne'. The ambiguous tone of the tableau, established in paragraph I, and the aura of mystery surrounding the enigmatic 'soupeuse' dispels as Nouveau observes a secretive female figure (possibly 'la soupeuse' herself) emerging from a restaurant and disappearing into a waiting vehicle:

De temps à autre de l'escalier de marbre d'un restaurant célèbre,  
une forme enveloppée de plis soyeux descend et se fourre, avec  
un claquement sonore de la portière, dans une voiture qui s'ébranle.

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<sup>106</sup> This imagined cosmopolitan pilgrimage revealing Nouveau's personal attachment to Paris is picked up in the following century by Apollinaire whose 'Vendémiaire' of Alcools imagines a similar scene with the nations of Europe invited to pay homage to Paris through the offer of wine.

<sup>107</sup> Jean René Klein, Le Vocabulaire des mœurs de la "Vie parisienne" sous le second Empire, Introduction à l'étude du langage boulevardier (Louvain, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1976), p.101.

As the mysterious woman disappears, Nouveau's attention is centred on the external appearance of the strange night-city around him and he captures for the reader a ghostly scene of empty streets, silent cafés and muffled sounds bearing witness to secret activity behind closed curtains. Contrasting vividly with the chaotic scenes of 'La Rue de la Gaîté' and 'La Rue de la Paix', this subsequent section of 'Les Grands Boulevards', with its stark use of urban décor and often sensual imagery, remains one of the most effective and memorable passages of all Nouveau's city poetry:

La chaussée si bruyante le jour, est déserte,  
silencieuse, par leurs vitres seules fermées,  
on voit l'intérieur noir et vide des cafés.  
Les kiosques à journaux, s'éclairent encore,  
et font penser à une rue du Japon. Un  
mendiant qui aurait l'oreille fine aiguisée par  
le jeûne, pourrait entendre vaguement remuer  
les jetons d'ivoire sur les tables de baccara,  
dans les cercles, dont les rideaux des fenêtres  
en ce moment s'embrasent, tout roses, comme  
des mousselines croisées sur la gorge enflammée  
des valseuses.

The forceful presence of the city and its insistent call to Nouveau's imagination as displayed in this latter extract are due in part, as the poet himself recognises in 'Les Grands Boulevards', to Paris' essential qualities and idiosyncracies being more apparent at night. The streets, for example, hidden by the activity of cabs during the daytime, startle the poet in their emptiness at night by their sinuosity and capricious dimensions: 'leurs côtes brusques et ondoyantes comme les arabesques du coup du fouet.' They are also intensified however in that at night the poet's own mind is also more attuned to appreciate the city's originality:

C'est l'heure où le noctambule se  
délecte aux pensées bizarres que dans  
ce milieu bizarre, la bizarrerie des  
choses vues à travers l'artificiel de  
la vie fait éclore dans son cerveau.



Intuitively thinking of Baudelaire, perhaps of 'A une heure du matin' (Le Spleen de Paris) where this latter poet drowns 'la tyrannie de la face humaine' in a 'bain de ténèbres',<sup>108</sup> or of 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' (from the same collection) where the notion of 'bizarrerie' is also strong, Nouveau makes a rare direct reference to his generation's poetic master in his works. Contemplating the deserted streets of nocturnal Paris (Nouveau's own poetic subject in 'Les Grands Boulevards') our poet recognises in them Baudelaire's source of inspiration too: 'C'est là que Baudelaire trouvait ses rimes fraîches et malades comme l'aube'. He thus draws his last known petit tableau of 1882 to a height in an image of fraternity with his poetic precursor.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Volume 1, p.287.

<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately Nouveau's sense of identity with Baudelaire, though offering a flourish at the end of Nouveau's tableau, does not actually conclude the piece in question. In common with other Petits tableaux parisiens, notably 'Le Square des Batignolles' which ends with the exaggerated and unattractive image of a shrieking train on the chemin de fer de ceinture being compared to a pack of injured dogs, 'Les Grands boulevards' closes on an anticlimax. Here the author focuses on a minor, albeit Parisian poet, Pierre Dupont and his actions and reactions in 'cette heure attendrie et faisandée':

C'est dans cette lueur froide que Pierre  
Dupont, heurtant sur la chaussée un tesson  
de bouteille - peut-être celle qu'il avait  
brisée, - le rangeait avec méthode sur  
le trottoir en disant: "Ça pourrait  
blesser un cheval." Doux mot d'ivrogne  
et de poète, bien à sa place dans  
cette heure attendrie et faisandée.

Though arguably appropriate in that departure from the scene of city poetry occurred on a note of success, Nouveau's abandonment of the urban theme just as he seemed to be both mastering the art of the prose tableau and acknowledging his debts to Baudelaire remains one of the great enigmas of his life and poetry. By the turn of the decade (1879-80) Nouveau had already moved his attention in the realm of verse at least away from the urban theme, concentrating in La Doctrine de l'Amour on spirituality and Roman Catholicism. With the Petits tableaux parisiens of 1882, his treatment of the city in prose also seems to have expired. His subsequent collections, the minor Sonnets de Liban (1884) which rely on the exotic theme and the more important Valentines (October 1885 - April 1887) which praise profane love with as much enthusiasm as La Doctrine de l'Amour had praised divine, both reveal a dearth of urban allusions and suggest that the world of the nineteenth-century French capital and its inhabitants had been permanently displaced from Nouveau's imagination. Despite this sudden abandonment in 1882 and the fact that Nouveau's city poetry on the whole represents a very small proportion of his total output, the poet's offering to the nineteenth-century urban theme is still valid and interesting. Nouveau's contribution is particularly so for if, outside the parodies on Coppée, less than ten poems in verse have a high urban content, the percentage in the prose works is much more striking. All of Nouveau's poèmes en prose as well as the prose tale 'Le Manoeuvrier' are decisively linked to the Parisian environment or its female inhabitants. This reveals a debt to Baudelaire who first sensed the link between the rhythm of city life and that of the prose poem in the preface to his Petits Poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris) and also proves Nouveau's attachments to and imaginative dependence on these two areas of inspiration. In Nouveau's case it is also significant that, like Baudelaire, his city works are in the main highlighted by the use of urban titles: 'Fantaisies parisiennes' in verse, Notes parisiennes and Petits tableaux parisiens in prose. This suggests that Nouveau himself believed these collections possessed qualities distinguishing them from his other compositions;

particularly Parisian qualities or as Nouveau preferred to express it, qualities of 'parisianisme'. For Nouveau this unique characteristic of 'parisianisme' resided, and was apprehended by the poet, partly in the enigmatic and entrancing figure of the Parisienne (subject of the Notes parisiennes), partly in the capital's cosmopolitan vitality and picturesque potential as displayed in the Petits tableaux parisiens. These two themes were expressed in Nouveau's city poetry as they coincided with his personal experience rather than vague literary affection. They can be traced back to the Parisian works of the early 1870s. Nouveau's 'Hier, par une après-midi' (1873), for example, though having affinities with Baudelaire's 'A une Passante' is probably also rooted in Nouveau's observations of Paris and certainly reveals his personal, fascinated yet deferential attitude towards one of the city's female inhabitants as well as an early appreciation of the urban scene as a pictorial 'tableau mouvant'. 'Retour' (1873) may similarly recall a Baudelaire poem ('Le Soleil) in its content or draw on Coppée's banlieue verse for its setting, but nevertheless it is pure Nouveau in its final tableau scene with the towers of Notre-Dame outlined against the grey Parisian sky. Finally, Nouveau's 'Dizain (sérieux celui-là)', though stylistically in the mould of Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs and thematically a precursor of Verlaine's stylized 'Parisien mon frère', is also directly influenced in its attitude towards Paris by real events in Nouveau's life. That series of unsettling moves between province and capital marking Nouveau's childhood was important, as was the fact that the poet was probably away from Paris when he actually composed the piece.

In the key collections of the Notes parisiennes and the Petits tableaux parisiens Nouveau's personal involvement with, and individualistic treatment of the Parisian objects of his attention are equally apparent. First intimated in the poet's stance of mute and humble adoration before the posed and eminently Parisian figure of Madame Nina de Villard, Nouveau's own attitude to the Parisienne in general is crucial to his evocations of these fickle and enigmatic women. They effectively become inspirational muses in the Notes parisiennes and also the focus of probably the most lyrical of all his city compositions. Though initially springing from awe and timidity in his approach to women in general, Nouveau's deferential self-effacing treatment of the Parisienne also rested on his conception of her as the human epitome of an urban society he found equally intimidating on occasions. Nouveau expressed his own feeling of embarrassment

before these entrancing but profane female figures through isolated male characters projected into the text in the Notes parisiennes. In 'Mendiants' (1875) however, in tune with this piece's more bitter tone, the poet employs a 'je' figure to convey his feelings of intense disillusionment with the unsuccessful love experience he undergoes with one of these worldly females. To equate the 'je' of 'Mendiants' with the poet himself is but a small step, especially because this poem, where Nouveau flees from the profane female figure, is virtually his last with relevance for the city theme in verse. It also marks the final treatment of the Parisienne theme as it had occurred in the Notes parisiennes.

The theme of parisianisme or the uniqueness of Paris in the Petits tableaux parisiens is linked largely with the theme of urban décor. It is given particularly personal relevance by Nouveau through the wide and varied choice of objects for his attention in this collection (which were compatible with his own 'âme contradictoire') and through the modes of expression used to convey them which rely primarily on his own artistic talents as an observer and painter of real scenes around him. Least successful of the Petits tableaux parisiens are those which stray furthest from the expressly picturesque nature of the collection or those wherein Nouveau's limited inventive capacity comes into play to produce a piece far removed from the actual circumstances of nineteenth-century Paris. Most representative of the Petits tableaux parisiens are those such as 'Au Père-Lachaise', 'L'Hôtel de Ville', 'Le Square des Batignolles' and 'L'Avenue de l'Observatoire' where Nouveau both satisfies his personal penchant for idiosyncratic visual detail by keen observation and also attempts to display the city as a 'poème en pierre' through lyrical, often sensuous imagery used in its evocation. Most successful of the Petits tableaux parisiens however, are those where the poet throws Paris's kaleidoscopic variety and cosmopolitanism into full relief by the use of areas wherein the city's essence was, in the nineteenth century and to some extent remains today, most apparent. In 'La Rue de la Paix', 'La Rue de la Gaîté' and 'Les Grands Boulevards', Nouveau embraces key themes of his city poetry and of literature in general: urban décor, inhabitants, the theatre, the Parisienne, night and the cosmos. He fully revels in the 'joie parisienne pure' which his poetry has been able to reveal.

The changes of emphasis in Nouveau's career from verse to prose, from Parisian people to the Parisian scene and finally from the city theme to those of divine and profane love, though assisted by the passage of time,

are also symptomatic of Nouveau's often contradictory poetic and personal constitution which provides the paradoxically unifying thread for his poetry. This 'étrange existence'<sup>110</sup> while offering numerous frustrations for the modern reader has nevertheless provided a constant subject of fascination for the present author in as much as it reflects on Nouveau's treatment of the city theme in poetry. In that it gives Nouveau's works as a whole an intangibility and originality among his contemporaries it also demands response from the general reader, for as J.H. Bornecque suggests in the final line of his perceptive article on Nouveau in an image of which the poet would undoubtedly have approved: 'toute vie intéressante n'est-elle pas un jeu de miroirs, comme toute vraie poésie?'<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Art.cit. Bornecque, p.5.

<sup>111</sup>Art.cit. Bornecque, p.5.

## CHAPTER 5

### ARTHUR RIMBAUD: PROVINCIAL SATIRE TO METROPOLITAIN VISION

Apart from Coppée, Arthur Rimbaud is the only member of the group of five poets whose works have previously been studied in depth with the city theme in mind. Unlike Coppée's work, however, Rimbaud's poetry is privileged in having received such attention in recent years and from contemporary scholars. Their keen interest has been expressed in a variety of ways ranging from short articles on individual city poems to lengthier, detailed studies considering the urban theme in general and necessitating comments on a wider selection of compositions. One might mention M. Spencer's article on 'Métropolitain' (1968),<sup>1</sup> and Rolland Mortier's on 'Promontoire' (1970),<sup>2</sup> as well as Jean-Luc Steinmetz's contribution to Volume II of Littérature which isolates the theme of 'urbanisme'.<sup>3</sup> M.J. Whitaker's

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<sup>1</sup> M. Spencer, 'A Fresh Look at Rimbaud's 'Métropolitain'', The Modern Language Review, 63 (1968), pp.849-53.

<sup>2</sup> Rolland Mortier, 'Deux rêveries devant le Promontoire: Hugo et Rimbaud', Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de langue et de littérature françaises, 3-4 (1970), pp.123-35.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Steinmetz, 'Ici maintenant les Illuminations', Littérature (Revue trimestrielle), II (October 1973), pp.22-45.

and Nathaniel Wing's studies on Rimbaud in 1972 and 1974, contain chapters on 'la ville' and 'The Metropolitan Poems' respectively.<sup>4</sup> Probably the most detailed examinations of the theme have been undertaken by C.A. Hackett in 'Rimbaud and the "Splendides Villes"' (1969),<sup>5</sup> by Francine Fénélon in 'Le Thème de la ville dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud' (1971)<sup>6</sup> and most recently E.J. Ahearn in 'Imagination and the real, Rimbaud and the city' (1973).<sup>7</sup> Two main points emerge from a reading of these very different critical studies: firstly, the debate as to which of Rimbaud's poems can justifiably be classed as urban, secondly, the lack of common ground as to what specific end Rimbaud was employing the city landscape in these particular poems.

As regards the first question, total agreement among the critical ranks is difficult to find. Though the 'ville' series of Illuminations<sup>8</sup> occupies a central position fairly consistently in discussions of the city poetry,<sup>9</sup> this basic list is augmented by individual authors in support of their arguments à propos the urban theme. Most frequent supplementary allusions are to 'Ouvriers' (referred to by Nathaniel Wing, Wallace Fowlie<sup>10</sup> and Pierre Guiraud<sup>11</sup>), to 'Enfance' (mentioned by Wallace Fowlie and W.M. Frohock,<sup>12</sup>), to 'Ornières' and 'Barbare', (classed as urban by Wallace

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<sup>4</sup>M.J. Whitaker, La structure du monde imaginaire de Rimbaud (Paris, Nizet, 1972), pp.167-177. Nathaniel Wing, Present Appearances: Aspects of Poetic Structure in Rimbaud's Illuminations (Mississippi, Romance Monographs Inc., 1974), pp.95-111.

<sup>5</sup>C.A. Hackett, 'Rimbaud and the "Splendides Villes"', L'Esprit créateur, 9 (1969), pp.46-53.

<sup>6</sup>Francine Fénélon, 'Le Thème de la ville dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud' (mémoire de maîtrise, University of Paris, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>E.J. Ahearn, 'Imagination and the real, Rimbaud and the city', Revue de littérature comparée (Oct.-Dec. 1973), pp.521-544.

<sup>8</sup>'Ville', 'Villes' ('Ce sont des villes!'), 'Villes' ('L'Acropole officielle'), 'Les Ponts', 'Promontoire', 'Métropolitain'.

<sup>9</sup>An exception to this rule is possibly Laus Nielsen who, in 'L'anti-conte, chez Rimbaud à travers quelques-unes des Illuminations', Revue romaine, IV (1969), pp.61-82, omits 'Promontoire' from the city section linking it with the journey theme in the section of 'Poèmes sur la Nature'.

<sup>10</sup>W. Fowlie, Rimbaud's Illuminations (London, Harvill Press, 1953), pp.95-110.

<sup>11</sup>Pierre Guiraud, 'L'Evolution statistique du style de Rimbaud', Mercure de France, 1094 (1 Oct. 1954), pp.201-34.

<sup>12</sup>W.M. Frohock, Rimbaud's poetic practice (Harvard U.P., 1963), p.200.

Fowlie) and 'Vagabonds' (included in the London series by Nick Osmond<sup>13</sup>). Apart from E.J. Ahearn, who prefers to concentrate on the prose poems, the more detailed studies of Rimbaud and the city theme embrace Rimbaud's early compositions and Une Saison en Enfer as well as the more popular of the city Illuminations. In the case of F. Fénélon and C.A. Hackett a clear chronological or thematic division between the three stages of Rimbaud's career is established. Mlle Fénélon distinguishes a crescendo of urbanism linking the eras of 'Charleville', ('A la musique'), 'Paris la Cité Sainte', (illustrated by 'Le Forgeron', 'Chant de guerre parisien' and 'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple'), 'La Grand'Ville' ('Ouvriers', 'Les Effarés', and the section beginning 'Bétail de misère', from Une Saison en Enfer) and 'Les Splendides Villes' ('Villes' I and II,<sup>14</sup> 'Métropolitain', 'Promontoire' and 'Les Ponts'). C.A. Hackett separates the Poésies, Illuminations, and Une Saison en Enfer, as they illustrate Rimbaud's treatment of the dual theme of nature and the city. The first collection underlines the contrast between the countryside and the city (Hackett refers to 'Soleil et chair', 'L'Orgie parisienne', 'Le Forgeron', 'Les Reparties de Nina', 'A la musique' and 'Les Poètes de sept ans'). The second creates a precarious harmony between the two motifs by reordering their antitheses into coherent patterns (examples are taken from 'Villes' I and II, 'Métropolitain', 'Les Ponts', 'Enfance', 'Promontoire' and 'Soir'). The third stage represents the conflict and disappearance of this dual theme with Hackett's examples taken from Une Saison en Enfer.

This wide variation of opinion as to what exactly can be classed as Rimbaud's city poetry is matched by the vastly differing interpretations of the final meaning of these urban pieces. Some critics, struck by the chaotic imagery of the Illuminations, especially emphasise the hallucinatory and futuristic dimension of this particular manifestation of the city theme. Paterné Berrichon, for example, one of Rimbaud's earliest apologists, has described 'Villes' I as a 'hallucination synthétique' and a 'vision prophétique'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nick Osmond, Arthur Rimbaud: Illuminations, Athlone French Poets (University of London, Athlone Press, 1976), p.22.

<sup>14</sup> 'Villes' I and 'Villes' II refer to 'Villes' ('Ce sont des villes!') and 'Villes' ('L'Acropole officielle') respectively. 'Villes' I and 'Villes' II will be used as reference forms for these two poems in our discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Paterné Berrichon, 'Rimbaud en Belgique et à Londres', Mercure de France 92 (16 July 1911), 225-48 (p.227).



Similarly, Jacques Plessen, writing several generations later, referred to the same poem as 'une [...] de ces constructions architecturales absurdes, hallucinantes, surréalistes'.<sup>16</sup> In a more general sense, W. Fowlie has alluded to Rimbaud's 'cities of the future',<sup>17</sup> while Luc Decaunes has described the poet as an 'ingénieur dressant les plans d'un univers futur'.<sup>18</sup> The proliferation of unrealistic elements in some of the city Illuminations has led other readers to the view that Rimbaud's city landscapes are totally divorced from the substantial world and have primarily a symbolic value. Hence M.J. Whitaker's conclusion that 'La ville des Illuminations est [...] l'état même du poète représenté comme structure symbolique',<sup>19</sup> or A.J. Ahearn's (in an article on Rimbaud and Wordsworth) that Rimbaud's city imagery is 'expressive of the poet's inner world'.<sup>20</sup> Such purely symbolic explanations, based for the most part on readings of the more opaque city Illuminations, cannot however be applied with equal justification to all of Rimbaud's urban poetry. Rimbaud's early verse poems especially cannot be described as 'purement imaginaires',<sup>21</sup> since they are doubly anchored in the real world. Not only are they indebted to the works of fellow poets and journalists in terms of form and imagery as we will illustrate, but they are also heavily dependent, as regards subject matter and contemporary allusions, to specific events occurring in the French capital in 1871. Similarly, a work such as 'Bruxelles' (the most commonly ignored or dismissed of all Rimbaud's city poems) has also discernible links with a particular mimetic model. Written in and about a real city, as opposed to the elusive and nameless 'villes' of the Illuminations and Une Saison en Enfer, the hermetic quality of this piece can be slowly penetrated by first-hand knowledge of the geographical area Rimbaud had in mind when writing. As fairly clear allusions to known social and political reality can be traced in poems like 'Chant de guerre parisien',

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Plessen, Promenade et Poésie (l'expérience de la marche et du mouvement dans l'oeuvre de Rimbaud) (Paris, Mouton, 1967), p.209.

<sup>17</sup> W. Fowlie, p.95.

<sup>18</sup> Luc Decaunes, 'Arthur Rimbaud ou le Jules Verne de la poésie', Cahiers du Sud, 295 (1er semestre 1949), 495-506, (p.503).

<sup>19</sup> Whitaker, p.167.

<sup>20</sup> E.J. Ahearn, 'The childlike sensibility. A study of Wordsworth and Rimbaud', Revue de littérature comparée, 42 (April-June 1968) 234-256, (p.252).

<sup>21</sup> P. Guiraud, p.222.

'L'Orgie parisienne' and 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie', and yet in other works (such as 'Bruxelles', certain Illuminations and sections of Une Saison en Enfer) realistic elements alternate with obscure and esoteric detail, this suggests a complexity of approach in Rimbaud's city poetry marking it out from that of his contemporaries. A detailed exploration of Rimbaud's developing attitude towards, and use of the city in the forms of Paris, Brussels and London is the object of the pages to follow.

Rimbaud's first flirtations with the city theme (occurring in his earliest derivative pieces) do not unfortunately extend beyond brief mentions of 'ville', 'cité' and so on. Into this category fall the reference to the 'splendides cités' of antiquity in 'Soleil et chair' (written in early 1870), which are implicitly contrasted with the cities of the nineteenth century. The Parisian allusions to 'La Bastille' and 'Les Tuileries' and the use of the crowd motif in 'Le Forgeron' (also early 1870) might also be mentioned. The brief nature of these allusions points to second-hand knowledge of the city scene on Rimbaud's part at this stage. In fact Rimbaud's information probably came from his reading, or was drawn from history and geography lessons at school.<sup>22</sup> Even at this early stage, however, Rimbaud's desire for personal contact with the city, even if only on a very tentative level, was gaining momentum. Encouraged by the enviable success he enjoyed at the age of fifteen with 'Les Etrennes des Orphelins' (published in La Revue pour tous, 2 January 1870), by 24 May of the same year Rimbaud was setting his sights on the broader literary horizons offered by Paris and Le Parnasse contemporain. His hopeful letter to Théodore de Banville on this date (in which were enclosed 'Soleil et chair', 'Sensation' and 'Ophélie') brought a reply from the master, though disappointingly no promise of publication. It marked the début of Rimbaud's serious Parisian literary ambitions ('Anch'io messieurs du journal je serai Parnassien'). It also pointed to an early desire for liberation from Charleville ('Dans deux ans, dans un an peut-être je serai à Paris').<sup>23</sup> In

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<sup>22</sup> Among his other academic successes for 1869 Rimbaud received first prize for history and geography in the concours académique.

<sup>23</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.236.

that it illustrated vividly Rimbaud's increasing disenchantment with the provinces and growing attachment to the city as represented by Paris, the period between this first letter of Banville and Verlaine's communication of September 1871 (containing the now famous phrase 'Venez chère grande âme, on vous appelle, on vous attend')<sup>24</sup> is crucial to Rimbaud's formation as a city poet and therefore deserves careful study and analysis.

Before Rimbaud's first actual visit to Paris (an abortive mission in August 1870 which ended in his detention at Mazas prison for failing to produce a valid railway ticket) the young poet had been mentally severing links with his now detested native town. The vaguely hopeful desire of escape from Charleville expressed in his letter to Banville on 24 May 1870, had become by August of that year a vehement attack directed against the constrictive physical and mental environment of his provincial surroundings. 'Ma ville natale' he explains in a letter of 25 August to his ex-teacher Georges Izambard, 'est supérieurement idiote entre toutes les petites villes de province'.<sup>25</sup> Rimbaud's contempt is based on three points. Firstly, Charleville's position as a geographical nonentity irritates him, 'elle est à côté de Mézières - une ville qu'on ne trouve pas'. Secondly, her population of geriatric military volunteers he finds despicable:

C'est effrayant, les épiciers retraités  
qui revêtent l'uniforme! C'est  
épatant, comme ça a du chien;  
les notaires, les vitriers, les percepteurs,  
les memuisiers, et tous les ventres,  
qui, chassepot au coeur, font du  
patrouillotisme aux portes de Mézières;  
ma patrie se lève! ... Moi, j'aime  
mieux la voir assise; ne remuez pas  
les bottes! C'est mon principe.

Lastly and most importantly for a young poet, her status as a literary desert, rendered more intense by the effects of the Franco-Prussian war, is odious.

Je suis dépaycé, malade, furieux,  
bête, renversé; ... j'espérais surtout  
des journaux, des livres... Rien!  
Rien! Le courrier n'envoie plus rien

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<sup>24</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.261.

<sup>25</sup>Letter to Izambard on 25 August 1870, Rimbaud, O.C., p.238.

aux libraires; Paris se moque de nous  
joliment: pas un seul livre nouveau!  
c'est la mort. [...] On est exilé  
dans sa patrie!!!

Rimbaud's feelings of alienation in the society of Charleville voiced here in prose, are echoed in the verse poem of 1870 'A la musique',<sup>26</sup> where the obsessive squareness and regularity of the 'Place de la gare', reinforces the conservatism of its inhabitants and threatens to close in on the poet like a cage:

Sur la place taillée en mesquines pelouses,  
Square où tout est correct, les arbres et les fleurs,  
Tous les bourgeois poussifs qu'étranglent les chaleurs  
Portent, les jeudis soirs, leurs bêtises jalouses.<sup>27</sup>

At this stage Rimbaud's sardonic wit (displayed in the abrasive evocations of Charleville's bourgeoisie as the 'clubs d'épiciers retraités/Qui tisonnent le sable avec leur canne à pomme', and as the 'officieux cornacs,/Celles dont les volants ont des airs de réclames') provided an escape valve for his mental frustrations as the company of the 'alertes fillettes' compensated for his profound boredom. No such possible relief is suggested in the second important letter to Izambard on 2 November 1870 however. This was written after the first flight to Paris which, though unsuccessful, strengthened Rimbaud's resolve to escape definitively from the 'maison maternelle'.<sup>28</sup> The letter exudes dissatisfaction with, and hatred for the pathological inertia of Charleville described as 'la platitude', 'la mauvaiseté' and 'la grisaille'.<sup>29</sup> Ironic comment has turned to bitterness as Rimbaud sums up the town's inhabitants ('Abominable prurigo d'idiotisme, tel est l'esprit de la population'<sup>30</sup>) and also regrets his diminishing spiritual as well as physical independence. No longer is Charleville's flatness simply odious in itself, but it has

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<sup>26</sup> This poem is probably contemporary with Rimbaud's letter to Izambard on account of the repetition of words and phrases in the two texts: 'épiciers retraités', 'épater', 'notaires' for example.

<sup>27</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.21.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Izambard, 5 September 1870, Rimbaud, O.C., p.240.

<sup>29</sup> 'Les Assis', a poem evoking the sedentary bibliothécaires of Charleville (and indirectly criticising the whole of the town's passive population) is also of this period.

<sup>30</sup> Rimbaud, O.C. pp.245-6.

become a threat to his poetic integrity. 'Je me décompose', he says and 'c'est dissolvant '. The notion of sterility implied here also suggests that by November 1870, life in Charleville and the Ardennes no longer sufficed on its own as an inspirational source for Rimbaud's verse. The poet's decisive rejection of his earliest works composed in Charleville (effected in the letter of 10 June 1871 to Paul Demeny) reinforces the fact that between November 1870 and June 1871 especially, a vast reservoir of new material had presented itself to the poet. This new source of subject matter was clearly tied to the city to which Rimbaud had been briefly introduced between 29 August and 5 September 1870 and to which he reaffirmed his commitment in early 1871 by a second trip to Paris and a series of poems inspired by this séjour. These poems, including notably 'Chant de guerre parisien', 'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple', 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' (and 'Le Coeur volé'), reveal a clear difference in form and content from Rimbaud's previous verse. They also illustrate in varying degrees the poet's progressively growing awareness of the city as a literary and political force.

Rimbaud's first mental linking of Paris and his own poetic aspirations as we have shown occurred in his letter to Banville in May 1870. At this stage the distant city conjured up in Rimbaud's provincial imagination was a literary Utopia peopled wholly by editors, poets, 'parnassiens', 'maîtres' and 'messieurs du journal'.<sup>31</sup> In Rimbaud's first actual visit to Paris (which significantly coincided with the proclamation of the republic on 4 September 1870) the capital's political dimension was also brought to the fore. More central to developing Rimbaud's enthusiasm for the city from both points of view however, was his second more lengthy stay in pre-Commune Paris, from 25 February to 10 March 1871. As Rimbaud's letter to Paul Demeny from Charleville on 17 April 1871 reveals, this stay added a spark of reality to Rimbaud's dreams of a literary future by giving him desperately needed contact with a living poetic environment. 'Causons Paris',<sup>32</sup> he says and proceeds to give an account of the collections and works glimpsed in publishers' windows or actually read during his fortnight in the capital. In addition to the more popular pieces (including François Coppée's 'Lettre d'un mobile breton' and Mendès' 'Colère d'un Franco-tireur'), Rimbaud also significantly mentions a series of articles

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<sup>31</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.236.

<sup>32</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.247.

in socialist newspapers which had come to his attention and which betray a keen interest in the political situation of Paris hovering between siege and Commune. These 'choses du jour', as Rimbaud calls them, were sections of Henri Rochefort's radical publication Le Mot d'ordre and 'les fantaisies admirables de Vallès et de Vermersch au Cri du peuple which were lyrical passages of political invective designed to stir up revolutionary ardour in the hearts of the Parisian populace. That Rimbaud was particularly susceptible to their rhetoric is clear from a reading of his early Parisian poems, 'Chant de guerre parisien', and 'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple' in particular.<sup>33</sup> Both of these poems include political and social details accessible to a provincial visitor to Paris by means of the popular newspapers. Their echoes of journalistic vocabulary point especially to Le Cri du peuple and Le Mot d'ordre.

'Chant de guerre parisien' was written before 15 May 1871 when it was sent in a letter (the letter which has since been termed the 'lettre du voyant') to Paul Demeny. By virtue of its title, the piece indicates a second source of inspiration in the form of a Coppée poem from the collection Poèmes divers entitled 'Chant de guerre circassien'.<sup>34</sup> The form of this latter poem, eight stanzas composed of four octosyllabic lines, is exactly matched by that of Rimbaud's. In general terms too the opening stanzas of the two poems are very similar, both equating the commencement of hostilities with the re-awakening of the natural world after winter. In the Coppée poem:

Avril est la saison des grêles,  
Et les balles vont le prouver.

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<sup>33</sup>The significance of Paris as a catalyst in Rimbaud's imagination is underlined by the use of 'Paris' and 'parisien' in the titles of these poems. In the letter to Paul Demeny of 15 May 1871 Rimbaud also mentions 'Amants de Paris' and 'Mort de Paris' two lengthy poems which appear to have been lost.

<sup>34</sup>Rimbaud's interest in Coppée is shown by a reference to him in the 'lettre du voyant' as one of 'les talents'. Also, early Rimbaud poems such as 'Les Effarés' show Coppée's influence in choice of subject and ironic ending. A poem such as 'Dans la rue' of Les Humbles, for example, might have offered inspiration to Rimbaud in his youth.

Les neiges ont fini leurs fontes,  
Les champs sont verts d'épis nouveaux;  
Mettons les pistolets aux fontes  
Et les harnais d'or aux chevaux.<sup>35</sup>

and in the Rimbaud:

Le Printemps est évident, car  
Du cœur des Propriétés vertes,  
Le vol de Thiers et de Picard  
Tient ses splendeurs grandes ouvertes!

O Mai! quels délirants culs-nus!  
Sèvres, Meudon, Bagneux, Asnières,  
Ecoutez donc les bienvenus  
Semer les choses printanières!<sup>36</sup>

Here, however, the similarity ends for whereas Coppée is describing war preparations in a far off country and sprinkles his poem with exotic names: 'Volga', 'Baskirs', 'Caucase', 'Astracan', 'turc' and so on in an attempt to create local colour, the Rimbaud poem is firmly anchored in contemporary reality. No longer is his inspiration being sought in the ancient myths of 'Vénus', 'Pan', 'Cybèle', 'Astarté', 'Zeus' or 'Léda' as in 'Soleil et chair', or even in imagined past history as in 'Le Forgeron', but rather, for the first time, in the current political life surrounding and affecting him. Rimbaud insists on the originality of this latter point in the introduction to the poem which begins the famous letter to Demy,

J'ai résolu de vous donner une heure de littérature  
nouvelle, je commence de suite par un psaume  
d'actualité.<sup>37</sup>

The contemporaneity of 'Chant de guerre parisien' is evident in Rimbaud's replacement of Coppée's exotic proper and place names by the immediately recognisable faces of Parisian politics brought to his own attention through a reading of the pre-Commune press. In stanza I of the poem, Thiers (chef de la république and leader of the reaction against the Commune ideal) relaxes with Picard (his Minister of the Interior) in the greenery of the Parisian banlieue ('Du cœur des Propriétés vertes'). They are

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<sup>35</sup>Coppée, Poésies, 1864-1869, p.63.

<sup>36</sup>Rimbaud, O.C. p.39.

<sup>37</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.249.

awaiting the strategic moment to strike back at the capital.<sup>38</sup> Their army ('le vol') of Versaillais, blossoms out triumphantly like a flower opened in springtime. Favre (Thiers' Minister for Foreign Affairs who was present at the signing of the January armistice with the Prussians) is also depicted in lines 22-4. He is almost in the stance of 'Le Dormeur du val', who has 'les pieds dans les glaïeuls', as he weeps crocodile tears for Paris and her inhabitants:

Et couché dans les glaïeuls, Favre  
Fait son cillement aqueduc,  
Et ses reniflements à poivre!

This obscure detail of false tears, repeated twice by Rimbaud in 'cillement aqueduc' and 'reniflements à poivre', did not spring independently to his imagination but was an idea undeniably suggested by his readings of the Parisian newspapers. In Le Mot d'ordre 4 March 1871, a short paragraph accuses the government of practising 'la politique des larmes'. Similarly on the same day in Le Cri du peuple, a commentary on the victorious Prussian march through the streets of Paris reveals that 'M. Thiers a fondu en larmes'. Moreover, Favre is linked to this persistent motif in the same edition of Le Cri du peuple in an arousing article by Vermersch entitled 'Les larmes de crocodile':

Les crocodiles sont au pouvoir: j'en atteste  
le flot de leurs larmes qui, des Tuileries et  
de l'Hôtel de Ville, a coulé à Ferrières et  
détrempe maintenant jusqu'au macadam de  
Bordeaux.  
Après Trochu et Favre, vient le tour du  
petit Thiers.

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<sup>38</sup> Both Thiers and Picard were regular butts of irony in Le Mot d'ordre and Le Cri du peuple. In Le Mot d'ordre of 25 February 1871, Thiers comes in for severe criticism from Eugène Mourot who makes the following claim in an article entitled 'M. Thiers, Homme d'état':

M. Thiers serait certainement, si M. Jules Favre n'était pas là, le plus misérable homme d'Etat de notre siècle; je dis bien, le plus misérable et le plus méprisable.

In Le Cri du peuple on 4 March 1871 (during Rimbaud's stay in Paris) Picard is ridiculed by Vermersch in comic terminology which Rimbaud as a satirical exposé of Charleville's bourgeoisie would no doubt have appreciated. Picard is described as 'ministre corpulent', a 'truculent ministre des finances' whose political ineffectiveness is displayed in physical form: 'le ventre de Picard est un signe du temps'.



Leurs yeux sont métamorphosés en  
fontaines, des cascades tombent entre  
leurs cils, et cela couvre déjà l'Alsace  
et la Lorraine, qui disparaissent sous  
cette inondation.<sup>39</sup>

As Coppée's 'Baskirs' of the 'Chant de guerre circassien' are replaced by Rimbaud's 'Ruraux' (as epitomised by Thiers, Picard and Favre) so his vague geographical references become in Rimbaud's poem real names of the Parisian banlieue: 'Bagneux', 'Asnières', 'Sèvres' and 'Meudon' (line 6). Asnières was significant, being bombed by the ruraux in April 1871 (Rimbaud mentions 'les choses printanières' in line 8, 'les jaunes cabochons' in line 15 and 'vos douches de pétrole' in line 26, in this respect).<sup>40</sup> Sèvres and Meudon, south-west and south-east of Paris respectively, were important in their positioning in relation to Versailles. A lively linguistic approach also combines with the political and social immediacy of the poem to contribute to its originality. Use is made of colloquialisms, neologisms and word play. The 'culs-mus' of line 5 and the verb 'bambocher' of line 9 are words from everyday conversation serving instead of traditional poetic vocabulary. 'Aqueduc', of line 23, is an example of a noun used adjectivally, while 'hamnetonner' of line 20 ('Voici hamnetonner leurs tropes') is a verb derived from the noun 'hamneton'. Its suggestion of insectile destruction of vegetation conveys well the insidious creeping forward of the Versaillais army ('leurs tropes' being no doubt a corruption of troupes) crushing the flower of the resistance ('les héliotropes' of line 18) in its path:

Thiers et Picard sont des Eros,  
Des enleveurs d'héliotropes;  
Au pétrole ils font des Corots  
Voici hamnetonner leurs tropes...

Ils sont familiers du Grand Truc!...

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<sup>39</sup> It is likely that Rimbaud's attention was drawn to this article as it followed a report on the bombardment of Mézières which would certainly have caught his eye.

<sup>40</sup> In Le Cri du peuple of 3 May 1871 reference is made to petrol bombs being used on Paris by the Versaillais.

Word play appears in the first two lines of both of these stanzas. 'Thiers et Picard sont des Eros', as Antoine Adam suggests, could give auditorily the sense of 'des héros', meant no doubt ironically,<sup>41</sup> or possibly, as J. Gengoux believes, 'des zéros', probably a more apt description of the two to Rimbaud's mind.<sup>42</sup> The 'Grand Truc' of stanza VI is an anagram of Coppée's 'turc' rather than, as Antoine Adam claims, an obscure reference to God.<sup>43</sup> This last example, significantly illustrating how Rimbaud borrows Coppée's poetic form yet deliberately turns his poem's content on its head, reveals clearly his own change of emphasis, away from out-moded poetic material in 'Chant de guerre parisien'. Emphasis has especially moved away from the natural world and the poet's personal response to it (as expressed in earlier poems such as 'Sensation') towards an evocation of the contemporary city, 'la Grand'Ville', and its wider political relevance for the future. This point is underlined by the threatening use of a future tense in the last stanza of 'Chant de guerre parisien',

Et les Ruraux qui se prélassent  
Dans de longs accroupissements,  
Entendront des rameaux qui cassent  
Parmi les rouges froissements!

Rimbaud's reference to 'Ruraux' though tied especially to the situation of communard Paris, also hints at the distinction between country and city which was invading his imagination in the early months of 1871. Since 'Chant de guerre parisien' was composed in Charleville, Rimbaud's description of 'les Ruraux' as slow and lazy ('qui se prélassent') and politically constipated ('Dans de longs accroupissements') could equally well refer to the inhabitants of his native town.

The suggestion of hope for the future through revolution, conveyed in the ominous details of the last lines of 'Chant de guerre parisien' ('des rameaux qui cassent', 'les rouges froissements'), also emerges very

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<sup>41</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.882.

<sup>42</sup> J. Gengoux, La Pensée poétique de Rimbaud (Paris, Nizet, 1950), p.274. Suzanne Bernard agrees with M. Gengoux on this point. See Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, Nizet, 1959), p.390.

<sup>43</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.887.

strongly from 'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple'. This latter poem was also ostensibly composed under the influence of Rimbaud's experience in the capital in February to March 1871, but unfortunately there exists no manuscript version of it in Rimbaud's own hand.<sup>44</sup> The Paris Rimbaud arrived at in late February 1871, was one reeling from the dual blow of the Franco-Prussian war and the siege. It was a city virtually drained of resistance and low in self-confidence after a crushing armistice and the demoralising sight of Prussian troops marching in triumph through the boulevards. Nevertheless, it was also a capital at a crossroads in its political history, a city capable of creating its own destiny through social revolution. In the opening lines of 'L'Orgie parisienne', Rimbaud appears to combine his own reactions at seeing Paris in this light with those of the returning Parisians who had fled from their homes during wartime and <sup>to</sup> whom he refers in the poem's first words as the 'lâches':

O lâches, la voilà! Dégorgez dans les gares!

Le soleil essuya de ses poumons ardents

Les boulevards qu'un soir comblèrent les Barbares.

Voilà la Cité sainte, assise à l'occident!<sup>45</sup>

The city's unique potential for the future (suggested in the image of purification in line 2) and its appearance as a promised land ('la Cité sainte') are however contradicted by the bitterness of repressed anger and irony conveyed in the exclamations of this first stanza and of the one to follow. In stanza II, the poorer inhabitants of Paris forced, or committed to remain in Paris during the siege, appear to greet their returning, more timorous compatriots with scarcely veiled contempt:

Allez! on prévientra les reflux d'incendie,

Voilà les quais, voilà les boulevards, voilà

Les maisons sur l'azur léger qui s'irradie

Et qu'un soir la rougeur des bombes étoila!

By their references to 'reflux d'incendie' and 'la rougeur des bombes' they belie the idyllic and apparently unchanged physical appearance of Paris ('Voilà les quais, voilà les boulevards, voilà/Les maisons sur l'azur léger qui s'irradie') which their experience of war and siege has taught them

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<sup>44</sup>The text for 'L'Orgie parisienne', fragments of which were first published in Lutèce 2-9 November 1883, appears to have been reconstructed from memory by Verlaine.

<sup>45</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.47.

can never be the same again. Now what is important to their minds, is to forget about past decadence before the war ('Cachez les palais morts dans des niches de planches', line 9) and to concentrate on the re-building of a new Paris made possible by the undermining of the Ancien Régime during hostilities (the 'ancien jour effaré', of line 10). The actions of the returning 'lâches' and 'Vainqueurs',<sup>46</sup> however, work against the establishment of this new social order as they attempt to recreate their former lifestyles in the now dramatically changed circumstances of Paris. The women, especially, are criticised as personifying the corruption of past decades, their opulence and their sensual pleasure. The animalistic reference and the suggestions of disease in line 13 ('Tas de chiennes en rut mangeant des cataplasmes') show effectively the depth of the poet's contempt for these figures who, immediately back in the capital, resume their frivolous habits by frequenting the 'maisons d'or' (that is expensive shops or luxurious restaurants) and by pursuing their own erotic pleasures:

Voici le troupeau roux des tordeuses de hanches:

Soyez fous, vous serez drôles, étant hagards!

Tas de chiennes en rut mangeant des cataplasmes,

Le cri des maisons d'or vous réclame - Volez!

Mangez! Voici la nuit de joie aux profonds spasmes

Qui descend dans la rue. O buveurs désolés,

Buvez!

[...]

Avalez, pour la Reine aux fesses cascadantes!

Ecoutez l'action des stupides hoquets

Déchirants! Ecoutez sauter aux nuits ardentes

Les idiots râleurs, vieillards, pantins, laquais!

The section of the poem to which these lines belong (stanzas III-VIII) is marked by a rhetorical tone established in part through the repeated use of imperatives

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<sup>46</sup> Antoine Adam suggests that these 'Vainqueurs' to whom Rimbaud refers in line 28 represent those Parisian inhabitants who by dint of their compliance with the Prussian troops effectively aligned themselves with the victorious army. See Rimbaud, O.C., p.893.

many of which have alimentary connotations ('mangez', 'buvez', 'avalez' for example) and through images of proliferation ('luxes ruisselants', 'fesses cascadantes'). They heighten the poet's distaste for a class of society merely concerned with its own physical well-being and so selfish and rapacious that it is distracted from the danger signs of revolution and surrounding social change.<sup>47</sup> The warning signs to which they are deaf are the rattle of gunfire, ('l'action de stupides hoquets/Déchirants', lines 22-3) and the blaze of petrol bombs ('nuits ardentes' of line 23). Both threaten the possible destruction of the 'fous', 'buveurs désolés', 'idiots râleux', 'vieillards', 'pantins' and 'laquais' described in vivid detail by Rimbaud in stanzas IX-XI.<sup>48</sup>

Le Poète vous dit: "O lâches, soyez fous!

Parce que vous fouillez le ventre de la femme,  
Vous craignez d'elle encore une convulsion  
Qui crie, asphyxiant votre nichée infâme  
Sur sa poitrine, en une horrible pression.

Syphilitiques, fous, rois, pantins, ventriloques,  
Qu'est-ce que ça peut faire à la putain Paris,  
Vos âmes et vos corps, vos poisons et vos loques?  
Elle se secouera de vous, hargneux pourris!

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<sup>47</sup>This repeats a point made in 'Chant de guerre parisien' where Rimbaud contrasts personal complacency with political threats:

Plus que jamais nous bambochons  
Quand arrivent sur nos tanières  
Crouler les jaunes cabochons  
Dans des aubes particulières!

<sup>48</sup>These insults which Rimbaud uses to describe the Versaillais were probably suggested in part by his reading of Le Cri du peuple. On 24 February 1871 Jules Vallès writes an article called 'Les Charlatans politiques' wherein professional politicians are referred to as having 'ventres bedonnants, crânes chauves' and 'fronts bas'. On 14 April 1871 MacMahon is described as having a 'dévouement de laquais' and on 18 April 1871 the Versaillais are described as a 'tas de pantins'.

Et quand vous serez bas, geignant sur vos entrailles,  
Les flancs morts, réclamant votre argent, éperdus,  
La rouge courtisane aux seins gros de batailles  
Loin de votre stupeur tordra ses poings ardus!

Despite the bourgeois attempts to prostitute the city (Paris is described as 'la femme' in line 33 and 'la putain' in line 38) shortly the tide of political events will change to the advantage of her worthy inhabitants (i.e. the workers), smothering the rich and their desires in its wake. This change will be initiated by Paris herself who will shake off the advances of her uninvited suitors with a gesture of revolutionary defiance ('tordra ses poings ardus'). From stanza XII onwards the poet's attention thus centres on Paris and her population of ouvriers with whom the seed of a new future lies. Despite all she has suffered during the siege and war at the hands of her enemies (described in line 46 as 'tant de coups de couteau') and what she is threatened with by her own inhabitants ('la vie effroyable', (line 54) and 'les doigts glaçants' (line 56), the city is at present poised to step into a new era. Excited vocabulary suggestive of change such as 'renouveau', (line 48) 'L'Avenir' (line 50) 'remagnetisé' (line 53) and 'Progrès' (line 58) punctuates this section of the poem. It underlines the poet's faith in a city which, despite its having reached the depths of degradation and decline, he has now recognised and adopted as his spiritual home:

"Les vers, les vers livides

Ne gêneront pas plus ton souffle de Progrès  
Que les Stryx n'éteignaient l'oeil des Cariatides  
Où des pleurs d'or astral tombaient des bleus degrés"

Quoique ce soit affreux de te revoir couverte  
Ainsi; quoiqu'on n'ait fait jamais d'une cité  
Ulcère plus puant à la Nature verte,  
Le Poète te dit: "Splendide est ta Beauté!"

L'orage te sacra suprême poésie;  
L'immense remuement des forces te secourt;  
Ton oeuvre bout, la mort gronde, Cité choisie!  
Amasse les strideurs au coeur du clairon sourd.

Le Poète prendra le sanglot des Infâmes,  
La haine des Forçats, la clameur des Maudits;  
Et ses rayons d'amour flagelleront les Femmes.  
Ses strophes bondiront: Voilà! voilà bandits!

These four stanzas of 'L'Orgie parisienne' especially illustrate E.J. Ahearn's conclusion regarding Rimbaud, that 'in the spring of 1871 political revolution and poetry converge around the theme of the city'.<sup>49</sup> In them Rimbaud reaffirms his commitment to Paris and the communard ideology in a combination of elements and vocabulary from all three spheres. The poetic is represented by the legendary allusions to the 'Stryx' and 'Cariatides', by the precious 'pleurs d'or astral [qui] tombaient des bleus degrés', and by mentions of 'poésie', 'le poète', and 'strophes'. The political dimension is alluded to through the powerful 'sanglot des Infâmes', 'haine des Forçats' and 'clameur des Maudits'. The urban theme is underlined by Rimbaud's use of 'cité' followed by the triumphal 'Cité choisie'. Since Paris is the chosen arena for new political experiment (her uniqueness is insisted upon repeatedly in the revolutionary press),<sup>50</sup> so she forms the backbone of Rimbaud's newly found urban poetic, 'Le Poète te dit: "Splendide est ta Beauté!"/L'orage te sacra suprême poésie!'. In an uncharacteristic reference to himself in the third person, Rimbaud dedicates his own literary talent to the socialist movement in three ways. Firstly, he pledges support through political polemic expressing the discontent of the outcast and imprisoned. Secondly, he will support through genuine love poetry castigating 'les femmes' or 'le troupeau roux des tordeuses de hanches' ('ses rayons d'amour flagelleront les femmes'). Finally, through satirical poetry, he will unmask the bourgeoisie ('Voilà! voilà! bandits!').<sup>51</sup> The poem's final stanza, in which the phrase 'Société, tout est rétabli' is typographically isolated, serves as an ominous warning and as a reinforcement of ideas expressed stanzas II and IX-XI. Although society appears almost as before to the uninitiated, the powerful sequence of contrasts between ancient and modern established here reveals the supremacy of the nascent era over the resuscitated one. The 'orgie', symbolic of the corrupted life under the Ancien Régime, seems finally moribund. It represents the past, being described as 'ancien' and having as its setting the 'anciens

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<sup>49</sup> E.J. Ahearn, 'Imagination and the real, Rimbaud and the city' (p.524).

<sup>50</sup> 'Les fantaisies admirables de Vallès et de Vermersch' especially eulogise Paris' situation. Vermersch's leading article in Le Cri du peuple of 4 March 1871 is entitled 'Bravo Paris!' and Vallès' front page column on 26 March includes the apostrophe 'O grand Paris!'. Appreciation of Paris' unique political position reaches its height in the article 'Au peuple de Paris' (Le Cri du peuple 21 March 1871):

lupanars', the brothels of the sixteenth century. As a contrast the new order (represented by the nineteenth-century innovation of gaslight, restored to the city streets after war in March 1871) reflects with sinister potential on the reddened walls of Paris. It appears in tune with the stirrings of political revolution to come:

Société, tout est rétabli: -les orgies  
Pleurent leur ancien rôle aux anciens lupanars:  
Et les gaz en délire, aux murailles rougies,  
Flambent sinistrement vers les azurs blafards!

Much ink has flowed as to the exact dating of this poem. Pierre Gascar believes 'L'Orgie parisienne' to be 'postérieur à l'écrasement de l'insurrection' (i.e. the Commune)<sup>52</sup> while C.A. Hackett reads the poem as Rimbaud's 'vehement attack on the return of the cowardly Versaillais and the restoration of bourgeois order to the Paris of May 1871'.<sup>53</sup> Even if 'L'Orgie parisienne' were written in May 1871 as the spurious dating of this poem on its first complete publication in La Plume 5 September 1890 suggests, this fact does not necessarily prove that Rimbaud was evoking events of May 1871 (notably the Versaillais entry into Paris and the so-called Semaine sanglante which ensued) in this poem. Marcel Ruff claims that 'L'Orgie parisienne' can be situated 'avant la commotion de la Commune', and therefore that it describes the return of Paris' bourgeois inhabitants at the end of the war.<sup>54</sup> Antoine Adam in the Pléiade edition, is in agreement with this latter thesis.<sup>55</sup> These points of view are moreover supported by the tone of the poem itself, one of political hope and potential for the future rather than defeat, which casts doubt on the hypothesis that it describes the crushing suppression of the Commune. Significantly, in addition to simply criticising the returning bourgeoisie, the poem puts forward a plan of action through which the poet, in contact with the urban world, can contribute to Paris'

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Paris a le droit absolu de disposer  
de lui-même, [...] il faut que la Revolution se borne à Paris.

Lui seul en a eu le courage et le péril, lui seul doit en bénéficier.

<sup>51</sup> A front page headline of Le Cri du peuple 5 April 1871 was 'Ces Bandits!'.  
<sup>52</sup> Pierre Gascar, Rimbaud et la Commune (Paris, Gallimard, 1971), p.45.

<sup>53</sup> Hackett, 'Rimbaud and the "Splendides Villes"', p.46.  
<sup>54</sup> Marcel Ruff, Arthur Rimbaud, Poésies, édition critique (Paris, Nizet, 1978), p.98.

<sup>55</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.892.



political advancement. 'L'Orgie parisienne' is thus a key text in the understanding of Rimbaud's earliest achievements as a city poet.

If difficulties surrounding the dating and original manuscript conspire to hamper our comprehension of 'L'Orgie parisienne', the same is true of 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie', the third of Rimbaud's early Parisian works, whose original manuscript is undated and which also remained undiscovered until 1919.<sup>56</sup> As in the case of 'Chant de guerre parisien', 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' takes as its point de départ a previously written work by another poet. Rimbaud's imitation does not, however, reveal a dependent approach to its model but rather uses the earlier poem as a springboard for the development of contrasting ideas. The original concept for 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' is to be found in a pair of poems from Gautier's Emaux et camées entitled 'Etude de mains'. The first describes the hands of an empress, 'Impéria'. The second pictures the hands of a convicted murderer, 'Lacénaire'. Although different in length (sixteen stanzas as opposed to ten) the stanzaic composition of the Rimbaud poem parallels exactly that of the two Gautier poems: eight-syllable lines with an ABAB rhyme scheme. Just as Gautier suggests in the subtitles of his poems the status and even temperament of the characters therein portrayed ('Impéria' has aristocratic connotations and 'Lacénaire' suggests the violence of the assassin's knife), so Rimbaud sets his contrasting scene by the unpretentious name of his heroine. From this point, however, the poems differ since Rimbaud is treating not an impersonal work of art nor a macabre souvenir but the hands of a living, contemporary individual. Ultimately, Jeanne-Marie has significance beyond the limited individual plane however and comes to represent a particular sector of Parisian communard society.<sup>57</sup> This personal yet revolutionary dimension inherent in the hands is brought out by the antitheses Rimbaud uses to describe them. They are 'Des mains fortes/Mains sombres que l'été tanna', yet

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<sup>56</sup> Stanzas VIII, XI, XII of the manuscript version of 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' are in the hand of Verlaine which suggests the poem was recopied or revised after September 1871 when Rimbaud definitively moved to Paris.

<sup>57</sup> In the notes to the Pléiade edition of Rimbaud's Oeuvres complètes Antoine Adam refers to a book by Edith Thomas entitled Les Pétroleuses (Paris, Gallimard, 1963) wherein a female member of the Commune, Anne-Marie Ménand, known as Jeanne-Marie, is mentioned. This little-known figure was possibly at the root of Rimbaud's poem.

'Mains pâles comme des mains mortes'.<sup>58</sup> This initial contrast between darkness and light runs throughout the poem and also embraces the revolutionary theme. In stanza XIII, the hands are darkened by contact with the Parisian proletariat: 'une tache de populace/Les brunit comme un sein d'hier' while in stanza XIV they pale when clenched around a rifle butt in the heat of revolutionary fervour: 'Elles ont pâli merveilleuses,/Au grand soleil d'amour chargé,/Sur le bronze des mitrailleuses/A travers Paris insurgé!'. The dark and light theme is perpetuated in the two images of bleeding in lines 15-16 and in the final lines of the poem. Firstly, the hands conceal a dormant threat of death in the 'sang noir des belladones/Qui dans leur paume éclate et dort'. Secondly, they too could suffer in their turn: 'On veut vous déhâler, Mains d'ange,/En vous faisant saigner les doigts!'. Through a combination of these motifs wherein Jeanne-Marie's hands are seen as antithetically 'sombres' and 'pâles', 'fortes' (line 36) and 'fatales' (line 35) yet 'amoureuses' (line 45) and 'qui ne font jamais mal' (line 33), they become symbolic of the ambivalent Parisian revolutionary spirit. Symptomatic of this symbolic dimension, the questioning tone of the poem's first six stanzas has become by stanza VII of the poem, highly rhetorical. The hands of Jeanne-Marie become capitalised as 'Mains' in lines 51, 57, 58 and 63. They even become deified in 'Mains sacrées' (line 57) and 'Mains d'ange' (line 63). Rimbaud's vocabulary also becomes suddenly reminiscent of political propaganda: 'populace' (line 49) 'Révolté fier' (line 52) 'le bronze des mitrailleuses' (line 55) 'Paris insurgé' (line 56).<sup>59</sup> This clearly indicates the poet's susceptibility to the language of posters and tracts

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<sup>58</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.49.

<sup>59</sup> Jules Vallès' front page article from Le Cri du peuple, 26 March 1871 is couched in vocabulary similar to Rimbaud's in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' and suggests a possible inspirational source in the communard press:

Quelle journée!  
Ce soleil tiède et clair qui dore la gueule  
des canons, cette odeur de bouquets, le frisson  
des drapeaux! le murmure de cette Révolution  
qui passe tranquille et belle comme une  
rivière bleue, ces tressaillements, ces lueurs,  
ces fanfares de cuivre, ces reflets de bronze,  
ces flambées d'espoirs, ce parfum d'honneur,  
il y a là de quoi griser d'orgueil et de joie  
l'armée victorieuse des Républicains!

in circulation in the capital in early 1871.<sup>60</sup> As a final point, Rimbaud's use of the female figure in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' as representative of Paris is not only significant in the links it forms with the legend of 'les pétroleuses' but is also interesting in poetic terms since it develops Rimbaud's use of the 'Paris-femme' theme, first hinted at in 'L'Orgie parisienne'. For Rimbaud, the capital is not epitomised by the coquettish fashionable Parisienne as it is for Nouveau but by a combination of Baudelaire's 'catin'<sup>61</sup> and Delacroix's female revolutionary figure. Appearing as the prostituted victim of social upheaval in 'L'Orgie parisienne' Paris is represented in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' by a self-prostituting individual 'qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité à l'imprévu qui se montre, à l'inconnu qui passe'.<sup>62</sup>

This wonderfully evocative final quotation from Baudelaire's 'Les Foules', which could be used to describe Jeanne-Marie's selfless abandonment to the communard ideal, is also appropriate to describe Rimbaud's own relationship with the city during this crucial first stage of his career as an urban poet. In the early months of 1871 both Paris as a city and Rimbaud as a poet were prepared to 'se donne[r] tout entière [...] à l'imprévu', as evidenced by the Commune episode and by Rimbaud's own increasing enfranchisement from his native town. Similarly, the city, at an exciting and critical phase of her political history, was prepared to surrender itself 'poésie et charité à l'inconnu qui se passe'. This 'inconnu', in Rimbaud's case, was a poet probably at his most receptive to the different aspects of his new urban surroundings as a living environment and as a political force. Hence Rimbaud's Parisian poetry of early

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<sup>60</sup> Louis Forestier and Suzanne Bernard suggest even closer ties with specific events in Paris in the last lines of 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie'. For Forestier, stanzas XV-XVI 'évoquent la répression exercée contre les Communards et spécialement contre les pétroleuses' (Rimbaud, Poésies Une Saison en Enfer, Illuminations (Paris, Gallimard, 1973), p.254); for Suzanne Bernard, they 'font allusion avec plus de précision à la Commune et aux répressions qui ont suivi la semaine sanglante'.

(Rimbaud, Oeuvres (Paris, Garnier, 1960), p.403).

<sup>61</sup> 'Epilogue' in Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.191.

<sup>62</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.291.

1871 reveals a distinct move away from the natural world of the Ardennes and from his early personal verse of adolescent eroticism and bohemianism: 'Les Reparties de Nina', 'Première soirée', 'Rêvé pour l'hiver', 'Ma Bohême' and 'Au Cabaret vert'. The three Parisian poems of 'Chant de guerre parisien', 'L'Orgie parisienne' and 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie', are also written in the third person with Rimbaud only mentioning himself distinctly in the apostrophe of the second poem where he is 'Le Poète'. Moreover, all three poems are marked by a contemporaneity and fresh realism in content with Rimbaud making use of real, named individuals such as Thiers, Picard, Favre and Jeanne-Marie. Finally, these poems are marked by a vivacity and originality of technique made all the more striking by Rimbaud's pastiche in two of them of well-known pieces by Coppée and Gautier.

In Rimbaud's three early city pieces, Paris' political revolution is apparent. In other poems of this early period, not necessarily inspired by the capital or its people (such as 'Le Coeur volé', and 'Mes Petites amoureuses') what has been termed the poet's 'révolte personnelle',<sup>63</sup> is very much in evidence too. It was a development which was clearly assisted by Rimbaud's contact with insurgent Paris in early 1871 but one which did not limit itself to the city poems for its expression. Rimbaud was aware, for example that a poem like 'Le Coeur volé' transcended established literary bounds. He makes this point clear as he introduces the poem in his letter to Izambard on 13 May 1871:

Est-ce de la satire, comme vous diriez?

Est-ce de la poésie? C'est de la  
fantaisie toujours.<sup>64</sup>

His belief in the poetic originality of this work is confirmed by the use of forged vocabulary in the poem: 'pioupiesques', 'abracadabranques' for example. As well as its linguistic innovations, 'Le Coeur volé' also contradicts the traditional criteria of romantic poetry in terms of its content. As Rimbaud explains in a later letter to Paul Demeny, the poem was specifically designed to contradict popular sentimental illustrations 'où batifolent les cupidons où s'essorient les coeurs panachés de flammes, fleurs vertes, oiseaux mouillés, promontoires de Leucade , etc'.<sup>65</sup> The same could be said of 'Mes Petites amoureuses' which would also have shocked

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<sup>63</sup>Ross Chambers, 'Réflexions sur l'inspiration communarde de Rimbaud', La Revue des lettres modernes, Vol. 3 (1973), 63-80, (p.63).

<sup>64</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.249.

<sup>65</sup>Letter to Paul Demeny 10 June 1871. See Rimbaud, O.C., p.255.

the sensibility of a reader accustomed to traditional love poetry. Despite its attractive title 'Mes Petites amoureuses' is a sadistic poem of hate and violence voiced in lines of discordant harmony and fractured rhythm. It is aimed at Rimbaud's 'laidérons' by whom he feels he has been rejected and whom he now vigorously discards.

From the brief evidence of these latter two poems it is clear that Rimbaud's poetry of early 1871, even that not connected with the city theme, was quite different from anything composed previously. To claim that his pre-Commune trip to Paris alone was responsible for this literary development would probably be an exaggeration; however, it is clear that the poet himself recognised the city as a vital factor in changes of literary style and attitude. In philosophical terms Rimbaud clearly admitted the connection in the so-called 'lettre du voyant' of 15 May 1871 to Paul Demeny. The poet's social role, suggested in stanza XVIII of 'L'Orgie parisienne', recurs in Rimbaud's description of 'Le poète' as a 'multiplicateur de progrès!'. The possible political influence of his writings is also restated in the claim that 'La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action; elle sera en avant'. A renewed belief in female potential confirmed in Rimbaud's readings about or contact with female communardes or pétroleuses, is also expressed in the 'lettre du voyant' and is linked especially to the field of literature:

Quand sera brisé l'infini servage de  
la femme, quand elle vivra pour elle  
et par elle, l'homme, -jusqu'ici  
abominable, -lui ayant donné son  
renvoi, elle sera poète elle aussi!<sup>66</sup>

Also present in the 'lettre du voyant' is the sense of Paris' superiority and uniqueness which led Rimbaud to use this city name in the titles of 'Chant de guerre parisien' and 'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple' and to suggest it for two proposed works 'Amants de Paris' and 'Mort de Paris'. His criticism of Musset (quatorze fois exécrable!) is also based on the fact that in his works 'tout est français, c'est-à-dire haïssable au suprême degré; français, pas parisien!'.

After solidifying the links between his poetry and the city in the form of Paris in the 'lettre du voyant', Rimbaud also recorded, in letter form, his feelings in a personal sense towards the loss of poetic and

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<sup>66</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.252.

individual freedom which resulted from his return to Charleville from the capital. In his last recorded letter to Georges Izambard on 12 July 1871 (almost a year after his friend had left the Ardennes) Rimbaud speaks in envy of the latter's liberation from the 'ville natale':

Vous prenez des bains de mer, vous avez  
été en bateau... Les boyards, c'est loin,  
vous n'en voulez plus je vous jalouse,  
moi qui étouffe ici.<sup>67</sup>

Not only is that feeling of physical constriction conveyed in earlier letters persistent, but now, Rimbaud is aware of his inspirational stream drying up in the atmosphere of Charleville, 'je m'embête ineffablement et je ne puis vraiment rien porter sur le papier'. He repeats these claims more insistently in a letter of the following month to Paul Demeny (28 August 1871):

Situation du prévenu: j'ai quitté depuis plus  
d'un an la vie ordinaire, pour ce que vous  
savez. Enfermé sans cesse dans cette  
inqualifiable contrée ardennaise ne  
fréquentant pas un homme, recueilli dans  
un travail infâme, inepte, obstiné,  
mystérieux, ne répondant que par le  
silence aux questions, aux apostrophes  
grossières et méchantes me montrant  
digne dans ma position extra-légale,  
j'ai fini par provoquer d'atroces résolutions  
d'une mère aussi inflexible que soixante-  
treize administrations à casquettes de plomb.<sup>68</sup>

Permanent flight to the capital would provide, in his opinion, a solution to his problems both financial (as caused by his mother's hostility to his ambitions) and poetic (ensuing from Charleville's slow stranglehold on his imagination). The poet was prepared to work but under his own conditions, 'libre [...] à Paris, que j'aime'.<sup>69</sup> His final plea sent to Verlaine in September 1871 explaining his predicament ('J'ai fait le

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<sup>67</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.256.

<sup>68</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.258-9.

<sup>69</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.259.

projet de faire un grand poème, et je ne peux travailler à Charleville. Je suis empêché de venir à Paris, étant sans ressources')<sup>70</sup> did not however fall on deaf ears. A letter, summoning Rimbaud to Paris and containing payment for a ticket from Charleville to the capital, quickly followed. What more dramatic an indication of the arena in which the next stage of Rimbaud's poetic life was to unfold? How significant a presage of the common life and inspiration he was destined to share with Verlaine!

Curiously, almost as if Rimbaud's perpetual longing after Paris had extinguished his desire to write about the capital city once it was fully accessible to him, the months between September 1871 and April 1872 (by which time Rimbaud had returned temporarily to Charleville) are marked by a period of almost total inactivity in the field of poetry.<sup>71</sup> This period of limbo is all the more intriguing in view of Rimbaud's decisive rejection of his past poetic self on 10 June 1871 when he ordered Paul Demeny to destroy manuscript copies of early verse still in his possession.<sup>72</sup> His new start (suggested by this dissociation from the past), was only to come with the fluid and lyrical pieces of the Derniers vers of 1873.<sup>73</sup> From the evidence of contemporary witnesses,<sup>74</sup> however, it is possible to

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<sup>70</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.260.

<sup>71</sup>A possible exception to this is the poem 'Qu'est-ce pour nous mon coeur' which could refer in its 'nappes de sang' and 'mille meurtres' to the bloodbath after the collapse of the Commune. In this poem Rimbaud presages the defeat of established society, 'Industriels, princes, sénateurs/Périssent! puissance, justice, histoire, à bas!/[...] passez,/Républiques de ce monde!'

<sup>72</sup>In this letter Rimbaud simultaneously commands and entreats his friend:

Brûlez, je le veux, et je crois que vous  
respecterez ma volonté comme celle d'un  
mort, brûlez tous les vers que je fus assez sot  
pour vous donner lors de mon séjour à Douai.

(Rimbaud, O.C., p.255).

<sup>73</sup>Rimbaud complains of his temporary sterility in a letter of April 1872 to Verlaine, 'le travail' he says 'est plus loin de moi que mon ongle l'est

reconstruct the events of this period in Rimbaud's life and to deduce that his time was spent savouring the physical and intellectual freedom of his new existence, indulging in excesses forbidden in Charleville (and even frowned on in Paris) and making useful new contacts in the literary and artistic world.<sup>75</sup>

Rimbaud's interest in writing did revive around early May 1872 (almost a year after the composition of his first really Parisian poems) but paradoxically it was from the comfortingly familiar countryside of the Ardennes, rather than from the exciting surroundings of Paris, that the poet took his inspiration. Direct allusions to the city in the 'hymnes ténébreux et limpides'<sup>76</sup> of the Derniers vers are rare and mostly of minor significance: one might mention the 'quelque vieille ville' of 'Le Pauvre songe' from 'Comédie de la soif',<sup>77</sup> and 'la richesse de la ville' ('Bonne pensée du matin').<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, original images in these poems clearly antithetical to Rimbaud's rural source of inspiration, reveal the persistence of urban motifs in his imagination if only on a sub-conscious level. In stanza IV of 'Michel et Christine', for example, Rimbaud describes streaks of cloud in an evening sky being 'comme un railway'.<sup>79</sup> In stanza III of 'Larme' the darkness and thunder of the storm recalls the semi-obscurity and deafening train sounds 'des gares'.<sup>80</sup>

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de mon oeil. Merde pour moi!'. (Rimbaud, O.C., p.262).

<sup>74</sup> See Ernest Delahaye, Verlaine (Paris, Messein, 1923), Edmond Lepelletier, Paul Verlaine (Paris, Mercure de France, 1907) and Ex. Mme Paul Verlaine, Mémoires de ma vie (Paris, Flammarion, 1935).

<sup>75</sup> During this period Rimbaud lodged successively with Verlaine and his parents-in-law, Charles Cros, Ernest Cabaner the musician and Forain the painter.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Leuwers in Rimbaud, Poésies (Paris, Livre de poche, 1972), p.132.

<sup>77</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.75.

<sup>78</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 76.

<sup>79</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.85.

<sup>80</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.72.



During Rimbaud's second spell in Paris from May to July 1872, the capital also failed to stimulate Rimbaud's poetic imagination in any profound sense and even appears to have had an adverse effect on its functioning. In the suffocating heat of the summer of 1872 Rimbaud writes of his disenchantment with Paris, caused by a combination of his home-sickness for the coolness of the 'rivières ardennaises et belges, les cavernes'<sup>81</sup> and his natural aversion to being trapped in any adverse environment longer than it suited his purpose. In the letter of Junphe 1872 to Ernest Delahaye he comments ironically:

Oui, surprenante est l'existence dans le  
cosmorama Arduan [...] Mais ce lieu-ci:  
distillation, composition, tout étroitesse.<sup>82</sup>

As this comment clearly reveals, by June 1872 Paris was beginning to assume the same characteristics of restriction and suffocation which Rimbaud had earlier associated with the provincial world of Charleville. His disappointment on the literary front was probably based on the discovery that many figures which he had imagined to be bohemian poets had in fact turned out to be respectable, middle-class men of letters who viewed his own exploits with suspicion. His frustrations on the personal front stemmed from difficulties in his relationship with Verlaine occasioned by the Mauté household. In reply to Rimbaud's wanderlust and to the vicious circle of circumstances which threatened to bring complete poetic sterility, came his escape with Verlaine to Belgium and the Ardennes in July and (possibly) August 1872 and their subsequent departure for England on 7 September of that year. The first phase of these journeyings from July to August 1872 might be classed as Rimbaud's Belgian period. It was characterised by a closeness

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<sup>81</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.265.

<sup>82</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.265. The tendency towards comic corruption of words, ('Junphe' for 'Juin', 'absomphe' for 'absinthe', 'cosmorama' for 'cosmos') is a trait marking Verlaine and Rimbaud's correspondence at this time. The 'rama' ending, suggested by the popularity of the diorama as an entertainment in nineteenth-century France, also plays a significant role in Balzac's Le Père Goriot, 'santérama', 'froidorama', 'soupeaurama' and 'Goriorama' occurring during a conversation at the pension Vauquer in the early pages of the novel.

of inspiration with Verlaine, not least where the two poets use of the city theme is concerned. The second phase (their life in London) was marked by Rimbaud's first tentative moves in the field of prose poetry, a mode which Baudelaire himself described as being born naturally from the 'fréquentation des villes énormes' and from the 'croisement de leurs innombrables rapports'.<sup>83</sup>

Rimbaud's Belgian period, which took the poets through Charleroi, Malines and Brussels, each of which is evoked through a poem in Verlaine's Romances sans paroles is significant in terms of his city poetry for the two pieces from his Derniers vers entitled 'Bruxelles' and beginning 'Est-elle almée?'. Both of these works have received very little critical attention, yet 'Bruxelles' is probably the clearest example in the whole of Rimbaud's city poetry of the poet being directly inspired by the visual appeal of a scene before him and of clearly communicating this fact to the reader by indications in the text. Like an artist setting up his easel at a picturesque spot in the city, Rimbaud chooses his location, the Boulevard du Régent, and begins to write. A visual spectacle thus provides the point de départ for the poem though the final picture Rimbaud gives of central Brussels is not limited to the pictorial dimension of reality. Typically, it is also infused with images springing from his own fertile imagination and suggested through association of ideas by specific elements in the scene. Stanza I of the poem begins with a fairly clear evocation of the central avenue of Brussels' Parc Royal in summertime ('ton bleu presque de Sahara'). Picturesquely, its flower beds stretch out between the Palais des Académies at one extremity of the park and the Palais Royal at the other. The link between 'Jupiter' in the Rimbaud poem, and 'royal' in the title of the building, suggest that this latter edifice was probably in Rimbaud's mind when he referred to the 'agréable palais' in the opening lines of 'Bruxelles':

Plates-bandes d'amarantes jusqu'à

L'agréable palais de Jupiter.

- Je sais que c'est Toi qui, dans ces lieux,

Mêles ton Bleu presque de Sahara!<sup>84</sup>

Rimbaud's imagination then progresses from the visual picture of a real park before him, onto a series of images of imprisonment suggested by the

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<sup>83</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.276.

<sup>84</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.82. 'Bruxelles' is an undated poem but there is a strong possibility it is contemporary with 'Est-elle almée?' dated July 1872.

fenced-in flowers and trees of lines 5-6: 'rose et sapin du soleil/Et liane ont ici leurs jeux enclos'. He first mentions a 'Cage de la petite veuve!' (line 7) and then a 'Kiosque de la folle' (line 9). As with other unexpected images in Rimbaud, these two details tempt one to invent esoteric explanations aided and abetted by knowledge of Rimbaud's own personal life. However attractive may be the theory that this 'cage de la petite veuve' is somehow an oblique reference to Verlaine's prison cell<sup>85</sup> or that the 'folle' from the 'Kiosque' is a subtle allusion to Ophelia, a far simpler explanation of the two, rooted in the reality of Brussels itself, exists. Lines 7-8 of the poem: 'Quelles/Troupes d'oiseaux & ia io, ia io!...!' give the clue since both a 'petite veuve' and a 'folle' are species of birds.<sup>86</sup> Maurice Deflandre suggests that Rimbaud may have glimpsed exotic caged birds in the windows of rich households along the Boulevard du Régent which in the late nineteenth century was an exclusive residential area.<sup>87</sup> A second possibility is that Rimbaud may have been remembering the bird market of the Grande Place which in the 1870s and even today presents a colourful and noisy spectacle on Sunday mornings in Brussels. This latter hypothesis is confirmed by Rimbaud's mention of 'Calmes maisons, anciennes passions' in line 9 of the poem. This seems to refer to the silent backstreets of Ilôt Sacré (the oldest and most picturesque area of central Brussels)

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<sup>85</sup> This hypothesis would of course assume that 'Bruxelles' was composed in July 1873, i.e. after the so-called 'Drame de Bruxelles'.

<sup>86</sup> A 'petite veuve' is an African species of bird belonging to the sparrow family, it is termed a 'widow' on account of its black and white colouring. A 'folle' is a large seabird, noted for its eccentric movement and behaviour with affinities to the pelican. Among the more bizarre explanations of this line 'Quelles/Troupes d'oiseaux' etc. of 'Bruxelles' one might quote J. Gengoux who on p.363 of his La pensée poétique de Rimbaud, claims: 'Dans 'Bruxelles', ce ne sont plus les fillettes qui sont assimilées aux saules et leurs gestes aux oiseaux, mais probablement les Bruxellois dont les deux prononciations du oui flamand l'une distinguée ia, l'autre populaire io, donnent lieu à ce vers '.

<sup>87</sup> Maurice Deflandre, 'Arthur Rimbaud et le Boulevard du Régent', Le Thyrses 1 April 1953, pp.190-1.

which would have provided a stark contrast to the bustling market activity of the city's central square. With line 12, Rimbaud's poem returns to its original focal point with a park scene of rose bushes and shady groves:

Après les fesses des rosiers, balcon  
Ombreux et très bas de la Juliette.

As the park railings had sparked off associations of imprisonment in Rimbaud's mind, the protected balcony he now sees recalls Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and by word association brings to mind an extraneous scene from his past life or memory:

- La Juliette, ça rappelle l'Henriette,  
Charmante station du chemin de fer,  
Au coeur d'un mont, comme au fond d'un verger  
Où mille diables bleus dansent dans l'air!

Here, as in other of the Derniers vers (even when the urban scene is not the source of Rimbaud's inspiration) the railway motif reappears. Juliette recalls through some vague assonance, 'l'Henriette', the name of a railway station, or more likely the name of a person encountered briefly by Rimbaud at such a place. The setting becomes suddenly alpine with mountain scenery and an orchard possibly lined with blue flowers ('Où mille diables bleus dansent dans l'air'). In this respect and in the references to height and depth the fourth stanza of 'Bruxelles' is highly reminiscent of the 'gorges', 'cimes', 'gouffres' and 'abîme' of 'Villes'I of the Illuminations. This similarity is reinforced in the subsequent lines of 'Bruxelles', which evoke a second imaginary cameo conjured up around an ordinary city object, a mossy park bench: 'Banc vert où chante au paradis d'orage/Sur la guitare, la blanche Irlandaise ' (lines 17-18). In these lines the phrase 'le paradis des orages' of 'Villes'I is repeated almost word for word. Ultimately, after his second escape from the visual scene, Rimbaud returns to the real world of Brussels through a series of auditory images in stanza V: 'chante', 'orage', 'guitare' and 'bavardage'. As in a dream, where the waking stimulus is often interpolated into the dream itself, the scene to which we return is one of noise and animation with the sounds of birdsong and the cries of children playing in the Parc Royal or (possibly) heard issuing from surrounding, exotically furnished residences: 'De la salle à manger guyanaise/Bavardage des enfants et des cages'.

This final odd detail of a 'salle à manger guyanaise', which can only arouse speculative comment from the modern reader, poses an interesting question relevant to Rimbaud's source of inspiration in 'Bruxelles' which

might profitably be considered here. Was he not supplementing his own observations of the urban scene around him by more unusual aspects of the Brussels' landscape such as might be pointed out during a guided tour of the city? Such a likelihood is supported by the structure of the poem wherein aspects of the real world with special historical or cultural significance occur in sequence as if on a 'tour guidé'. There is the 'balcon/Ombreux' (lines 11-12), the 'salle à manger guyanaise' (line 19), the 'Fenêtre du duc', (line 21)<sup>88</sup> and the 'Boulevard sans mouvement ni commerce' (line 25). Emphasising this 'guided tour' effect is the poet's signposting of the various aspects of the city panorama by strategically placed adverbs and prepositions, for example the 'puis' of lines 5, 19 and 23 and the 'après' of line 11. As Rimbaud gives order to his poem by this particular technical device he is also eager to indicate the imaginative flights and dream sequences in his poem so as not to lose the reader. 'La Juliette, ça rappelle l'Henriette', he says, (my underlining) and 'Fenêtre du duc qui fait que je pense/Au poisons des escargots et du buis', (lines 21-2). It is the very absence of these signposting elements that creates problems of comprehension where the Illuminations are concerned.

Where Rimbaud had pointed out in the last stanzas of 'L'Orgie parisienne' that the city's inspirational value in its earliest stage was tied to the environment's political potential ('L'orage te sacra suprême poésie'), so in 'Bruxelles' the last lines of the poem (lines 23-8) help to clarify Rimbaud's attraction to the urban world as a source of poetic material or as a venue for poetic rêverie a year later in his career. In contrast to Paris whose political activity had stimulated the poet to action and to social involvement ('Le Poète prendra le sanglot des Infâmes/La haine des Forçats, la clameur des Maudits',) the Belgian city is visually appealing and inspires in the poet a state of hushed reverence and immobility: 'C'est trop beau! trop! Gardons notre silence ' (line 24). As a mute yet expectant observer of the still, silent Boulevard du Régent, Rimbaud's affinities with a spectator before a curtain rising on an empty stage are evident. The poet in fact reaffirms this metaphor in the final stanza of the poem where theatrical terminology prevails:

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<sup>88</sup> Maurice Deflandre explains this 'Fenetre du duc' as being a reference to the 'Hôtel des ducs d'Arenberg' located at 35 Boulevard du Régent.

- Boulevard sans mouvement ni commerce,  
Muet, tout drame et toute comédie,  
Réunion des scènes infinie,  
Je te connais et t'admire en silence.<sup>89</sup>

For the observing poet, the city street, even 'muet' and 'sans mouvement', is a theatrical stage, a potential setting for the enactment of life's varied dramatic situations.<sup>90</sup> The perfect stage for both tragedy and comedy, the city street can also provide a backdrop suitable for a poet's musings arising from surrounding reality as the interplay of real and imaginary in 'Bruxelles' suggests.

'Est-elle almée?' is a separate work written in Belgium in July 1872, yet it has been frequently treated as merely an insignificant extension of 'Bruxelles'. Apart from the poem possessing a regular structure (11-syllable lines and 4-lined stanzas with a 'rime plate' rhyme scheme) which distinguishes it from the freer style of 'Bruxelles',<sup>91</sup> 'Est-elle almée?' contains no specific reference to the Belgian capital.<sup>92</sup> The poem in its city content, can rather be aligned with that vein of urban poetry established by Baudelaire and perpetuated by François Coppée and Charles Cros, which explores the link between time of day and the poet's changing perception of his city. For Baudelaire for example crépuscule in the city is often mysteriously associated with death. His 'Crépuscule du matin' and 'Crépuscule du soir',<sup>93</sup> both involve hospital imagery. For Coppée, the same twilight hour, reinforced by the setting sun motif, often decorates his moments of imaginative awareness in the urban scene. For Cros, it is

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<sup>89</sup>The theatrical motif recurs in 'Scènes' from Illuminations where Rimbaud speaks of 'L'Ancienne Comédie' and 'Des boulevards de tréteaux' and in 'Les Ponts' of the same collection where a 'rayon blanc, tombant du haut du ciel, anéantit cette comédie'.

<sup>90</sup>This can be compared to Nouveau's description of the city scene in 'Notes d'un réserviste' as a 'vrai décor de théâtre' (Nouveau, O.C., p.448).

<sup>91</sup>'Bruxelles' consists of an amalgam of 9 and 10-syllable lines with no discernible regular rhyme scheme. Stanzas V and VII feature 'rime embrassée' and elsewhere (such as in the case of 'verges' and 'fer' in stanza IV and 'commerce' and 'silence' stanza VII) rhymes are for the eye rather than the ear.

<sup>92</sup>Antoine Adam claims 'il ne peut s'agir que de Bruxelles' (Rimbaud, O.C., p.938) but as Maurice Deflandre suggests in his more cautious appraisal of the poem, a 'ville énormément florissante' constitutes a rather exaggerated description of Brussels in 1872.

<sup>93</sup>Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.94 and p.103.

Paris' 'heure verte' which designates a time of poetic realisation and social communion. Early morning conversely represents for him fear, loneliness and on a personal level the severing of relationships made during the hours of darkness. As regards Rimbaud, such temporal factors as influenced the city poetry of his contemporaries were of equal importance. In mid-1872, as his letter to Delahaye ('Parmerde, Junphe 1872') reveals, Rimbaud had assumed a nocturnal existence in an attempt to expurgate his dissatisfaction with everyday Parisian life and its constricting effect on his imagination:

Le mois passé, ma chambre rue  
Monsieur-le-Prince, donnait sur un  
jardin du lycée Saint-Louis. Il y  
avait des arbres énormes sous ma  
fenêtre étroite. A trois heures du  
matin, la bougie pâlit: tous les  
oiseaux crient à la fois dans les arbres:  
c'est fini. Plus de travail. Il me  
fallait regarder les arbres, le ciel,  
saisis par cette heure indicible, première  
du matin. Je voyais les dortoirs du  
lycée, absolument sourds. Et déjà le  
bruit saccadé, sonore, délicieux des  
tomberaux sur les boulevards.<sup>94</sup>

Revelling in the stillness and solitude of the silent and deserted city, Rimbaud worked through the night then paused to observe the gradual arrival of dawn from his attic window high above the rooftops of Paris. Consequently this 'heure indicible, première du matin' seems to have held special significance for the poet. Firstly, it marked the curtailment of his own nocturnal creativity 'A trois heures du matin [...] c'est fini. Plus de travail'. Secondly, it marked the subsequent awakening of his fellow city inhabitants ('A 5 heures [...] les ouvriers sont en marche partout') which formed a contrast to his own desire for oblivion: 'A 5 heures [...] c'est l'heure de se soûler chez les marchands de vin, pour moi '. Such meditations on the poet's early morning experiences in

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<sup>94</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.266.

the city clearly inspired Rimbaud in the writing of the enigmatic piece,  
'Est-elle almée?'

Est-elle almée?...aux premières heures bleues  
Se détruira-t-elle comme les fleurs feues...  
Devant la splendide étendue où l'on sente  
Souffler la ville énormément florissante!

C'est trop beau! c'est trop beau! mais c'est nécessaire  
- Pour la Pêcheuse et la chanson du Corsaire,  
Et aussi puisque les derniers masques crurent  
Encore aux fêtes de nuit sur la mer pure!<sup>95</sup>

Due to Rimbaud's rather vague use of personal pronouns in this work, opinions have varied as to what or whom Rimbaud is referring in the 'Elle' of the first line of this poem. Antoine Adam believes 'elle' is the city<sup>96</sup> while Maurice Deflandre thinks 'elle' is a female figure momentarily glimpsed at a window.<sup>97</sup> As is often the case with Rimbaud, explanations can only be tentative but in addition to these two hypotheses I would suggest that 'elle' represents Rimbaud's imagination or nighttime rêverie which, like the gyrations of an oriental dancer (an 'almée') or a withered bouquet of flowers, threatens to appear incongruous in the cold light of dawn ('aux premières heures bleues') and against the vibrant backcloth of the awakening city ('splendide étendue' and 'ville énormément florissante'). In his letter of 'Junphe 1872' Rimbaud had explained how his 'travail' suddenly ended at 3 a.m.. Here, in the first stanza of 'Est-elle almée?', he expresses in poetic form the disturbance offered to his nocturnal imaginative activity by the same restless urban environment. Stanza II, however, represents his coming to terms with the same surroundings, a fact which the ecstatic fifth line of the poem illustrates: 'C'est trop beau! c'est trop beau!'. As in 'Bruxelles', here the city's status as an impressive spectacle, theatrical in character and capable of inspiring the sensitive observer with poetry, comes to the fore. City inhabitants thus appear to the poet in the form of the 'Pêcheuse[s]' and 'Corsaire[s]' of a buccannering drama. (Later in 'Ville' of Illuminations, they were to appear as the allegorical figures of 'la Mort' 'un Amour' and 'un joli Crime'). Similarly, in the final line of 'Est-elle almée?', the early

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<sup>95</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.83.

<sup>96</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.939.

<sup>97</sup>Art.cit., Deflandre.



morning city horizon dotted with lights appears to the poet's transforming imagination, like a marine spectacle of fairy-like quality: ' [des] fêtes de nuit sur la mer pure! '.

From the evidence of 'Est-elle almée?' and 'Bruxelles' (both probably written in July 1872), Rimbaud's city poetry had undergone a considerable change since its first manifestations in the form of 'Chant de guerre parisien' written over a year previously. The early Parisian poetry employed regular versification in a modern context and linked together the three great themes of poetry, politics and the city. The later verse of 1872 had a noticeably more personal emphasis as it described Rimbaud's own observations of city life and his reactions to it. These poems were also couched in a much freer verse style and moreover contained obscure details and allusions that were difficult to explain in purely biographical terms. The 'blanche Irlandaise' and the 'salle à manger guyanaise' spring to mind in connection with 'Bruxelles' and the 'Pêcheur' and 'Corsaire' in connection with 'Est-elle almée?' They are elaborations of Rimbaud's imagination which replace the real physical attributes of the surrounding city scene. Such suggestive possibilities available in the urban world were expanded upon in the Illuminations, the collection whose city poetry has most frequently been the subject of detailed critical discussion. Where Paris inspired the first of Rimbaud's city poems and Brussels his last city poems in verse, London appears to have played an important role in the composition of this collection.

Paris in February 1871 had revealed to Rimbaud the city as an active political force. Brussels in July of the following year had projected the urban environment as a theatrical stage but London (in which Rimbaud arrived via Ostende and Dover on 8 September 1872 and where he lived intermittently until November 1874) presented probably an even greater challenge to his imagination. As Paris as a city had impressed the provincial intruder with its cultural variety, London in the early 1870s could not fail to have thrilled and excited Rimbaud by its sheer immensity in architectural and human terms compared to the French capital.<sup>98</sup> Un-

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<sup>98</sup> Jules Vallès, a contemporary of Rimbaud, exiled in London after the Commune from 1871-80 reinforces this point in the 'Conclusion' of his La Rue à Londres (Paris, Charpentier, 1884).

Tout est énorme dans ce pays [...]  
Tout se fabrique en grand; les fortunes ou  
les détresses. Il y a des milliards de  
poux; on crève de faim par bataillons;

fortunately no correspondence expressing Rimbaud's own reactions to London at this time has been conserved, though the letters of Verlaine and Nouveau and the letters and diary of Rimbaud's younger sister Vitalie (who visited London in 1874) provide fascinating reading on the subject. Verlaine describes at length London streets and the tribulations of an English Sunday in his letters of 1872 and 1873 to Ernest Delahaye.<sup>99</sup> Nouveau comments on the foggy British climate and on the numerous bridges over the river Thames in his letter of 26 March 1874 to Jean Richepin.<sup>100</sup> Finally, Vitalie Rimbaud's letters of July 1874 voice alternately apprehension in respect of London's enormity and foreignness and wonderment at her apparently inexhaustible supply of 'richesses' and 'merveilles'.<sup>101</sup> For Rimbaud's own impressions on the English city and his developing attitude to the city in general when living in London we must have recourse to those poems inspired by or composed during this period. Many of these works possess a particularly English flavour or contain allusions to London life. They include 'Ouvriers', 'Ville', 'Les Ponts', 'Villes' I, 'Villes' II, 'Métropolitain' and 'Promontoire' all from Illuminations.<sup>102</sup> The first four of these poems ('Ouvriers', 'Ville', 'Les Ponts' and 'Villes' I) betray the same handwriting in their manuscript form as 'Ornières', 'Royauté' and 'Vagabonds'. Though not necessarily suggesting contemporary composition

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on se noie à cinq cents dans un lac dont  
la glace se rompt; on coule en grappes de  
douze cents dans la Tamise. C'est la  
terre du colossal.

<sup>99</sup> See Correspondance de Paul Verlaine, ed. Van Bever (Paris, Messein, 1922), Tome I, pp.43-88 .

<sup>100</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.817.

<sup>101</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.294.

<sup>102</sup> A second work written during this period (April to August 1873) but finally committed to paper in Roches rather than London is Une Saison en Enfer. Though using city imagery on occasions, this collection describing Rimbaud's spiritual metamorphosis is not primarily an urban composition as some of the Illuminations are; therefore its study will not occupy an important position in the present work. Where reminiscences of life in England do feature in Une Saison en Enfer they will be quoted for the light they throw on the city Illuminations.

this fact does reveal a desire on Rimbaud's behalf to preserve the seven poems together in a fair copy. 'Villes' II and 'Métropolitain' apparently belong to a different stage in Rimbaud's career as their definitive manuscripts are in the hand of Germain Nouveau who was in London with Rimbaud in 1874. The final piece which betrays major urban content, 'Promontoire', has survived separately in a copy executed by Rimbaud's own hand. This poem is something of an exception in the Illuminations being seemingly inspired by Scarborough rather than the English capital. It is therefore possibly much later than 1872-4 in its composition.

Among the city poems in the Illuminations, 'Ouvriers' stands out on account of its personal and narrative tone and its attempt at realism through the use of lower class characters and accurate setting. The individual through whose eyes we view the scene is uncharacteristically banal. He is an ouvrier trapped in the kind of tedious monotony which Rimbaud himself struggled to avoid in the summer of 1871.<sup>103</sup> In the opening lines of the poem the worker's predictable existence is interrupted by a freak natural occurrence, a warm morning in winter. He awakens as if from a period of hibernation to the full realisation of the wretchedness and poverty he is suffering in a spiritual as well as a physical sense:

O cette chaude matinée de février. Le  
Sud inopportun, vint relever nos souvenirs  
d'indigents absurdes, notre jeune misère.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Rimbaud's attitude to work in 1871 is clear from his letters of that year. On 13 May 1871 he writes 'Travailler maintenant, jamais, jamais, je suis en grève'. On 28 August he complains of his mother's ambitions for him in the following words, 'Elle a voulu m'imposer le travail - perpétuel, à Charleville (Ardennes)! Une place pour tel jour, disait-elle, ou la porte'.

<sup>104</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.133. This décalage motif of time and temperature used in 'Ouvriers' is repeated by Rimbaud in 'Phrases' where the poet speaks of 'Une matinée couverte en juillet'.

Paradoxically, this warm awakening wind conjures up only bad memories for the worker. Firstly, it reminds him of the summer desiccation of the natural world 'toutes les vilaines odeurs des jardins ravagés et des prés desséchés,' (paragraph II). Secondly it brings home to him his own sense of barrenness and disappointment: 'Le sud me rappelait les misérables incidents de mon enfance, mes désespoirs d'été, l'horrible quantité de force et de science que le sort a toujours éloignée de moi', (paragraph IV). The ouvrier's present tragedy, is essentially that he is imprisoned in his environment (that of the city) while he perceives happiness in a different setting and in another life: 'O l'autre monde, l'habitation bénie par le ciel, et les ombrages!'. His attempts to look ahead beyond his immediate surroundings and achieve this 'autre monde' are confounded by his personal circumstances (marriage and work) and the all-pervasive nature of the city itself. Both conspire together to limit his movements to the present and to the urban enclave. His wife, however, as her old-fashioned clothing suggests ('une jupe de coton à carreau blanc et brun, qui a dû être portée au siècle dernier, un bonnet à rubans et un foulard de soie') is naturally retrospective. She is therefore unmoved by the 'Sud inopportun' and its associated nostalgia 'Cela ne devait pas fatiguer ma femme au même point que moi' (paragraph III). As liberation from memory (which redoubles the misery of the present) is beyond hope for the ouvrier, so escape in a physical sense from the place of work cannot be achieved. Being denied the poet's solitary wanderings through nature, such as Rimbaud describes in 'Ma bohème', the worker finds diversion in the half-world of suburbia where the poem is set, ('Nous faisons un tour dans la banlieue'). Ironically, in reality, this area was often as polluted by the dirt and chaos of urban living as the city itself; as Rimbaud says, 'La ville, avec sa fumée et ses bruits de métiers nous suivait très loin dans les chemins' (paragraph IV).<sup>105</sup> As all

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<sup>105</sup> Rimbaud's realistic approach to the banlieue which was often the site of heavy industry contrasts with Nouveau's attitude to this area as a place of escape from the city (as expressed in 'Retour') and especially with Coppée's idealisation of the banlieue (in collections such as Intimités and Promenades et intérieurs).

these details suggest, what immediately strikes the reader in connection with 'Ouvriers' is the poem's cheerless nature. This fact is furthermore accentuated by the dull and somnolent atmospheric setting: 'cette chaude matinée de février [...] Le temps était couvert' and by the brief evocation of Henrika's dress which is described as 'bien plus triste qu'un deuil'. Nevertheless the poem is not totally pessimistic. Paragraph III sounds an ambiguous note of life and hope in the 'très petits poissons' found swimming in an isolated pool of water left standing after floods.<sup>106</sup> Moreover the last lines of the piece seem to mark a definite decision by the ouvrier to resist his fate, avoid repetition of the disappointments of the previous summer and move onto a renewed relationship with his wife freed from the platitudes of conventional love and female dependence:

Non! nous ne passerons pas l'été  
dans cet avare pays où nous  
ne serons jamais que des orphelins  
fiancés. Je veux que ce bras durci  
ne traîne plus une chère image.<sup>107</sup>

Though critics have been anxious to attribute autobiographical significance to this poem from the Illuminations by claiming the disillusioned couple represent Rimbaud and Verlaine, whether the poem is intended to convey poetically Rimbaud's own predicament in early 1873 can only remain a question of debate. On the one hand, 'Ouvriers' does call to mind Regamey's depressing sketches of Rimbaud and Verlaine in wretched circumstances in London in 1873. It also seems to illustrate Rimbaud's parable of the 'vierge folle' and 'Epoux infernal' whom he describes in Une Saison en Enfer as 'Deux bons enfants libres de se promener dans le Paradis de tristesse'.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the poet would have wished to limit his comment to his own situation to the detriment of more generalised remarks on man's response to the

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<sup>106</sup>The ardennisme 'une flache laissée par l'inondation' recalls the 'flache/Noire et froide' of 'Le Bateau ivre' and has similar suggestions of desolation.

<sup>107</sup>The italicised 'une chère image' of 'Ouvriers' recurs in 'Enfance' of the Illuminations as a "cher corps" et "cher coeur" and in 'Délires' of Une Saison en Enfer as the 'chère âme'.

<sup>108</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.104.

'avare pays' whose 'fumée' and 'bruits de métiers' restrict human potential just as its dry, airless atmosphere stifles the growth of vegetation within its confines.

In 'Ouvriers', Rimbaud speaks on behalf of a working couple to reveal their ill-fated relationship with the city environment. In 'Ville', he speaks from the quite different perspective of a 'point trop mécontent citoyen'<sup>109</sup> of an anonymous metropolis. Despite this change of viewpoint, 'Ville' is equally despairing and critical in tone as 'Ouvriers', consequently it has led C.A. Hackett to describe the poem as 'Rimbaud's most lucid illumination of man's plight in the urban age'.<sup>110</sup> Unlike the working man in 'Ouvriers' who is trapped in the material world as a place of work, the narrator in 'Ville' seems more detached from the urban scénario. He assumes the role of a witness to the city world rather than that of an active participant in it. In the opening scene of the poem for example, he describes himself as an 'éphémère [...] citoyen' of a 'métropole crue moderne'. Similarly, towards the end of the poem he relinquishes involvement in urban life and observes its movement from a vantage point above the streets, 'de ma fenêtre je vois des spectres nouveaux, roulant à travers l'épaisse et éternelle fumée de charbon'. The city itself is not described in any physical sense in 'Ville' but is rather suggested through vague abstract notations, often ironical in tone, which tend to prevent the reader from visualising a scene in his mind's eye. Through a subtle use of understatement, for example, Rimbaud castigates that tasteless modern architectural design, often employed in the planning of cities, which equates modernity simply with the contradicting of established notions of taste. By substituting its own dry rationalism for the artistic inspiration of past eras, this category of design merely displays the imaginative void at its own heart:

Je suis un éphémère et point trop  
mécontent citoyen d'une métropole  
crue moderne parce que tout goût  
connu a été éludé dans les  
ameublements et l'extérieur des  
maisons aussi bien que dans le  
plan de la ville.

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<sup>109</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.134.

<sup>110</sup>C.A. Hackett in a review on Nathaniel Wing's Aspects of Poetic Structure in Rimbaud's Illuminations in French Studies, Vol. XXXII (April 1978), p.208.

Rimbaud also comments on the nineteenth-century vogue for science since his city in 'Ville' has taken this latter discipline, rather than the old religion as its social guideline: 'Ici vous ne signaleriez les traces d'aucun monument de superstition'. Consequently, language and morality (as in Don Juan's narrow concept of the universe) have been reduced to mathematical formulae:<sup>111</sup> 'La morale et la langue sont réduites à leur plus simple expression, enfin!'. This material simplification, brought about by the city's intense modernisation, seems however to have been a pointless advancement in respect of the drawbacks on a human level which the poem reveals. Fraternity and individuality are denied and the span of human life from childhood and maturity to old-age is dismissed as 'une statistique folle'.

Ces millions de gens qui n'ont pas  
besoin de se connaître amènent si  
pareillement l'éducation, le métier  
et la vieillesse, que ce cours de  
vie doit être plusieurs fois moins  
long que ce qu'une statistique folle  
trouve pour les peuples du continent.

As the narrator observes from the safety of his cottage window, the tragic victims of this particular city (which could be said to represent the worst in all modern cities) appear before him. A macabre 'épaisse et éternelle fumée de charbon' provides a mocking urban counterpart for the shady woods of a summer's evening in the countryside ('notre ombre des bois, notre nuit d'été'). Through this smog parade 'des spectres nouveaux', modern equivalents of the allegorical Greek goddesses of revenge who inhabited the underworld,<sup>112</sup> The first, 'la Mort sans pleurs', is merely an implacable commonplace figure, 'notre active fille et servante'. The second, 'un Amour désespéré', provides the only suggestion of comfort and compassion in the barren landscape. The third 'un joli Crime' animalistically 'piaulant dans la boue de la rue', cancels out amour and redoubles the sordid connotations

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<sup>111</sup> 'Je crois que deux et deux sont quatre, Sganarelle, et que quatre et quatre sont huit', Don Juan, Act III, Scene I, Molière, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris, Gallimard, 1971), Vol. II, p.57.

<sup>112</sup> This appropriate use of mythological allusion in a city poem could be compared to Verlaine's use of 'les Kobolds' in his poem 'Charleroi' written in July 1872 when he was travelling through Belgium in Rimbaud's company.

of the scene.<sup>113</sup>

After these pictures of what we can be sure represented for Rimbaud urban civilization at its lowest ebb, in 'Les Ponts', we have the only example among the city prose poems of a true 'illumination'; that is a brief visual impression arising suddenly from nowhere and disappearing almost immediately without trace. The décor of 'Les Ponts' is traditionally associated with that of the Thames, Regent's Canal and London and the poem's similarity with Germain Nouveau's comment in a letter from the English capital in 1874 ('n'en finissent pas, les ponts, et combien plus hauts de parapets qu'aux bords fleuris de la Seine')<sup>114</sup> would seem to confirm this probability. Antoine Adam's suggestion that Rimbaud was possibly inspired by a painting or engraving rather than by a scene personally witnessed is also feasible, not least on account of the term 'dessin' in the poem's first line.<sup>115</sup> The impressionistic style Rimbaud employs in omitting main verbs and his technique of focusing on a crowded central area of vision framed as if on a canvas by the translucent sky and water above and below also contribute to the artistic effect:

Des ciels gris de cristal! Un bizarre  
dessin de ponts, ceux-ci droits ceux-là  
bombés, d'autres descendant ou obliquant  
en angles sur les premiers, et ces figures  
se renouvelant dans les autres circuits  
éclairés du canal.<sup>116</sup>

Although the bridges themselves are the central point of interest in this

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<sup>113</sup> Similar phraseology appears in Une Saison en Enfer in the opening lines of the volume: 'Je me suis allongé dans la boue. Je me suis séché à l'air du crime'. It also features in the section 'Mauvais sang' where 'Dans les villes la boue m'apparaissait soudainement rouge et noire comme une glace quand la lampe circule dans la chambre voisine, comme un trésor dans la forêt!'. (See Rimbaud, O.C., p.93 and p.97).

<sup>114</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.817.

<sup>115</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p. 991.

<sup>116</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.133.



poem, a fact reinforced by their perpetuation through the jeu de miroirs effect in the final phrase of the excerpt ('ces figures se renouvelant dans les autres circuits éclairés du canal'), in common with other real objects in Rimbaud's poems they rapidly suggest a reality beyond their own visual dimension. Unusually decorated with flagstaffs, masts and parapets some bridges assume a nautical air. Others, weighed down by houses and buildings, recall the London of the middle ages. Inspired by the thought of a ship's rigging or merely inner city washing lines which suggest musical scores outlined against the sloping riverbank, Rimbaud's mind turns to music, 'Des accords mineurs se croisent, et filent, des cordes montent des berges',<sup>117</sup> An unexpected flash of colour ('une veste rouge') brings the scene to life and a military parade, an open-air concert and an evangelical meeting merge momentarily into a noisy spectacle banishing the inanimate landscape: 'On distingue une veste rouge, peut-être d'autres costumes et des instruments de musique. Sont-ce des airs populaires, des bouts de concerts seigneuriaux, des restants d'hymnes publics?'. In tune with the image of the bridge which offers the connection between two unrelated sections of a whole and which presents a complete entity when linked with its own reflection in water the imaginative movement of Rimbaud's poem is circular. Gradually, our attention is drawn from the grey sky which provides a neutral backdrop for the subsequent tableau, to the bridges themselves and their suggestions of activity. The poet's gaze then moves onto the grey-blue canal water beneath and finally, in the 'rayon blanc tombant du haut du ciel [qui] anéantit cette comédie', upwards into the sky again. This 'comédie', referred to in the last line of 'Les Ponts', remains unidentified by the poet. It could refer specifically to the colourful musical parade he conjures up and shares with his reader. In a more general sense, it could describe the Poème en prose itself as a brief and unique imaginative creation infinitely susceptible to the intrusion of the real world.

Despite the sudden termination of 'Les Ponts' and the subsequent evaporation of the poet's vision, the poem does make a distinct move towards a more optimistic treatment of the urban theme in Rimbaud's prose poetry. In 'Ouvriers' and 'Ville', city rigidity was criticised in favour of a freer natural environment ('l'habitation bénie par le ciel et les ombrages', 'notre ombre des bois, notre nuit d'été'). In 'Les Ponts',

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<sup>117</sup> The musical theme features largely in other city Illuminations, notably 'Promontoire' and 'Villes' I.

however, the process is reversed and the ray of sunshine representative of the natural world, is implicitly unacceptable as a displacer of the poet's dreams of the highly architectural, structured city. This tendency towards an increased recognition of the city's possibilities and its dream - inspiring potential is expanded upon in 'Villes' I where Rimbaud speaks for himself rather than on behalf of other city characters and seeks to establish the prototype of his ideal city freed from the 'misère', 'crime', 'fumée' and 'boue' of 'Ouvriers' and 'Ville'. Rimbaud combines in this poem concepts from Baudelaire's 'Rêve parisien' (Les Fleurs du Mal) with ideas and images unique to his own poetic imagination.

In the footsteps of contemporary fellow-poets and in line with his other city Illuminations, Rimbaud's initial point of comparison for his 'Villes' is the cities of ancient or exotic civilization.<sup>118</sup> As in 'Promontoire' where the poet refers to 'Epire', 'Péloponnèse', 'Carthage' and so on, and in 'Villes' II where he refers to 'Nabuchodonosor' King of Babylon, in 'Villes' I Rimbaud finds inspiration in the past. Here, his allusion is in the opening lines of the poem:

Ce sont des villes! C'est un peuple  
pour qui se sont montés ces  
Alleghanyes et ces Libans de rêve!<sup>119</sup>

Continuing his urban dream, in Baudelairian fashion Rimbaud conjures up the mineralistic universe found in 'Rêve parisien'. Where Baudelaire's eerie inanimate landscape betrays 'l'enivrante monotonie/Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau',<sup>120</sup> Rimbaud's, as a contrast, exudes life movement and vitality:<sup>121</sup>

Des chalets de cristal et de bois qui  
se meuvent sur des rails et des  
poulies invisibles. Les vieux cratères  
ceints de colosses et de palmiers  
de cuivre rugissent mélodieusement

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<sup>118</sup> In his article 'Paris futur' Le Pays (20-21 December 1851) Théophile Gautier had used terminology strikingly similar to that employed by Rimbaud a generation later. 'Parlez-moi de Ninive de Babylone' he said, 'cela peut s'appeler des villes'.

<sup>119</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.135.

<sup>120</sup> Baudelaire, O.C., Vol. I, p.101.

<sup>121</sup> This parallels Gautier's notion expressed in 'Paris futur' of living minerals 'élevés jusqu'à la vie par les efforts de la science'.

dans les feux.<sup>122</sup>

To intensify the effect of his bustling scene Rimbaud employs enumeration, pluralisation and musical terminology. Hence he refers to 'des chalets', 'Les vieux cratères', 'Des fêtes amoureuses', 'les plateformes', 'les gouffres', 'les toits des auberges', 'les mâts' and so on. He refers to 'de palmiers de cuivre', 'Des fêtes amoureuses [qui] sonnent', 'La chasse des carillons [qui] crie', 'Des corporations de chanteurs', 'Des groupes de beffrois [qui] chantent' and to a 'musique inconnue'. His scene moreover fills with figures and objects from different cultures and civilizations. Inanimate objects are brought to life: 'des moissons de fleurs grandes [...] rugissent' and 'la lune [...] hurle'. Finally, legendary figures like Venus, Mab, Diane and Bacchus materialise as a concrete reality:

Des cortèges de Mabs en robes rousses,  
opalines, montent des ravines. Là-haut  
les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces,  
les cerfs têtent Diane. Les Bacchantes  
des banlieues sanglotent et la lune  
brûle et hurle. Vénus entre dans  
les cavernes des forgerons et des ermites.

By this point in the long first paragraph of the poem where the atmosphere resembles that of a protracted Dionysian festival or, as Rimbaud suggests, a

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<sup>122</sup>The possibility that Rimbaud is here inspired by real city objects merely viewed from an unusual angle cannot be dismissed. Charles Chadwick in Etudes sur Rimbaud (Paris, Nizet, 1960), p.141, suggests that Rimbaud's 'chalets de cristal et de bois' could be cabs viewed from above moving as if on invisible pulleys along the city streets and that his 'vieux cratères' are roundabouts or fountains set in the roads. A possible explanation for Rimbaud's 'palmiers de cuivre' is given by Coppée in 'Paris' from Longues et brèves where he asks nostalgically,

Où sont les cafés de l'ancien style  
où les tuyaux de poêle avaient  
la forme d'un palmier?

'fête de la nuit' the depressing urbanism permeating 'Ville' and 'Ouvriers' seem to have evaporated totally. This is partly on account of the setting of the poem which, despite the urban title, is provided by a totally naturalistic environment of rustic, mountainous scenery with 'gorges', 'cimes', 'hauteurs', 'champs', 'moissons de fleurs' and 'ronces'. Isolated details suggestive of a real city are methodically cancelled out by their puzzling combination with articles or figures with alien or contradictory connotations. 'Les toits des auberges', for example, jostle for a place on the city skyline with 'des mâts'. The banlieue is inhabited by 'Bacchantes', while 'toutes les légendes évoluent [...] dans les bourgs'. The sentence beginning 'Et une heure je suis descendu' finally signals the end of this impromptu imaginative vision. Interrupted by the unexpected past tense and Rimbaud's sudden introduction of the 'je' figure into the poem, his poetic creation will disappear 'comme les fleurs feuss' before the flat reality of the city itself. Transformation is gradual, however, with the optimistic musical theme persisting in 'des compagnies [qui] ont chanté la joie du travail nouveau' and the city street lingering briefly as a 'boulevard de Bagdad'. The vision is eventually blurred by the 'brise épaisse' and the 'fabuleux fantômes' which both contain a threatening echo of the 'spectres nouveaux roulant à travers l'épaisse et éternelle fumée de charbon' which had haunted the poet in 'Ville'. His poem ends with a nostalgic yearning after the lost stimulus which was capable of evoking the escapist vision of a new civilization in his imagination:

Quels bons bras, quelle belle  
heure me rendront cette région  
d'où viennent mes sommeils et mes  
moindres mouvements?

As analysis of 'Villes' I has revealed, an attempted relating of all Rimbaud's disparate images to known reality is often a fruitless exercise. While we may admit the existence of 'des références à certaines réalités particulières' in 'Villes' I as Antoine Adam suggests,<sup>123</sup> one is ultimately forced to side with J.P. Richard, Wallace Fowlie and Suzanne Bernard who consider this poem as constructing rather an 'anti-paysage',<sup>124</sup> 'a poet's unreal city',<sup>125</sup> or a 'monde récréée'.<sup>126</sup> As Rimbaud himself explains in

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<sup>123</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.993.

<sup>124</sup> J.P. Richard, Poésie et profondeur (Paris, Editions du seuil, 1955), p.240.

<sup>125</sup> W. Fowlie, Rimbaud's Illuminations, p.95.

<sup>126</sup> Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours, p. 187.

the text, the main source of his poem is in his own subconscious. His villes resemble 'ces Alleghanys et ces Libans de rêve!'; they arise in 'cette région d'où viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements', hence they are often chaotic in their organization and contradictory in their tone. Though some images in 'Villes' I are merely unusual (one might quote 'Des châteaux bâtis en os' and 'des oriflammes éclatants comme la lumière des cimes'), others such as 'les centaures [qui] évoluent parmi les avalanches' and 'les élans [qui] se ruent dans les bourgs' seem surrealistic and bizarre. The possibility that Rimbaud was deliberately exaggerating his own style in this poem for effects of self-parody cannot be ignored.<sup>127</sup> Such a hypothesis, fitting in with his attempts at comic imitation in his 'vieux coppées', would naturally undermine the opinion that 'Villes' I is the production of a deranged psychotic as Godchot<sup>128</sup> and Jacques Plessen<sup>129</sup> believe. It would also threaten the

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<sup>127</sup> La Chasse spirituelle (Paris, Mercure de France, 1949) supposedly by Rimbaud but in fact written by Mme Akakia-Viala and Nicolas Bataille is strikingly similar in its style to this section of 'Villes' I as the following excerpt reveals:

Cascades de fiel, tourbillon de neige rouge et  
noire, souffle d'haleines fétides, carnaval de  
tortues énigmatiques, cancers et hydres fardés  
de vert-de-gris, chiens géants, coques  
châtres, dentelles; dans le ciel glorieux,  
des lambeaux de chairs organisent des ascensions,  
des singes grotesques volent mes vêtements,  
flèches, ruisseaux de gemmes, fleurs, sans  
formes, sève sanglante, cristaux éclatés,  
pastels poussiéreux des obscures visions. Les  
kangourous sautent sur les places publiques et  
les cargos tressent des chapelets de cordes  
glissant sur des océans de braise.

<sup>128</sup> See Simon Godchot, Les Illuminations ou mieux les hallucinations de Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud (Nice, Chez l'auteur, 1936), pp.3-8.

<sup>129</sup> Jacques Plessen, Promenade et poésie, p.209.

theory that the poem (like 'Voyelles' or 'Parade'), is a work of profound spiritual significance of which Rimbaud alone 'réservait la traduction'<sup>130</sup> or '[tenait] la clef'.<sup>131</sup> More simply than a parody, a hallucination or a 'disordine totale',<sup>132</sup> however, is the possibility that 'Villes' I represents merely Rimbaud's exercises on the theme of the 'métropole fabuleuse et onirique' as Jean Richer suggests.<sup>133</sup> This belief is compatible with the poem itself which, as we have shown, fits into a framework of writings on the same theme including Gautier's 'Paris futur' and Baudelaire's 'Rêve parisien'. Also, without depriving Rimbaud of his originality, it points to the importance of contemporary sources of information and contemporary poetic figures in the composition of his own works, not least his city poetry.

Such a derivative element in Rimbaud's poetry has of course been a point of interest since the nineteenth century when Gustave Kahn situated Rimbaud in a tradition of poets and artists 'épris par la beauté de Paris [et] ses transformations', and 'touchés par le contact babylonien de Londres'.<sup>134</sup> In the present study the connection between Rimbaud's early city verse and available sources of information has been clarified while elsewhere the urban pieces of the Illuminations have inspired similar comments from critics. E.W. Meyerstein for example, has considered Baudelaire's 'spiritual influence' on Rimbaud and has concluded that the Illuminations were largely derivative, in terms of 'the layout of Rimbaud's visions' and their 'interpretation of life', of the elder poet's collection Le Spleen de Paris.<sup>135</sup> Pierre Petitfils, on the other hand, has concentrated on individual prose poems and has deduced that the key to 'Villes' II for example, lies in Mallarmé's compte rendu of London's International Exhibition of 1871 which featured in L'Illustration of 20 July 1872.<sup>136</sup> As far as this latter poem is concerned Mallarmé's article does reveal a striking overlap of vocabulary and ideas between itself and the Rimbaud poem, however it need not offer an exhaustive explanation of the work.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.106.

<sup>131</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.126.

<sup>132</sup> M. Matucci, Illuminations (Florence, Sansoni, 1952), p.94.

<sup>133</sup> Jean Richer, 'Gautier en filigrane dans quelques Illuminations, Europe, (May-June 1973), pp.69-76.

<sup>134</sup> Gustave Kahn, 'Arthur Rimbaud', La Revue blanche (15 August 1898), pp.592-601, (601).

<sup>135</sup> E.H.W. Meyerstein, 'Baudelaire and the Illuminations', Mandrake, Vol.1, No.3 (1945), p.6.

<sup>136</sup> Pierre Petitfils 'L'Architecture Rimbaudienne' Les Nouvelles littéraires 24 August 1967, p.10.

<sup>137</sup> Daniel de Graaf notably disagreed with Pierre Petitfils' interpretation of

As 'Villes' I and 'Villes' II bear the same title, one might reasonably expect some similarity in their content, but this is not the case. Though the theme of enormity prevails in the second poem, it is tied to the arena of culture and architecture rather than to the field of the natural world as it is in the first as is revealed by the opening lines of the piece:

L'acropole officielle outre les conceptions  
de la barbarie moderne les plus  
colossales. [...] On a reproduit dans un  
goût d'énormité singulier toutes les  
merveilles classiques de l'architecture.  
J'assiste à des expositions de peinture  
dans des locaux vingt fois plus vastes  
qu'Hampton-Court.<sup>138</sup>

This effect, combined with the use of proper names as in Hampton Court gives us a sense of precision lacking in 'Villes' I and also suggests (as readers have been eager to point out) that the poem has at its basis an actual city. Enid Starkie for example sees the poem as evocative of London<sup>139</sup> while Pierre Guiraud, in an article on Rimbaud's stylistic development, describes 'Villes' II as 'une description de Londres, mais transposée'.<sup>140</sup> The possibility that 'Villes' II relies heavily on Rimbaud's observations of nineteenth-century London is reinforced by a repetition

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the poem. He believed 'Villes' II to be inspired by the International Exhibition of 1878. This hypothesis, which obliged a much later date of composition than is normally admitted for the poem, was forwarded by De Graaf in an article of 1955 ('Une clé des Illuminations: L'Exposition universelle de 1878') in Autour du Symbolisme edited by Pierre Georges Castex (Paris, Corti, 1955). Subsequently, it was discovered that part of the manuscript of 'Villes' II was in the hand of Germain Nouveau which threw doubt on Mr De Graaf's theory.

<sup>138</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.137.

<sup>139</sup> See Enid Starkie, Arthur Rimbaud (London, Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 258, where 'Villes' II is referred to as being 'suggestive of the English atmosphere'.

<sup>140</sup> Pierre Guiraud, 'L'Evolution statistique du style de Rimbaud', Mercur de France 1094 (1 October 1954),<sup>201-34</sup> (p.222).

of the 'guidebook technique' (previously observed in 'Bruxelles') in this poem. Interestingly, the piece was re-copied (if not written) during the summer of 1874 when Rimbaud acted as a guide for his mother and sixteen-year-old sister Vitalie on their visit to the English capital. Rimbaud selects objects of special importance and signals them for his reader's appreciation: one might quote the staircase designed by a 'Nabuchodnosor norvégien', the parks which 'représentent la nature primitive travaillée par un art superbe', or a bridge which 'conduit à une poterne immédiatement sous le dôme de la Sainte-Chapelle'. He also attempts numerical accuracy in the 'armature d'acier artistique de quinze mille pieds de diamètre environ' and the 'boissons polaires dont le prix varie de huit cents à huit mille roupies'. Veracity of description also is present in accurate architectural terminology: 'Sur quelques points des passerelles de cuivre, des plateformes, des escaliers qui contournent les halles et les piliers'. Cleverly engineered incongruities or contradictions in the text nevertheless challenge the superficial impression of substantiality which figures and specialist vocabulary create. For example, what at first glance appears to be an accurate specification of a church dome as 'quinze mille pieds de diamètre' turns out to be merely a rough approximation of the same, 'environ'. The price variations for the curious 'boissons polaires' are subsequently also undermined through being quoted in 'roupies', an exotic currency meaningless for the average inhabitant of London or Paris. Similarly, though Rimbaud's use of architectural and even plutocratic vocabulary ('une police', 'la loi' and 'L'élément démocratique') points to experience of city life in general terms, it nevertheless does not definitively tie Rimbaud's work to any particular urban model in which he lived. This point is underlined by Rimbaud's position in 'Villes'II being neither that of a worker, nor a 'citoyen', albeit 'éphémère' and 'pas trop mécontent'. He appears firstly as an observant guide and secondly (and most strongly) as a questioning tourist or visitor visiting an unfamiliar scene for the first time.<sup>141</sup> This, combined, with the mechanical

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<sup>141</sup> Rimbaud assumes the role of an appreciative admirer of the city landscape in phrases, such as 'Quelle peinture!', 'Impossible d'exprimer' and 'C'est le prodige dont je n'ai pu me rendre compte'. Similarities with Vitalie's comments on London made in her letters and journal of July 1874 are evident.



complexity of 'Villes'II', its 'texture géométrique',<sup>142</sup> suggests a metropolis different from the other contemporary cities in Rimbaud's Illuminations and city poetry in general. This metropolis has striking affinities with the accounts of utopian writers visualising the layout and attributes of an entirely new urban age.

Among early writers of the nineteenth century, Charles Fourier was probably more responsible than any other for arousing fresh interest in the revitalisation of industry and re-arrangement of urban conglomerations central to socialist Utopianism. His more important treatises included Le Nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire (Paris, Librairie sociétaire, 1846) and Cités ouvrières. Des modifications à introduire dans l'architecture des villes (Paris, Librairie phalanstérienne, 1849). In Fourier's wake and pursuing a similar line of thought, followed a series of influential figures including among others Victor Considérant, author of Principes du Socialisme (Paris, Librairie phalanstérienne, 1847) and Eugène Pelletan, author of La Profession de foi du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris, Pagnerre, 1852). Attached to this latter group, yet chiefly remembered for his contributions to the field of medicinal and physiological research<sup>143</sup> appeared the figure of Doctor Tony Moilin. Today, his reputation as a utopian writer rests on the contents of a single, slim volume (published in Paris in 1869) with the intriguing and futuristic title of Paris en l'an 2000.<sup>144</sup> A comparison between one section of this essay which describes the architectural arrangement of the new city and Rimbaud's 'Villes'II reveals similarities between these two writers too close to be merely coincidental. A first possibility is that Moilin's book with its provocative title caught Rimbaud's eye as he was browsing through the shelves of Paris' bookshops in early 1871 or later. This would necessitate details lying dormant in Rimbaud's imagination for some time before the probable composition of 'Villes'II in 1874. A second more likely possibility is that Rimbaud discovered Paris en l'an 2000 in the catalogue of the British Museum Library in 1874 while searching for challenging reading matter in his own language. It could therefore have been in London that he consulted the

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<sup>142</sup>J.P. Richard, Poésie et profondeur, p.243.

<sup>143</sup>These include Nouveau système médical (Paris, L'auteur, 1863) and Leçons de médecine physiologique (Paris, Delahaye, 1866).

<sup>144</sup>Dr Tony Moilin, Paris en l'an 2000 (Paris, Librairie de la renaissance, 1869).

volume and retained ideas from it.<sup>145</sup>

In Chapter II of Moilin's thesis, the author describes the transformation of the dirty, unhygienic commercial areas of Paris in the nineteenth century in his capital of the future. In Paris en l'an 2000 the city would be reorganised around an extensive network of indoor roads or 'rues-galleries' accommodated by the first floors of existing buildings and made accessible to all by a system of covered bridges forming 'un réseau non interrompu embrassant toute l'étendue de la ville':<sup>146</sup>

Des ponts tout semblables, mais beaucoup  
plus longs furent jetés de même sur  
les divers boulevards, sur les places et  
sur les ponts qui traversent la Seine,  
de façon que la rue-galerie ne  
présentait de solution sur aucun point  
et qu'un promeneur pouvait parcourir  
toute la cité sans jamais se mettre  
à découvert et par conséquent en  
étant toujours parfaitement à l'abri  
de la pluie et du soleil.<sup>147</sup>

The proliferation of bridges in Moilin's vision of Paris has clear similarities with Rimbaud's urban picture in 'Les Ponts'. The idea of a regular structure of 'rues-galleries' offering protection against the elements and disposing of the need for public transport in inclement weather recalls Rimbaud's 'quartier commerçant [qui] est un cirque d'un seul style, avec galeries à arcades' and the groupement de bâtiments en squares,<sup>148</sup> cours et

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<sup>145</sup> Rimbaud's first application for a reader's pass for the British Museum was made on 25 March 1873. It was renewed on 4 April 1874. Paris en l'an 2000 was purchased by the British Museum Library on 10 November 1870 and therefore would have been available for consultation by the reading public during Rimbaud's use of the library. Vitalie Rimbaud tells of her brother's frequent visits to the library in her letter of 12 July 1874 to her sister Isabelle. See Rimbaud, O.C., p.291.

<sup>146</sup> Among the opponents of the new 'rues galleries' Dr Moilin mentions shoe manufacturers whose trade in winter footwear is sabotaged by the covered highways, doctors who no longer need to treat patients for colds and chills and 'cochers de fiacres' who are rejected in favour of the new indoor roads linking all areas of the capital.

<sup>147</sup> Moilin, p.10.

<sup>148</sup> Compare Moilin's description in Chapter III of Paris en l'an 2000 of the 'Maisons - modèles':

terrasses fermées', by which 'on a évincé les cochers'. Numerous other parallels in vocabulary and ideas also link the Rimbaud and Moilin texts. Themes of enormity, height and depth for example persist in both with a proliferation of adjectives and nouns such as 'colossal', 'immense', 'énorme', 'gigantesque', 'grandiose', 'magnifique', 'superbe', 'haut', 'profond', 'niveau', 'étage', 'sous-sol' and 'souterrain'. Architectural motifs are also repeated between Rimbaud's 'acropole officielle' and Moilin's Paris which represents the 'oeuvre de transformation' of some mysterious, all-powerful 'Gouvernement'. Rimbaud speaks of 'des passerelles de cuivre' for example, Moilin of 'de nombreuses passerelles'. Rimbaud mentions 'escaliers qui contournent les halles', Moilin an 'escalier tournant' and 'escaliers monumentaux qui occupent les quatre angles de l'édifice'. Perhaps the most striking similarities between the two works occur in Tony Moilin's account of the Palais International (Paris en l'an 2000, Chapter IV) and in Rimbaud's concept of the 'Sainte-Chapelle' in 'Villes' II. Situated in the centre of cities, both edifices are built in proximity to water, Rimbaud's 'Sainte-Chapelle' next to 'un bras de mer, sans bateaux [qui] roule sa nappe de grésil bleu entre des quais chargés de candélabres géants', and Moilin's 'Palais International' rising from the Seine like an 'immense navire' on its foundation of the combined Ile de la cité and Ile Saint-Louis. Similarly, both buildings enjoy a position of vantage over the metropolis they dominate. Rimbaud's Sainte-Chapelle is located in the 'haut quartier' and Moilin's 'Palais International' reaches high over the housetops of central Paris. From the footbridges and platforms of his building Rimbaud feels inspired to 'juger la profondeur de la ville' while a visitor to Moilin's city can observe 'le panorama de Paris et des campagnes environnantes [...] dérouler à ses pieds' from the balcony or gallery of the 'Palais International'. The final conclusive detail in the scenes is the huge metal dome distinguishing both Rimbaud's 'Sainte-Chapelle' and Moilin's 'Temple de la religion socialiste', the spiritual centre of his 'Palais International':

Un pont court conduit à une poterne  
immédiatement sous le dôme de la  
Sainte-Chapelle. Ce dôme est une  
armature d'acier artistique de quinze  
mille pieds de diamètre environ:

(Rimbaud, O.C., p.137)

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Chaque nouvelle construction forme un grand  
carré dont le milieu est vide et qui se  
trouve occupé par des cours et des jardins.

Sur ses flancs arrondis mille colonnes  
monstrueuses s'élevant au-dessus de  
la masse du Palais semblent vouloir  
escalader le ciel et portent jusque  
dans la rue un dôme immense, incui,  
prodigieux, le fer employé à sa  
construction ayant rendu possibles  
toutes les audaces de l'architecture  
et réalisé pour ainsi dire le rêve  
de la Tour de Babel.

(Moilin, p.20)

In line with the structure of other city Illuminations, notably 'Les Ponts, and 'Villes'II, Rimbaud's imaginative flight in 'Villes'II', based on notions common to nineteenth-century utopian writers, dissolves with the poem's final lines. The poetic vision is not, however, abruptly shattered as in 'Les Ponts', but in a movement more akin to the gentle reassertion of the real world in 'Villes'I', gradually fades before our eyes. The break is signalled in 'Villes'II' by the third paragraph of the piece beginning significantly with the words 'le faubourg'. It marks a move away from the inner city setting of paragraphs I and II. Slowly, the rigid metallic outlines of the 'acropole officielle' which show up against the 'ciel immuablement gris', disappear in an 'air de lumière'. Immediately, the regular arrangement of buildings 'en squares, cours et terrasses fermées' is replaced by 'les maisons [qui] ne se suivent pas' and ultimately by 'forêts' and 'plantations' as 'le faubourg se perd bizarrement dans la campagne'.

The city's transient, often elusive quality, emphasised here by the poet's attempt to capture a utopian city in the brief form of an Illumination, also plays a significant role in 'Métropolitain', the second of Rimbaud's city prose poems which probably date from 1874. The poem combines structural uniqueness with thematic opacity. Significantly, it opens with a reversal of the movement observed in the final lines of 'Villes'II' (where rural supplants urban) as attributes of the modern city such as boulevards and 'familles pauvres' emerge mysteriously from an archetypal natural scene of setting sun over the sea:

Du détroit d'indigo aux mers d'Ossian, sur  
le sable rose et orange qu'a lavé le  
ciel vineux, viennent de monter et de se  
croiser des boulevards de cristal habités  
incontinent par de jeunes familles pauvres  
qui s'alimentent chez les fruitiers. Rien  
de riche. - La ville!<sup>149</sup>

Apart from the detail of 'de jeunes familles pauvres', which momentarily recalls the two 'orphelins fiancés' of 'Ouvriers', this first section of 'Métropolitain', suggests neither a sordid nor a depressing urban environment. Its 'métropole' or 'ville' is rather decorated by a Gauguinesque rainbow of colours and by exotic and legendary allusions. The somewhat idealised picture of a poor community 'qui s'aliment[e] chez les fruitiers' is, however, displaced in paragraph II for a more familiar European scene. This landscape's claustrophobic décor recalls the worst details of 'Ouvriers' and 'Ville; their 'temps [...] couvert' and 'épaisse' and 'éternelle fumée de charbon':

Du désert de bitume fuient droit en  
déroute avec les nappes de brumes  
échelonnées en bandes affreuses au  
ciel qui se recourbe, se recule et  
descend, formé de la plus sinistre  
fumée noire que puisse faire l'Océan  
en deuil.

The stark contrast between paragraphs I and II is made more forceful by Rimbaud's repetition of images from the opening lines of his poem in a transformed state in its second section. The romantic 'mers d'Ossian', for example, becomes through an ironic play on words 'L'Océan en deuil'. The warm 'ciel vineux' which had encouraged upward movement in paragraph I becomes suddenly streaked with 'nappes de brumes' and 'sinistre fumée noire' which press down upon the earth. The 'boulevards de cristal', inspired possibly by rays of sunshine which appeared to rise up from the sea and sand, become, in section II, a dark and sterile 'désert de bitume' overshadowed by black clouds whose rounded shapes suggest the trappings of war: 'les casques, les roues, les barques, les croupes. - La bataille!'. This ominous

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<sup>149</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.143.

ending to the second paragraph of 'Métropolitain' - 'La bataille!' parallels in its typographic separation and exclamation mark the 'La ville!' of paragraph I. It leads one to draw an analogy between the city environment and a battlefield. It could even suggest that the poet's relationship with the city is one of constant physical struggle; a theory supported by the poem's final sentence with its use of 'débattre' and 'force'.

In paragraph III of 'Métropolitain' the real and metaphorical downward movement of sections I and II is reversed by an opening command which invites us to observe the changed surrounding scene:

Lève la tête: ce pont de bois arqué;  
les derniers potagers de Samarie ;  
ces masques enlumines sous la lanterne  
fouettée par la nuit froide; l'ondine  
niaise à la robe bruyante, au bas de  
la rivière; ces crânes lumineux dans les  
plans de pois - et autres fantasmagories  
- la campagne.

The sense of movement which permeates 'Métropolitain' and which is insisted upon by M. Spencer in his original interpretation of the poem is particularly strong in this enumerative third section.<sup>150</sup> Here the reader, in the company of the poet, passes swiftly under bridges, through agricultural scenery and beside enchanted rivers to leave the city world far behind. Though the water motif of sections I and II persists, the setting is cold and nocturnal. Other details are oddly reminiscent of Hallowe'en celebrations, 'masques enlumines sous la lanterne', 'crânes lumineux dans les plans de pois' for example. These 'fantasmagories', as Rimbaud calls them are suggested by or contained in the countryside. They persist in the following section of the poem which is filled by an extravagant and exotic mixture of fairy princesses, deserted inns and 'atroces fleurs'. These latter objects, enclosed behind railings or stone walls, recall the 'jeux enclos' of 'Bruxelles' but also in the trite rhymes they call to mind ('coeurs' and 'soeurs') the detested flora castigated in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs'. The links with this earlier poem are further developed when the flowers growing in the estates of mysterious aristocratic country houses ('possessions de féeriques aristocraties') are described

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<sup>150</sup> M. Spencer, 'A Fresh Look at Rimbaud's 'Métropolitain' The Modern Language Review, Vol. 63 (1968) pp.849-53. Mr Spencer interprets the poem partly as a railway journey on the newly completed London Metropolitan line, through subterranean areas, town and countryside.

as 'propres encore à recevoir la musique des anciens'. This suggests that they are more suited to receiving the Aolian strains of traditional and classical verse (produced by the 'constrictors d'un hexamètre')<sup>151</sup> than those of the 'lyre aux chants de fer'<sup>152</sup> of contemporary poetry. If the 'musique des anciens' tends to facile rhyme, word play and obscure allusion (all of which increase in frequency in the third and fourth paragraphs of the poem) and if it is also aligned with descriptions of aspects of the natural world which also prevail in this section, the converse must also be true; that the modern poetic (which Rimbaud calls on in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs' to express the 'fleurs étranges' and 'papillons électriques' of a new scientific era) should in its turn be more adapted to the exposition of a more original and contemporary subject matter. This new and contemporary subject matter is largely provided by the city theme which, according to Wallace Fowlie, reaches its zenith in the Illuminations where Rimbaud also significantly explores the possibilities of a new poetic form.<sup>153</sup>

By the end of paragraph IV in 'Métropolitain', the reader might be excused his confusion at a poem which purported by its title and first two sections to include urban content but which now almost imperceptibly has developed into something very different. The increasingly plausible details of the poem's first section and its resounding 'ville' and 'bataille' have been exchanged for a fanciful mixture of 'fantasmagories', 'la campagne' and 'le ciel'.<sup>154</sup> This move from urban to rural environments is compatible with the journey motif running through the poem but it clearly has a greater significance since it is emphasised by the poem's arrangement into separate stages marked 'ville' and 'campagne'. By this division, Rimbaud seems to be pointing to the traditional antithesis between these two orders, the former hated and artificial, the latter desirable, such as has been observed in the poetry of Verlaine, for example. As indicated by paragraphs I and II of 'Métropolitain', however, Rimbaud's distinction between the two environments is not as clear as that of his contemporary since he viewed the city less as a threat than as a challenge on a personal and poetic level for himself as a writer. It is what has been termed this 'desperate and unresolved struggle with the city' (which Rimbaud worked out through his life) which animates the final section of

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<sup>151</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.57.

<sup>152</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.60.

<sup>153</sup>See Wallace Fowlie, Rimbaud's Illuminations, p.95.

<sup>154</sup>Compare this with Rimbaud's claim in 'Nuit de l'enfer' (Une Saison en Enfer) that he is a 'maître en fantasmagories'. (Rimbaud, O.C., p.101).

'Métropolitain'.<sup>155</sup> In this paragraph Rimbaud also employs the now familiar scene of the active poet ('vous') waking to the ambivalent early morning world of the city, 'Elle [avec qui] vous vous débattîtes parmi les éclats de neige':

Le matin où avec Elle, vous vous  
débattîtes parmi les éclats de neige,  
les lèvres vertes, les glaces, les  
drapeaux noirs et les rayons bleus,  
et les parfums pourpres du soleil  
des pôles, - ta force.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>The phrase is that of M. Spencer in his previously mentioned article on 'Métropolitain'.

<sup>156</sup>The weighty analogy between city life and a battle experience reveals surprisingly little treatment elsewhere in the Illuminations only being supported by a reference to an 'aube de juin batailleuse' in 'Bottom'. However the subject was touched upon in the section beginning 'Encore tout enfant' of 'Mauvais Sang' (Une Saison en Enfer) where Rimbaud begins by exploring a comparison between himself and a 'forçat intraitable'. This criminal character enjoys both the wonders of nature ('le ciel bleu et le travail fleuri de la campagne') and the excitement of city existence ('je flairais sa fatalité dans les villes') during his periods of freedom and is moreover ideally dependent solely on his own capabilities to meet the challenge of his bohemian existence:

Encore tout enfant, j'admirais le forçat  
intraitable sur qui se referme toujours  
le bagne; [...] Il avait plus de force  
qu'un saint, plus de bon sens, qu'un  
voyageur - et lui, lui seul! pour  
témoin de sa gloire et de sa raison.

Sur les routes, par des nuits  
d'hiver, sans gîte, sans habits, sans  
pain, une voix étreignait mon coeur gelé:  
"Faiblesse on force: te voilà, c'est la force".



The reliance on the dual themes of city and nature, which overlap and separate in 'Métropolitain', displays a technique of bringing the two together which Rimbaud employs elsewhere in his city Illuminations. His balanced approach to the two environments recalls that of Nouveau who continually postponed commitment to one area or the other. Like Nouveau, Rimbaud had personal experience of semi, if not wholly rural surroundings in the form of Charleville and the Ardennes, so he refrained from forming romantic illusions regarding the natural world. Similarly, having also lived in a city environment, he was well aware of the existence of 'misère' and 'bons' in this milieu alongside its more attractive features. Giving Rimbaud's poetry an especially personal flavour where the city-nature theme is concerned, however, is his open and imaginative attitude to the subject, which ensured he did not presuppose a mandatory antithesis between the two different environments. Thus in 'Ouvriers', for example, the town invades the country, 'La ville [...] nous suivait très loin dans les chemins'. In 'Villes'II, the countryside blurs with the town, 'le faubourg se perd bizarrement dans la campagne'. In 'Métropolitain', city streets and their inhabitants emerge from the natural world while in 'Les Ponts' urban décor disappears with the interference of a natural agent, a ray of sunlight. Finally in 'Villes'I, the poem's city title is belied by a rich confusion of natural and urban imagery. The final city Illumination, arguably Rimbaud's finest achievement in the genre, and one wherein this characteristic mélange of urban and natural motifs is most apparent, is 'Promontoire'.<sup>157</sup> Its mysterious origins as outlined in the introduction to our discussion of the Illuminations (see p. 257) demands that the poem receives more careful consideration at this point in our study.

'Promontoire' is unusual among the urban prose poems in that it creates an impression of happiness on its first reading, untarnished as it is by the depressing details of 'Ouvriers' and 'Ville' or the ambiguous and anticlimactic endings of 'Villes'I, 'Villes'II, 'Métropolitain' and 'Les Ponts'. The poem also offers an impression of typographical density and compactness being composed, after a short introduction of one single, lengthy sentence weighed down by a mass of

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<sup>157</sup> Though interpretations of this poem have been many and varied most critics are agreed on its date of composition as being during Rimbaud's stay in England in 1874 or later. Thus like the other city Illuminations it belongs to his English period.

subordinate elements. In addition to these unique characteristics, 'Promontoire' also re-employs images and ideas noted in other city poems. Moreover, in its concluding phrase it also endorses ideas on poetry and the city as first revealed in 'L'Orgie parisienne'. It therefore provides a valid conclusion to a study of the Illuminations in particular and Rimbaud's city poetry in general.

If the promontory was not an original poetic subject as it had occurred previously in Hugo's exile poetry it nevertheless offered Rimbaud an apt point de départ as the 'lieu idéal du contact [de] deux mondes'.<sup>158</sup> The two milieus it comes to represent in Rimbaud's poem are the natural world, symbolised by the sea by which the promontory is surrounded, and urban civilization represented by the 'villa et [...] ses dépendances' which form the promontory's main feature. Rather than assuming the pose of a lone figure on the 'promontoire' which is Hugo's stance in his poetry, Rimbaud begins the poem as a passenger in a boat on the sea. From here he views the headland opposite under the natural luminosity of dawn and eventide and illuminated by the artificial lights of the returning 'théories':

L'aube d'or et la soirée frissonnante  
trouvent notre brick au large en  
face de cette villa et de ses dépendances,  
qui forment un promontoire aussi  
étendu que l'Épire et le Péloponnèse,  
ou que la grande île du Japon, ou  
que l'Arabie!<sup>159</sup>

From the outset the promontory offers Rimbaud a desirable refuge to be reached as conveyed by the image of the ship returning to port. By means of Rimbaud's irresistible hyperbole however it also comes to represent a microscopic counterpart for a selection of exotic lands and continents: 'Épire', 'Péloponnèse', 'Japon' and 'Arabie'.<sup>160</sup> This theme of immensity

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<sup>158</sup> Rolland Mortier 'Deux rêveries devant le Promontoire : Hugo et Rimbaud', Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de langue et de littérature françaises 3-4 (1970), 123-35 (p.126).

<sup>159</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p. 148. Rimbaud's description of a return to harbour is reminiscent of 'Adieu' from Une Saison en Enfer where he describes how 'Notre barque élevée dans les brumes immobiles tourne vers le port de la misère, la cité énorme au ciel taché de feu et de boue'. (Rimbaud, O.C., p.116).

<sup>160</sup> Compare with the phrase from 'Alchimie du verbe' (Une Saison en Enfer) where Rimbaud claims 'Je rêvais [...] déplacements de races et de continents'. (Rimbaud, O.C., p.106).

and exoticism is strengthened as the poem progresses through use of comparatives such as 'plus élégantes' and 'plus colossales' and capitalisation in 'Hôtel' and Palais-Promontoire'. Despite Rimbaud's elaboration of the scene before him, he never completely loses touch with 'la donnée primitive fournie par la réalité',<sup>161</sup> however, and allusions to Scarborough (the late nineteenth-century spa town mentioned in the poem from which Rimbaud apparently takes his inspiration) are discernible.<sup>162</sup> In the section from 'Des fanums qu'éclaire la rentrée des théories' to 'Arbre du Japon' Rimbaud's vantage point appears to change from 'en face de cette villa' to a point on the clifftop as he looks (or imagines looking) vertically downwards to survey a varied scene of fortifications flowering sand dunes and ornamental botanical or rockery gardens.<sup>163</sup>

d'immenses vues de la defense des côtes  
modernes; des dunes illustrées de chauds fleurs  
et de bacchanales; de grands canaux de Carthage  
et des Embankments d'une Venise louche,  
de molles éruptions d'Etnas et des  
crevasses de fleurs et d'eaux des  
glaciers; des lavoirs entourés de peupliers

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<sup>161</sup> Suzanne Bernard, p.526.

<sup>162</sup> Whether Rimbaud actually visited Scarborough itself is naturally debatable. V.P. Underwood, for example, has proved that such a journey (if occurring) could only have taken place in late 1874. This does not preclude the possibility that Rimbaud may have been inspired by photographs or paintings of this attractive north-eastern spa town at a different date.

<sup>163</sup> Rimbaud's viewpoint is probably from the ruins of Scarborough Castle 400 feet above sea level and built on the site of a fortified Roman camp. From here he would have had a commanding view of both north and south bays, the latter probably the position of the 'brick au large', also over the terraced gardens of south cliff and in the distance the ornamental gardens and man-made lake of Ramsdale Valley People's Park established in 1860.

d'Allemagne; des talus de parcs  
singuliers penchant des têtes d'Arbre  
du Japon;

Aquatic terminology such as 'côtes', 'canaux', 'Embankments', 'Venise', 'd'eaux' and 'lavoirs' provides the link in this chain of imagery where Rimbaud, in a breathtaking cultural and geographical sweep, sees embodied in the suggestive geological features of the landscape the diverse achievements and impressive spectacles of the natural and man-made universe. Aspects of the real scene call to mind the port of Carthage, representing ancient civilization. The canals of Venice,<sup>164</sup> represent the glories of the Renaissance, whereas London's embankments represent the achievements of nineteenth-century science.<sup>165</sup> In opposition to the urban world, 'la nature primitive' of Villes' II is present in features which recall 'dunes', volcanos (de molles éruptions d'Etnas'), 'crevasses' and 'glaciers'. Nature 'travaillé par l'art' also occurs in the 'parcs singuliers' of the cliffside with their cultivated foreign trees. On reintroduction of the cultural and architectural note (first sounded in 'villa' of section I) in the 'façades circulaires des "Royal" ou des "Grand"', Rimbaud's vertical viewpoint is exchanged for a horizontal vista with the frontage of the hotel, framed by its railways, extending impressively into the distance.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> This reference to a 'Venise louche' is one of the many mysteriously prophetic details in 'Promontoire'. Kiralfy's 'Arcadia', a 'fun palace' opened on the seafront in Scarborough in 1903, included among its other attractions a 'Little Venice' composed of underground canals on which visitors were conveyed by gondola.

<sup>165</sup> The Albert Embankment was opened in 1869, the Victoria Embankment in 1870, while the Chelsea Embankment was under construction at Rimbaud's arrival in London in 1872. See V.P. Underwood, 'Rimbaud et l'Angleterre', Revue de littérature comparée, 29 (1955), 5-35, (p.28).

<sup>166</sup> In 1875 a hydraulic tramway mounting the South Cliff to link the esplanade and spa was opened. Several years later a steam-powered tramway let into the cliffside linked the Grand Hotel with the shore below.

Like the promontory on which it rests, this edifice too swiftly assumes gigantic proportions and significance:

et les façades circulaires de "Royal"  
ou des "Grand" de Scarbro' ou  
de Brooklyn, et leurs railways flanquent,  
creusent, surplombent les dispositions  
dans cet Hôtel, choisies dans  
l'histoire des plus élégantes et des  
plus colossales constructions de l'Italie,  
de l'Amérique et de l'Asie

From his initial expansive vision of continents, in the final lines of his poem, Rimbaud focuses down on smaller details of the scene before him. He evokes the Hotel's restaurant with its illuminated windows alluring in the half-light of dawn and evening. He suggests high living in 'boissons' and 'brises riches', even human figures in 'des voyageurs' (like himself) and 'des nobles'.<sup>167</sup> These latter individuals, as the extended and ambiguous syntax of the poem seems to suggest, are instrumental (possibly through patronage) in promoting the cultural life of the Hotel. An internal rhyme between 'tarentelles des côtes' and 'ritournelles de vallées', combines artistic and geographical notions as the poet imagines the refrains of poetry and song emanating from the 'promontoire' and perceives dancing figures thrown in relief against the shoreline like an architectural frieze to 'décorer merveilleusement les façades'. This closing image of decoration linked to 'tarentelles' and 'ritournelles' which are both forms of artistic expression, is a particularly apt conclusion to the poem as it suggests Rimbaud's own poetic achievement in 'Promontoire'. Through the decorative, almost musical technique of theme and variations, Rimbaud has gradually enlarged his field of vision in 'Promontoire' from the 'villa et [...] ses dépendances' to take in the coastline in general and to move back to the 'Hôtel' which ultimately is subsumed in the immense and magnificent 'Palais-Promontoire'. Significantly, his interest and imagination is retained and challenged in this poem by the urban theme as

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<sup>167</sup> These noble figures are in sharp contrast to Rimbaud himself who in 'Mauvais sang' of Une Saison en Enfer affirms: 'Il m'est bien évident que j'ai toujours été race inférieure'. (Rimbaud, O.C., p.94).

architectural motif.

'Promontoire's' position among Rimbaud's last completed works effectively reveals the city's persistent influence on his poetic inspiration, an interest which arose with his first literary aspirations in Charleville and seemingly ended with his abandonment of Western Europe and city life after 1880. At the outset, the city represented a deeply motivating force for the young poet as witnessed especially by the letters of 1870-1. It also represented, in Rimbaud's striving to attain the capital, a cultural, primarily literary centre. Subsequently, on his decisive visit to pre-Commune Paris in February 1871 and first-hand experience of his dream, the city's strength as a political force became apparent to the poet. The works inspired by this particular stage of Rimbaud's career are 'Chant de guerre parisien', 'L'Orgie parisienne' and 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie'. They may be derivative in part of Gautier and Coppée or they may borrow phrases from articles in the revolutionary press (a natural source of information for a provincial newcomer with literary hopes); nevertheless they do illustrate and confirm the real establishment of the urban theme which was to persist with variations through the poet's literary life. 'L'Orgie parisienne', 'Chant de guerre parisien' and 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' moreover, combine the themes of poetry and politics (both near to Rimbaud's heart in the spring of 1871), within the image of the city as represented by Paris the poet's new environment. The city in 1871 thus provided the arena for new political experiment on one level while for the poet it also symbolised his definitive break with Charleville and his previous provincial existence. With the defeat of the Commune and Rimbaud's move to the capital in September 1871, the rhetorical and wideranging humanitarian tendencies of Vallès and Vermersch mirrored in Rimbaud's early city verse, faded into the background. They were replaced by a more personal approach to the city environment, stimulated by the poet's growing confidence, increased knowledge of and contact with city life. The poet's rapidly developing friendship with Verlaine also played a

part as his Belgian poetry ('Bruxelles' and 'Est-elle almée?') coincided with the contented initial phase of his liaison with his fellow poet. As if in illustration of Rimbaud's newly-found freedom and identity, these two poems are marked by a significant relaxing of the rules of traditional versification and by Rimbaud's introduction of himself as a perceiving individual in his city works (as distinct from the vague 'Poète' of 'L'Orgie parisienne'). By this point (mid-1872) the city's pictorial and dramatic dimensions were uppermost in Rimbaud's poetry as he drew on his personal response to the real scene around him for inspiration. Though many details in 'Bruxelles' can be tied in with the contemporary reality of the Belgian capital, others remain persistently elliptical displaying an early use of the private imagery hallmarking the future Illuminations. The most unique feature of 'Bruxelles' and 'Est-elle almée?' (two of Rimbaud's frequently ignored city poems) is undoubtedly their introduction and elevation of the image (to which Rimbaud admitted attachment in his letter of June 1872 to Ernest Delahaye) of the solitary poet framed against the background of a silent or early morning city. This particular motif, which punctuates Rimbaud's other urban poetry, has not previously been insisted upon in connection with his works.

Rimbaud's intermittent stays in London from 1872-4 which correspond to the final stages of his city poetry brought together a fresh and stimulating urban milieu and a poetic sensibility increasingly attuned to the literary possibilities of the surrounding city world. The sordidity of London brought forth pessimistic and documentary pieces such as 'Ouvriers' and 'Ville' where Rimbaud's actual poverty and sense of bewilderment on arrival in the English metropolis are displayed. On the other hand the foreignness and the enormity of the English capital also inspired a series of poems where in the city's architectural, utopic and futuristic appeal for its 'citoyen [...] éphémère' is apparent. The frequent evaporation of Rimbaud's city dreams and visions on the intrusion of reality reveals the permanent disparity between actuality and fiction in life and literature. This difference represented a constant challenge for the poet in his city works.

Where Rimbaud's city poetry underlines his geographical wanderings over several years: from Charleville to Paris through Belgium to England with Verlaine in 1872 and again to London with Nouveau in 1874, so it

reflects the parallel movement of his developing poetic sensibility in response to the urban world around him.<sup>168</sup> The distant satirical tone and conventional form of 'Chant de guerre parisien' where the wider general themes of literature and politics prevailed are exchanged gradually for a freer versification and a more personal involvement in the Derniers vers. Finally, in the Illuminations, verse forms are supplanted by the poème en prose with its direct evocation of cities arising from 'cette region d'où viennent mes songes et mes moindres mouvements'. (Significantly, Rimbaud's voyance technique, expounded in 'L'Alchimie du verbe' of Une Saison en Enfer also refers to urban stimuli as his spiritual development, described in the same volume, is illustrated through city terminology: 'le port de la misère', 'les splendides villes'<sup>169</sup> and so on).

Rimbaud's puzzling abandonment of western life and literature after 1880 represented even more dramatic a break with his previous existence than that effected in 1871 on his move from Charleville to Paris. Ironically, it is a less well documented event in the poet's life; its true motive will perhaps never be revealed. In relation to his city poetry, Rimbaud's departure from 'Europe aux anciens parapets' stands as a literal rejection of a life-style that had provided him with inspiration and a ready subject since his poetic début. Perhaps Rimbaud merely resigned the challenge of the city whose changing nature, as Baudelaire had recognised, resisted definitive encapsulation in poetic form. Perhaps, he was finally overawed by its poetic possibilities, 'C'est trop beau! trop! Gardons notre silence' he says in 'Bruxelles'. Indecipherable as it is, Rimbaud's final enigma, like others in his life, finds simple expression in a hauntingly evocative poem which though not necessarily construed as a final farewell can serve as an epitaph to this particular city poet:

#### DEPART

Assez vu. La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les airs.  
Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours.  
Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie. - O Rumeurs et Visions!  
Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>The Illuminations also possibly reflect a visit by Rimbaud to Scarborough and according to Antoine Adam his journeyings in Germany and Scandinavia. (See Rimbaud, O.C., pp.995-6).

<sup>169</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.117.

<sup>170</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.129.



### CONCLUSION

With Baudelaire's death in 1867 there emerged from the entourage of this 'roi des poètes' a new literary generation nurtured on Les Fleurs du Mal and excited by the variable 'mystères' and 'absurdités' of city life which this collection and Le Spleen de Paris had helped to reveal. Admiration of Baudelaire encouraged these younger poets in their turn to respond to the insistent 'appel de la réalité et de l'actuel' in their surrounding environment, though the extent and manner to which they did so was very much dependent on their own background, personality and attitude to poetry. It would be fair to say that of the five poets included in this study only Coppée set out to become primarily a city poet through a consistent use of Paris and its people to an artistic end. In his endeavour to become a 'poète purement parisien' he had the advantage of a thoroughbred Parisian upbringing which gave him a particularly compassionate interest in his fellow Parisian inhabitants. His Parisian childhood also created special ties or 'chaînes du coeur' between himself and his native city which his poetry attempted to express. Some aspects of Paris and her population Coppée loved simply for their picturesque charms ('les différentes physiognomies'). These elements inspired the descriptive and narrative pieces of Promenades et intérieurs and of Les Humbles. Other aspects of Paris, such as the banlieue and the Rive Gauche proved more powerfully motivating in a poetic sense being central to the poet's intimate personal relationship with his 'maîtresse bien-aimée'. Where these motifs recur in Coppée's early verse (especially in Intimités), often linked to the theme of memory, they hallmark Coppée's most notable attempts at urban poetry. Despite the intensely personal nature of Coppée's city verse, with the elegiac pieces heavily dependent on personal reminiscence and the narrative and descriptive ones often clearly directed by authorial comment, it nevertheless towered over that of his four confrères in terms of accessibility

and appeal to an audience in the nineteenth century. (This direct appeal has somewhat waned in the twentieth century as we will reveal.) Firstly, for his contemporary audience, Coppée's city verse had the advantage of a simple mode of expression in the words of everyday speech. It thus presented the reader with few, if any, difficulties in comprehension. Furthermore it also appealed to the general public by describing the familiar scenes and figures of city life around them in a way that they were easily visualised by even the least responsive of readers. The Lemerre collections of Coppée were even illustrated by sketches of Parisian life (inspired by the poems involved) and designed to facilitate the reader's response. The popular acclaim accorded to Coppée's Parisian poetry after his rise to fame with Le Passant of 1869 was reflected in a wider public sphere through the publication of numerous of his poems in Le Monde illustré and L'Illustration throughout 1871. It was also reinforced in the higher echelons of literary society by the inclusion of his Promenades et intérieurs in Le Parnasse contemporain of 1869-71, his elevation to the post of poetry selector for Le Parnasse contemporain of 1876 and finally in 1885 by the ultimate honour of election to the Académie Française. The poet's awesome achievements with the mass audience and the literary establishment only served to estrange him from earlier, less conventional poetic companions however. Verlaine, for example, in May 1873, indulged in a nostalgic reminiscence on 'le temps où Coppée n'était pas un grand homme'. Charles Cros, in 1876, became suddenly aware of the gap separating Coppée and himself when his offerings for Le Parnasse contemporain were returned with a curt 'non, impossible' from the elder poet. Interestingly enough, the judgement passed implicitly on Coppée's city poetry by these two poets through their comic imitations of his Promenades et intérieurs presaged the modern assessment of his poetry over a century later as fitting anthology material but as lacking the force and timeless quality to appeal to many succeeding generations. Where the bourgeois public of Coppée's day was charmed by his compositions, the modern reader, in the company of Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud, demands more from poetry than that it simply 'raconte une histoire'. This latter exercise was what Coppée, at the end of his career, confessed his poetry had been designed above all to do. Similarly, the modern reader appreciates a poetry which requires more than a passive participation on his own behalf. Such a participation is impossible in a work where 'tout est dit' and where even the reader's response to the content is directed by heavy-handed authorial insinuations in the text. The plethora of articles on Coppée and his Parisian poetry which marked the 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century has

thus totally evaporated by the present day with Coppée and his verse rarely the subject of serious interest and even less frequently the object of sympathetic and complimentary comment. Contemporary approval of other figures, such as Rimbaud and of the interest he showed in the urban scene, has conversely grown in recent years. This suggests that present-day disenchantment with Coppée is linked to his manner of treating the city theme in poetry rather than to the actual subject of the city itself which remains essentially modern and relevant to our twentieth-century circumstances. Whereas Rimbaud, for example, gradually expanded his urban vision by moving from Paris to Brussels and London and finally to the anonymous and universal cities of the 'Villes' poems, Coppée operated an opposite technique by consistently focusing down on limited and identifiable areas of a specific city. Intimités, with their revealing title, first set the tone by expressing the personal links between the poet, his native city and its inhabitants. Promenades et intérieurs continued the vein by offering a series of self-sufficient miniatures of Parisian life and people, while Les Humbles developed this brand of 'poésie familière' specifically in relation to Paris' human population. To a contemporary audience Coppée's poetry thus spoke of places and people familiar to them. To a modern reader on the other hand they speak of a past era of limited historical relevance. Coppée could have heightened the universality of his city poetry and perhaps ensured it a place in posterity by adopting Baudelaire's technique of establishing 'correspondances'. He however refused a poetry of spiritual and dramatic tension in favour of the security of a narrative and descriptive verse which could provide 'la matérielle'. His evocations of the city poor, for example, though touching on certain occasions, were never therefore as disturbing or moving as those of Baudelaire. His social realism, if philanthropic, similarly pales into insignificance beside the starkness and vigour of poems like Rimbaud's 'Ouvriers' or 'Ville'.

Where Coppée is at his best in the early nostalgic verse he invents pieces of haunting melancholy. In his rare ironic verse he also appears in a good light as being aware of the potential for humour in his verse and of its power to shock the bourgeois at times. In his later and overtly sentimental verse he had tired of challenging his middle-class readers and was merely content to 'cirer leurs bottes'.<sup>1</sup> This final verse thus contributes little worthy of recognition by modern standards in relation to the treatment of the city theme in poetry. From a distance of a hundred years Coppée's poetry can be judged in Rimbaud's words, clearly that of a 'talent', though certainly not to modern tastes that of a 'génie parisien'.

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Blémont in the preface to Etrennes du Parnasse pour l'année 1874.

Where Charles Cros is concerned, entirely different considerations and criteria come into play when we assess his contribution as a city poet. Firstly Cros' parentage was not purely Parisian as was that of Coppée so the same filial devotion marking Coppée's city verse is absent in that of Cros. Secondly, perhaps as a result of this first point, the percentage of Cros' poetry which has special relevance for the city theme through choice of personage, setting and urban motif is much more limited than that of Coppée. In a general sense, Cros' creative energies were directed into several different spheres, not just into the field of literature to which Coppée confined himself. In a poetic one, the limited city content of his verse was also due to Cros' belief that poetry offered an alternative to the mundane occupations engaged in our daily life (rather than a suitable means of expressing these banal occupations as Coppée had claimed). The special quality of Cros' Parisian poetry was also affected by the audience at which he aimed his works. Whereas Coppée gradually wooed the reader and finally pandered to his tastes, Charles Cros refused to compromise with his more rarefied verse and rejected the acclaim which necessitated unseemly and critical scrutiny from the public at large, 'qui ne comprend pas'. His Parisian poetry did not therefore aim at pleasing the city population at large by presenting it with a detailed mirror image of itself in literary form, but offered a series of subjective visions wherein the poet himself is the central creative character and where the city emerges intermittently as an insistent motif. This implicit, rather than conspicuous use of the city theme was less likely to appeal to the same audience as readily appreciated Coppée's poetry, hence Cros was largely denied the general recognition as a city poet which Coppée was able to enjoy in his lifetime. On the other hand, his interpretation of Paris as a living environment which stimulates and frames his own emotional, reflective and imaginative life, rather than as a realist spectacle before which he stands as an impassive observer, strikes a modernist chord. Similarly his verse illustrates the poetic force of the capital city not just in its pictorial dimension, but as a powerfully atmospheric milieu which relentlessly insinuated itself into his thinking and imagery. In the most lyrical of his city verse (the night poetry) the city acted as an eminently suggestive environment and appeared singularly compatible with the workings of Cros' poetic muse. Elsewhere in the poetry an elaborate duel between poet and the city is apparent. Sometimes Cros' changed emotional states prevail to colour his attitudes to the immutable urban scene. On other occasions the city rises to prominence and subtly filters into poems to alter their original direction and effect. In the more pessimistic of Cros' city poems the urban landscape relinquishes gentle insinuation in favour of a sudden reassertion which fractures

the poet's rêverie and reminds him of the existence of a substantial reality at variance with his dreams. Finally, in the negative phase of Le Collier de griffes, Paris resists and stifles the efforts of the poet's transforming imagination and affirms the rigidity of the city as an economic centre.

An essential difference between Coppée and Cros in their treatment of the city theme in poetry was that whereas the first took unpoetic aspects of city life and tried, with mixed success, to make them poetically appealing to a wider audience, Cros had no such deliberate plans in his writings. He merely responded on a personal level to elements of Parisian life, both attractive and depressing, and expressed this response in poetry. His poetry was therefore not accessible to all as Coppée's was, yet ultimately it was more lasting in its effect. A poem like 'L'Heure verte', for example, appeals directly to a reader in the twentieth century through the elasticity and musicality of its verse even though the specific phenomenon Cros is evoking in the piece was a particularly nineteenth-century occurrence. Similarly 'Insomnie' also shows Cros well ahead of his time in handling the particularly twentieth-century problem of individual alienation in crowded yet unsympathetic urban surroundings. Presaging the stance of one of Eliot's 'lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows', Cros, in this poem and in 'L'Heure froide', suggests what Apollinaire was to describe two generations later as a sense of being 'tout seul parmi la foule'.<sup>2</sup> Such evidence confirms the pertinent description of Cros made by a contemporary observer in 1885 as a 'Moderniste dans la vérité du terme [parce qu'] il a rendu comme personne, l'aigu et le vrai de la vie heurtée d'à présent'.<sup>3</sup> This 'aigu' and 'vrai' he revealed not through an attempt to be 'réaliste en restant poète', nor through a close observation of the spectacle of Parisian life played out around him as Nouveau did, but through a sincere expression of his own reactions to that reality which retain more of a universal value than mere description. Charles Cros cannot be described as a city poet of the same variety as Coppée since he never committed himself to write about little else but the city and its people. Nevertheless, he is undeniably a poet who wrote in the city and for whom the city offered alternately a source of literary inspiration and provided a deeply alienating environment. Whether Cros' city poems constitute a highpoint in his poetic achievement is a debatable point, yet it is clear that if Charles Cros had not experienced an urban environment his verse would have been the poorer for it and would certainly have been devoid of that modernist element which has rendered it a subject of increasing interest in recent years.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Zone' in Guillaume Apollinaire, Alcools N.R.F. (Gallimard, 1920).

<sup>3</sup> Louis Marsolleau, 'Charles Cros poète', Le Chat Noir 19 September 1885.

Though all our five poets were ultimately inheritors of Baudelaire, (the first poet really modern in his approach to the city) Verlaine, probably more than his four contemporaries, revealed the visible influence of this poet most clearly in his writings and poetry. In his Confessions he explains how Les Fleurs du Mal provided an illicit source of interest to him in his school years. In his lengthy 1865 article on Baudelaire he also shows his profound personal admiration for the poet as well as a certain familiarity with his critical writings in the vocabulary and terminology he uses to comment on Baudelaire's use of the city in poetry. In a purely poetic sense, Verlaine's prose pieces of 1867 (which formed the basis of the later Mémoires d'un veuf), were also clearly cast in the mould of Baudelaire's Petits poèmes en prose. It is thus surprising that in the light of Verlaine's apparent recognition of the true potential of the city theme that his poetry (in comparison with that of Baudelaire and even Coppée) reveals proportionately only intermittent attempts to draw on the 'source intarissable' which Paris offered to the literary man. When viewed in the light of Verlaine's heredity and personality his use of the city in poetry can be seen as both arising from and compatible with these two decisive factors. Like Cros, Verlaine was a Parisian not by birth but by adoption and thus his relationship with the city was of a different order from that of Coppée. Nostalgic longing for a past era plays no part in his poetry, neither does an overt concentration on specific areas of the city of personal interest, although proper names of locations in Paris do occur notably in the Mémoires d'un veuf. Moreover his non-Parisian parentage had the effect that Verlaine, like Rimbaud, did not restrict himself to Paris in his city poetry. He wrote about Brussels, Charleroi and London, not to mention the unidentifiable 'ville[s] de rêve' of 'Kaléidoscope' and 'Quelques-uns de mes rêves' which would have been anathema to a poet concerned with personal particularities such as Coppée. As the titles to these two Verlaine poems suggest, a proportion of Verlaine's city poetry was also related to the practice of rêverie in a city environment, not as an escape from that environment, but as a means of exploring its suggestive possibilities to the ultimate degree. The poet's dreams (like that of Cros in 'Effarement') are not therefore at variance with the real world in many of their constituent elements but rather in the odd way in which these elements are made to relate to each other and in the complex time sequence in which they interact. The same could be said of Rimbaud's 'Villes' poems where recognisable as well as unfamiliar objects from different times and cultures intertwine unexpectedly in the poet's visions of a new urban age. Rêverie is also significant where Verlaine's most characteristic

urban theme is concerned: his use of death in the city.

For Verlaine, death existed firstly as the ultimate reality facing mankind, a reality all the more threatening because of the constant physical reminders of its presence in the urban scene. Secondly, it existed as a powerful stimulant for the poet's macabre imagination through which he was drawn into the scenes he was witnessing making them appear even more terrifyingly immediate. The motif (as it appears in Verlaine's urban poetry) thus provides the link between the poet's concrete surroundings and the abstract imaginative realm which his poetry also tried to express. The banlieue motif in Coppée, the night motif in Cros and the figure of the attractive Parisienne in Nouveau are all of similarly dual significance as they represent visible aspects of the substantial world on one hand and active stimuli for psychological or emotional activity on the other. As his contemporaries invested their touchstones with specifically Parisian relevance so Verlaine portrayed death as an insidious urban threat, unexpected because of the superficial impression of vitality the urban scene presents, yet forever preying on the receptive mind of the poet in moments of vulnerability.

Our concluding comments on Verlaine will constitute less of an assessment of the poet (who already holds an undisputable position in French literary history), than a reevaluation of him in the light of some of his less popular pieces and especially from the perspective of his frequently dismissed short prose pieces which constitute (as with Nouveau) a considerable proportion of his city compositions.<sup>4</sup> From his city writings a picture of Verlaine in a biographical sense emerges. We can follow through his youthful reactions on a move to the capital from the provincial world of Metz, we learn of his early literary aspirations and friendships, his travels and the significant relationships with the men and women who shaped his life. We can also assess the poet in a psychological sense as his city poetry throws new light on Verlaine in love, Verlaine in prison and Verlaine feeling abandoned by his friends. Verlaine the dreamer appears in his city poetry as a very different character from the rêveur of Fêtes galantes and one inspired by his substantial surroundings. Verlaine the realist also emerges as a poet concerned with death as it permeates his city surroundings. The rounded personality which is built up of the poet through a reading of his city poetry fits Verlaine more satisfactorily for his privileged place in the annals of poetic history.

Germain Nouveau, the fourth poet in the study, is a good example of Bruno Hongre's claim that generally in the poet's relationship with the city 'tout est

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<sup>4</sup>In anthologies, Verlaine's position in literary history is presented largely in terms of his attitude towards versification. His city compositions are rarely referred to on their own merits in such collections.

passionnel'.<sup>5</sup> In his case the response to Paris arose from largely emotional (therefore variable) considerations rather than from a priori hereditary factors. Fond memories of the capital as an environment associated with happy years of early childhood were supplanted in Nouveau's adolescent sensibility by the more immutable ties established with his native Midi as a maternal image of consolation in bereavement. The city thus appears in his poetry as a complement to the rural and provincial environment with which he never completely relinquished personal ties and his approach to the urban theme is often that of a provincial intruder, and therefore diametrically opposed to that of Coppée. Nevertheless, Nouveau's poetry is in some ways more effective in exposing the capital's characteristic charm than that of the indigenous writer who forcibly related the contemporary city to his 'Paris natal'. From his semi-independent poetic position Nouveau concentrated less on the biographical importance of the city; he preferred to select aspects of Parisian life which epitomised the city's unique flavour (its parisianisme) and weave them into his poetry. His treatment of these aspects, namely the enigmatic figure of the Parisienne and the picturesque appeal of the Parisian streets was nevertheless influenced by personal factors, notably his own ambivalent emotional attitude towards women and his artistic talent which enabled him to transfer picturesque visual scenes into memorable 'tableaux' of verbal impressionism. Considering the Parisienne theme, this may at the outset have been inspired by Baudelaire's 'A Une Passante' or it may have relied on contemporary writings on the subject, such as those of Arsène Houssaye, for certain details. It swiftly acquired subjective significance for the poet however, as he recognised in the figure the essence of a femininity he found threatening and the personification of the vitality and the originality of 'la ville' itself, also an ambivalent female principle. Through elevation to the position of an inspiring urban muse the Parisienne became for Nouveau an inaccessible figure before whom he remained a passive and insignificant observer: 'muet comme un musicien'. His silence before this awesome figure was akin to that of Rimbaud in 'Bruxelles' who, overwhelmed by the poetic possibilities of the scene before him, can only exclaim: 'C'est trop beau! trop! Gardons notre silence'. As regards the second aspect, Paris as a 'spectacle en plein air', Nouveau also trusted to personal sentiment in the choice of those details to be emphasised to the reader. His descriptive pieces where the capital appears as a 'décor de théâtre' can thus no more be classed as objective realism than can Coppée's selective evocations of the city. Nouveau's authorial intrusions are however in the form of gratuitous details, unusual imagery and lyrical effusion rather than personal confessions or concealed appeals to the reader as those of Coppée tend to be.

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<sup>5</sup>Bruno Hongre and Luc-Duret, Paris et les poètes (Toulouse, Centre régional de documentation pédagogique, 1979), p.1.



The special power of Nouveau's city poetry lies in his pinpointing the essence of Parisian life in its characteristic motifs and in the memorable images he brought to bear on these motifs in his writings. By birth a non-Parisian he nevertheless became a Parisian poet through his often 'vivante' and 'fantasque' approach to the city, especially in the realms of prose poetry and poetic prose which hallmark his contribution to the theme. Through his choice of the Parisienne as a subject he took his place among a tradition of writers for whom the city found expression in female terms. For Baudelaire it was a 'catin', for Verlaine, in his 'Nocturne parisien', a 'courtisane', for Rimbaud, the revolutionary Jeanne-Marie. He also highlighted the theme by setting it against that of the province which recurred in his poetry, also as a female entity, 'conseillère et sainte'. Nouveau's coquettish Parisienne was however more than a literary abstraction or a symbolic force but she provided a basic inspirational stimulus rooted in the reality of his urban experience to which he gave an anguished personal turn especially in works such as 'Mendiants'. His Petits tableaux parisiens on the other hand, were not conceived of as a collection as were the Notes parisiennes and so they often lack the cohesion of this latter group. Nevertheless, in their semi-journalistic style, they do offer informed comment on various aspects of contemporary life as well as an attempt to abstract the especially Parisian quality of the French capital with reference to its pictorial and dramatic qualities. In both major urban collections, though rarely featuring as an identifiable 'je' figure in the text, the poet displays his own personality and reveals the interchange between himself and the urban milieu.

At the outset, the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud presents a greater challenge to the reader than that of his four contemporaries, not least where basic comprehension of the pieces is concerned. This opacity, though not uniquely the prerogative of his city poetry, is further complicated in the urban sphere by a number of additional factors which come into play.<sup>6</sup> For example, as the city (in the form of Paris) as a literary and political centre formed a key motivating force for Rimbaud's early works there was a natural tendency for the poet to work allusions to the contemporary world in his writings. These references to real events, which often necessitate a certain amount of detective work by the reader in themselves, are made doubly problematic when they are combined with details and images arising from the poet's fertile imagination which cannot always be reduced to a rational process. As Rimbaud's poetry passed from the Poésies to the Derniers vers and finally to the Illuminations this penchant towards impenetrable detail and secret, personal imagery became more pronounced. Concurrently his treatment

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<sup>6</sup>Significantly two of Verlaine and Nouveau's most difficult poems 'Kaleïdoscope' and 'Mendiants' are city poems!

of the city in poetry became more original. The stages of Rimbaud's city poetry were clearly marked in a way which distinguishes him from his fellow city poets by a commitment to three different cities: Paris, Brussels and London. The final stage moreover embraced elements not identifiably belonging to any existent city, yet undeniably urban in their essence and intent. In its first stage, on escape from Charleville, Rimbaud's verse sought to celebrate the city's new political identity as it emerged after the Franco-Prussian war and confronted him on a personal level on his decisive trip to pre-Commune Paris in early 1871. In his poeticisation of this highly charged urban environment the poet was assisted by a familiarity with the revolutionary press which provided factual information and rhetorical turns of phrase useful to a provincial observer of the confused Parisian scene. The poet nevertheless became disenchanted with Paris on his move there later in the year and he turned to a different source of urban inspiration in his subsequent city verse. His Brussels poetry, by way of contrast to his Parisian, was more personal in tone and often included an active 'je' figure in the text. It also placed more emphasis on the city's present potential as an impressive visual spectacle than on its historical significance as the setting for revolution. A similarly picturesque element was to impress Nouveau later in the decade (though in relation to Paris) and was to demand an equal response from this particular poet. The Brussels poetry also elevates the theme of the poet and the early morning city and marks an oasis in Rimbaud's personal and poetic life removed from the frustrations of life in Charleville and the disillusionment of life in London. It was also significantly placed in relation to his technical development from poetry in verse to prose poetry.

The subsequent Illuminations are less easy to place in a biographical sense in Rimbaud's experience of cities, though in a stylistic one they suggest a progression in their abandonment of the first person motif which is replaced by a number of different urban counterparts (including an 'ouvrier' and a 'citoyen') through whom Rimbaud speaks. This illustrates a gradually widening perspective in his city poetry where personal observation of an actual city is finally replaced by an enlarged vision of a new metropolis. A contrasting emphasis is evident in Coppée who concentrates on Paris as seen through the 'petit bout de la lorgnette'. The present-day attitude towards these two poets reflects their different responses to the key urban theme wherein the appeal for the modern audience lies. Coppée was a household name by the 1830s but today he has relinquished such popularity. Rimbaud, conversely, was unknown in other than limited literary circles in the nineteenth century but has now become an acceptable topic of debate in political, and psychological as well as poetic circles.

where the linguistic simplicity of Coppée's personal urban verse assures its comprehension by the average reader, the opacity of Rimbaud's poetry and the multiple interpretations it offers has protected it from appearing dated and ensures his survival as a literary enigma of the modern age.

During the course of chapters 1-5 of this study the difference between the five poets under inspection has emerged most strongly. At this point the balance may be redressed slightly by an underlining of the general links and similarities discernible in their pursuit of the common theme of the city which placed them in a tradition of urban literature. Although the rapprochements between the five poets are neither recurrent nor pronounced enough to mark them as a group distinct from their contemporaries who also exploited the city theme, they do point to those aspects of the theme which were prominent in the minds of poets at the time and to certain common concepts linking poets to the city in the twenty year period of our study. Firstly, in the works of all five poets concerned, the city is employed in its visible form as a real and inescapable physical presence. For Coppée this portrayal of the city's visible dimension was often an end in itself with a high proportion of descriptive and narrative pieces featuring Paris and its human population. In Nouveau it was also dwelt on at length in the Petits tableaux parisiens, while the city as a distinct 'tableau mouvant' occurs in the 'Fantaisies parisiennes'. The city's physical aspect ~~was also~~ significant for Verlaine, especially in mainly descriptive pieces such as 'Nocturne parisien' and 'Streets'. In his Mémoires d'un veuf, urban life also appears as a visible theatrical spectacle which the poet observes unfolding from the advantageous perspective of the third floor window. Rimbaud's Brussels' poetry picked up the theatrical element of urban life as exploited by Nouveau and Verlaine and his city became a 'réunion de scènes infinies'. Straightforward description or narration nevertheless plays only a minor part in his poetry. The same is true of Charles Cros who rarely uses realist description to a purely gratuitous end. He preferred to invest physical aspects of the urban world with a symbolic dimension (as in 'Le Fleuve') or to use them as a springboard for réverie.

A second similarity between the five poets, (which follows on from their acceptance of the city world around them) was a concerted imaginative response to that reality. It was the imagination which recognized and communicated the poetic potential of the urban environment. For Coppée, the immediate response to the city was that of an 'enfant de Paris' to his native town and he was inspired to establish nostalgic links between the present city and the distant era of his own childhood, thus extending the lyrical possibilities of the former scene. For Cros, the reaction to present reality was often a hostile one as powerful city images infiltrated and later intruded on his poetry. In the night verse, however, the poet responded favourably to the urban scene and pieces such as 'L'Heure froide', where he abandons himself to the nocturnal city, illustrate its full suggestive possibilities. In the cases of Rimbaud, Verlaine and Nouveau the novelty of the French capital to their provincial eyes invested the city with a special poetic value not appreciated by their other two fellows. A response to its 'poésie' was moreover reinforced in the case of the first poet by the Commune experience ('L'orage te sacra suprême poésie'). In the case of the second it was strengthened by the capital's perpetual reminders of 'l'horreur' or death and in that of the third by the enchanting Parisienne who offered a constant stimulus to his curiosity and imagination.

Thirdly, in the works of all five poets concerned there was a tendency to dismiss both the actual city world around them and their own immediate response to it and to replace both by an imagined or elaborated urban environment different from present reality. In the works of those poets who displayed a keen interest in description of the substantial world the importance of fantastic rêverie was naturally of minimal relevance. In those who relied only rarely on such methods the opposite is true. Where Coppée's poetry departed from the real surrounding urban world the shift was effected by means of memory, the 'lac sans rides'. Scenes viewed through the lens of memory were however not imaginary but merely recollective, they therefore appear with as much acuity as present stimuli. In Nouveau, the progression from the bare visible scene to one conceived in the poet's imagination relies largely on a use of imagery whereby gradually the objective scene before him is embellished with extraneous details and infused with subjective notations. In Verlaine the rêverie is more pronounced and is displayed both in the poet's construction of a 'ville de rêve' rooted in the various cities in which he lived, and in his frequent departure from the visible scene into a 'pays de rêves' as a result of an urban occurrence. In the latter case Verlaine's rêverie necessitates a fading out of the original scene and a substitution of it by unreal circumstances which are at least, if not more immediate to the poet's mind. In

Charles Cros the creation of a dream existence is also particularly strong both as an alternative to an uncompromising urban reality and as an extension of its more poetic aspects. A successful blurring of concrete reality through the transforming media of love, alcohol and the imagination marks the poetry of Le Coffret de santal for example, while a failure to transcend an increasingly unacceptable reality in Le Collier de griffes through similar means renders this last collection even more poignant in its mood and effect.

Finally, in the case of Rimbaud, the futuristic and Utopian urban visions of the Illuminations provide powerful examples of how an 'unreal city' can replace one's substantial urban surroundings in the mind of a sensitive poet. Rimbaud's vibrant 'villes' not only embrace natural phenomena, which are normally at variance with the urban scene, but they also interweave past and present eras and elements from the civilizations of east and west in their catholic visions.

It is in these general aspects of acceptance of the physical reality of the city, personal response to it and its replacement by a transformed poetic vision or an insubstantial 'ville de rêve' that our five poets can be placed in a tradition of modern urban poetry established by Baudelaire and his 'Rêve parisien', 'Tableaux parisiens', and Spleen de Paris and continuing into the twentieth century. Among the chief apologists of the urban theme after the five poets included in this study were Laforgue, whose 'Complaintes' belong to the first half of the 1880s, Verhaeren with his 'Villes tentaculaires', Apollinaire with 'Alcools' and ultimately Eliot. Vague echoes of motifs and themes employed by our five poets and by their successors also underline the imaginative bond linking these individuals, a bond which arose from their common city experience. The haunting piano music issuing from a banlieue residence in Coppée's 'Adagio' is echoed by Laforgue in his 'Complainte des pianos'. Similarly the barrel organ, of which Verlaine is aware in his 'Nocturne parisien', reappears in Laforgue's 'Complainte de l'orgue de Barbarie'. Rimbaud's geometrical park scenes, featured in 'A la musique' and in 'Bruxelles', foreshadow Laforgue's reference to the 'obtus et chic' Parisian park in 'Préludes autobiographiques', while the unsuccessful relationship with worldly women which plays a major role in Nouveau's urban poetry (and is also significant in that of Cros) recurs in Laforgue's 'Complainte des blackboulés'.

Verhaeren, as a poet of the scientific and industrial scene, also has connections with our poets especially with the Verlaine of 'Charleroi' in his attitude of horror yet strange fascination with the spectacle of modern life before him. The former poet also borrows some of Verlaine's London fog motifs and reverses

Coppée's sentimental approach to prostitution and vice in the city. In his more pessimistic poems, such as 'Les Usines', he stresses the nightmarish inhumanity of the modern metropolis and recalls Rimbaud's 'Ville' where 'ces millions de gens [...] n'ont pas besoin de se connaître'. In other memorable images such as that of the city as a relentless hand 'se renfermant sur l'univers', he brings to mind Charles Cros' later works and his horrific vision of the pitiless advance of the urban entity in economic terms: 'L'océan d'argent couvre tout/Avec sa marée incrustante'.

Apollinaire offers an interesting combination of the nostalgic element favoured by Coppée's early Parisian verse and that more lively appreciation of the contemporary scene favoured by his more adventurous contemporaries. His poetry includes flashbacks to his own childhood, references to the emigrants theme and to the concept of the city as a prison environment, all of which occur in Coppée's earliest city collections. In 'Le Pont Mirabeau' he explores the water motif which was significant for Verlaine in his city verse and for Cros in 'Le Fleuve'. In 'Les Fiançailles' he employs the nocturnal theme which marked the urban poetry of the latter poet. In 'Zone', probably his most well-known Parisian poem, he alludes to the 'poésie' of 'les prospectus', 'les catalogues' and 'les affiches', which played a role in the Dixains réalistes and also offered the bare bones of poetry in works such as Rimbaud's 'Paris'. In so doing he casts his poetic net back over a period of forty years and forward into the present day as those same 'prospectus', 'catalogues' and 'affiches' become increasingly part of our own varied urban environment.

One central image shared by the poets of the post-Baudelairian generation and by their successors in the early decades of the twentieth century, could serve as a relevant conclusion to this thesis in that it suggests the fascination with the city theme which has been our main subject. It is the image of the city as a focal point, an irresistible centre of activity and a controller of that activity as in the hub of a wheel. In the non-Parisian poets of our study the capital was constantly portrayed in their correspondence as a vital literary centre essential to the development of their poetic talent. For the one indigenous city poet and for Verlaine it represented both a significant imaginative stimulant and an environment whose rhythm was in tune with their poetic activities. On a geographical level Paris was frequently presented as a central point of focus for the nations of Europe or as Walter Benjamin has suggested a 'capitale du XIX<sup>ième</sup> siècle'. This concept is clearly underlined in Nouveau's poetry in relation to the city's nocturnal activity as in 'Les Grands Boulevards' he suggests a 'désir [...] qui se met en marche vers ce lieu'. In Apollinaire's 'Vendémiaire' the city's celebrative function is similarly to the fore as the different regions

of France throng to the capital and to the 'gosier de Paris'.

The image of the city as the hub of a wheel was Verhaeren's idea in 'La Ville' of Les Campagnes hallucinées and in 'L'Ame de la ville' of Les Villes tentaculaires. It aptly sums up the central and directive force offered by the city as a political entity, a literary nerve-centre and a poetic environment which offered a consistent source of inspiration to a variety of individuals who, apart from Coppée, are not remembered primarily for their city works. It expresses in visual form the centrifugal attraction and magnetic hold of the city on late nineteenth-century poetic imagination: 'Et les chemins d'ici s'en vont à l'infini/Vers elle',<sup>7</sup> 'Victorieuse, elle absorbe la terre',<sup>8</sup> Conversely, the detail of the spokes radiating outwards from a central point which also plays a role in Verhaeren's imagery, suggests the diverse and far-reaching implications of the theme in the works of those who employed it:

Et la clarté que font ses feux dans la nuit  
Rayonne au loin, jusqu'aux planètes.<sup>9</sup>

[...]

[...] la bête éclatante de bruit

[...] monte épouvanter le silence stellaire!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Emile Verhaeren, Les Villes tentaculaires précédées des Campagnes hallucinées (Paris, Mercure de France, 1926), in 'La Ville', p.14.

<sup>8</sup> 'L'Ame de la ville', Verhaeren, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> 'L'Ame de la ville', Verhaeren, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> 'Le Bazar', Verhaeren, p.167.

#### APPENDIX I

Strengthening the historical and personal links between the five poets in our study who all shared a common literary heritage and enjoyed contemporary life in the changeable and stimulating atmosphere of late nineteenth-century Paris, are special poetic links drawing this group closer together. In the case of Paul Verlaine and Francois Coppée for example, an early bond was established in the 1860s by their mutual attempt at rendering Hugo's <sup>son's</sup> prose translation of King Lear into verse. Later, in 1875, Charles Cros and Germain Nouveau consolidated their personal friendship by a joint improvisation of the comic play Le Moine bleu. The central adventure which drew all five poets together in the 1870s however, was evidenced by the collection of dizains from the Dixains réalistes par divers auteurs, published in 1876<sup>1</sup> and the miscellaneous and unpublished Album zutique composed between 1871 and 1872.<sup>2</sup> These works offered direct or indirect

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<sup>1</sup>Dixains réalistes par divers auteurs (Paris, Librairie de l'eau forte, 1876). Though the normal French term for a ten-line poem is a dizain the term dixain occurs in the title of this collection. A further peculiarity is that the Dixains réalistes only employ capital letters at the beginning of lines when they coincide with a new sentence.

<sup>2</sup>See Album zutique edited by Pascal Pia (Paris, Pauvert, 1962).



parodies of Coppée's early works, notably his Promenades et intérieurs. They were written by Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud, among other more minor contemporaries. As a literary document these dizains are doubly important. Firstly, in relation to Coppée, they provide comment from a discerning section of his audience in the nineteenth century and thus offer the modern reader a valuable contemporary assessment of his Parisian 'poésie réaliste'. Secondly, in relation to the parodists themselves, they help to further illuminate their attitudes to the city and poetry, for in relying on urban models for their inspiration, the parodies could also be classed as urban verse. Behind their comic façades they often reinforce attitudes towards urban life that are displayed in the more serious of the poets' compositions.

Before a more detailed discussion of the parodies, one might pause briefly to consider why Coppée, especially, should have become such a popular butt of humour among his poetic contemporaries. On a practical level, as the parodying of an unknown work is questionable, perhaps the most obvious explanation is that by the early 1870s, Coppée alone in our group had achieved widespread acclaim with his non-intellectual verse.<sup>3</sup> His poems, which appealed to the reading public at large if at times they irritated the more idealistic of Coppée's literary colleagues, could at least be parodied in the safe knowledge that the parodies themselves would not go unrecognised in their allusions. Moreover, as our study of Coppée has revealed, this poet was himself aware of the potential for humour present in his verse and specifically employed safety phrases to protect against ridicule in 'Le Banc' and Promenades et intérieurs VII. He also used humour himself in 'Le Petit Epicier', where he claims to have carried out 'sa propre parodie'.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore feasible that Coppée's often semi-serious approach may have given the lead to his parodists in some respects. Their comic dizains could thus be viewed less as a vehement

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<sup>3</sup>I-XVII of Promenades et intérieurs were published in Le Parnasse contemporain of 1869.

<sup>4</sup>Other ambiguous poems such as 'Simple ambition', 'Dans la rue' and 'La Famille du menuisier' (Les Humbles) and 'A un sous-lieutenant' (Le Cahier rouge) belonging to Coppée's early verse may also have encouraged the parodists in their activity.

attack on a contemporary whom they despised, as some critics have claimed,<sup>5</sup> than as flattery of a sort for a fellow Parisian and city poet.

When these possible stimuli for the parodies are considered, it is also clear that where Coppée's poetry is concerned, frequent eccentricities of style and usage as well as general tendencies towards banality or sentimentality make his poetry more likely to draw fire from a hostile audience than that of his contemporaries. To Rimbaud, whose early city poetry is forceful and politically motivated, the prosaism and lack of tension marking Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs could have appeared a weakness. Similarly, to Cros, whose imagination allowed him to displace and transform the immediate city scene around him, Coppée's reliance on the banal, daily events of Parisian life or on actual members of the city's unfortunate population may have seemed worthy of criticism. In a more particular sense, Coppée's poetic techniques as well as his personal approach to subject matter are frequently siezed upon by the parodists. Use of emotional vocabulary, personal revelations, authorial intervention and idiosyncratic rhyme are wilfully exaggerated by the parodists for their comic purpose. A detailed study of the Dixains réalistes of Cros and Nouveau, and of the 'vieux coppées' written by Verlaine and Rimbaud for the Album satique will illustrate the parodists attitude towards Coppée's early city poetry in terms of content and technique.

Parodies of Coppée's early verse can be divided up roughly into two categories: those poems which achieve a direct parody by relying on a specifically identifiable poem of the victim, and those which offer indirect parody by picking up only the more general aspects of the original author's work for comic imitation. There exists a natural overlap between these two varieties within individual poems as all parodies imitate in a general manner the digain form as used by Coppée, yet some do adhere in aspects of rhyme and subject matter to identifiable originals. This general categorisation of the parodies embraces a further scale of evaluation which takes into account the personal achievements of the four poets engaged in

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<sup>5</sup>Louis Forestier refers to Rimbaud's 'talent de briseur d'idole' which is exercised in his 'vieux coppées' ('Rimbaud en son temps', Europe (May-June 1973), pp.4-21 (p.17)). G. Crouvezier describes Coppée as Verlaine and Rimbaud's 'bête noire' in 'Deux farfelus célèbres au siècle dernier: Verlaine et Rimbaud', L'Union, 23-24 July 1966. Jean Nicallier in 'Textes peu connus de Rimbaud', Gazette de Lausanne, 12 May 1951 refers to the digains of the Album satique as 'de pastiches fort cruels'.

this comic exercise. As well as being indirect and direct parodies, those imitative dizains of Coppée are also composed of ribald travesties, satirical pastiches or merely harmless imitations of a previous author's style which can almost be liberated from dependence on their originals and be enjoyed as poems in their own right. The most successful of parodies occupies a central position where these two scales intersect, at a point between the two extremes of indirect and direct parody on the one hand, and between travesty and slight imitation on the other.

It is in Germain Nouveau's attempt at parody in 'A l'église' that the dizains approximate most closely the extreme of bold, exaggerated and critical imitation which characterises travesty:

Elle était à genoux et montrait son derrière  
Dans le recueillement profond de la prière.  
Pour le mieux contempler j'approchai de son banc:  
Sous la jupe levée il me sembla si blanc  
Que dans le temple vide où nulle ombre importune  
N'apparaissait au loin par le bleu clair de lune,  
Sans troubler sa ferveur je me fis son amant.  
Elle priait toujours. Je perçus vaguement  
Qu'elle bénissait Dieu dans le doux crépuscule.  
Et je n'ai pas trouvé cela si ridicule.<sup>6</sup>

Seeking to establish a Coppesque framework for his dizain Nouveau purloins the last ten rhymes and instantly recognisable final line of 'Le Banc' for his own poem. This however fails to disguise the obscene content of the parody which could by no stretch of the imagination be attributed to Coppée. In 'Le Banc', Coppée emphasises innocence and sadness in the relationship between a nursemaid and a soldier which is central to the poem. Nouveau in his turn underlines worldliness and licentiousness. Nouveau similarly substitutes for the religious, confessional tone of the first poem a religious setting in 'A l'église' incompatible with the content of the dizain. This makes his parody reminiscent of the medieval fabliau tradition with its tales of the sexual exploits of monks and nuns, or of the Marquis de Sade and his use of pornography in ecclesiastical settings. It is quite apart from the pure and naïve pieces of the Promenades et intérieurs. The parodic effect of Nouveau's 'A l'église' is derived from a combination of the form chosen by Coppée and Nouveau's own deliberately incompatible subject. This takes advantage of the traditional comic device of establishing incongruity between matter and manner, subject and style

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<sup>6</sup>Nouveau, O.C., p.424.

and of the powerful attraction of the obscene for humorous purposes. In these respects, though discovered separately from the Album satique and not featuring in the Dixains réalistes, 'A l'église' approaches the subversive and essentially private parodies of the former collection which was destined for clandestine circulation among friends rather than for the attention of a wider audience through publication. A second Nouveau parody with similarly vague origins repeats the ribald tone of 'A l'église' and what P.O. Walzer calls the 'pure tradition de l'Album satique'.<sup>7</sup> 'Après-midi d'été' evokes the Rabelaisian activities of a local brothel as conducted in time with the measured rhythm of choirboys singing in the vicarage garden next door:

Dans ce berdel provincial plein de fraîcheur,  
Attendant le sonneur, Martin, pauvre pêcheur,  
Qui vient tirer son coup entre deux sons de cloche  
Si son gland violet sur sa poche baloche,  
Trois filles dorment. - Ah! doux repos vaginal! -  
Et leur rêve est bercé par le chant virginal  
Des Enfants de Marie, au jardin de la Cure:  
Mais c'est le sacristain qui leur bat la mesure  
(Car tout se mêle en songe) et le vit de lilas  
Saccade en le rythmant l'Ave Maris Stella.<sup>8</sup>

In this poem the whispered aside to the reader of line 9 recalls Coppée's direct addresses to his audience in Promenades et intérieurs and the details of 'provincial' and 'bat la mesure' seem drawn from Promenades et intérieurs XIII, also set 'en province' where a small girl is playing a Haydn andante to the accompaniment of her grandfather ' [Qui] marque la mesure avec sa tabatière'. In other respects, chiefly setting and suggestive content, Nouveau seems to have strayed rather far from his model in this poem. Its obscenity gains especially ironic significance when viewed with hindsight against Nouveau's serious religious composition, 'Ave Maris Stella' of 1912. As well as this petition to the Virgin Mary offering in its title a hollow echo of the last line of 'Après-midi d'été', its first line and refrain: 'A genoux sous ma voile', is strikingly similar to the opening phrase of 'A l'église' (Elle était à genoux'), also written thirty years earlier and before Nouveau's conversion to Catholicism.

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<sup>7</sup>P.O. Walzer in Nouveau, O.C., p.1209.

<sup>8</sup>Nouveau, O.C., p.423.

The religious dimension of Nouveau's travesties of Coppée is one picked up by a number of further parodies though not necessarily with the same salacious intent. In them, religious figures, rather than the church as an institution are presented for belittlement or ridicule as they had previously been presented by Coppée for admiration.<sup>9</sup> A Cros dizain, for example, borrows the religious theme and takes for its title that of Coppée's famous recitation piece 'Bénédiction' (Poèmes modernes, 1869). This centres around the figure of a priest resolutely saying mass in the face of an enemy invasion of his church. Cros' religious figure is however more minor, physically and morally than his Coppesque counterpart. He takes little part in the action of the poem which involves the passing of ribald comments by a rowdy group of men returning from an orgy at Montmartre, to a couple of sleepy Parisiennes spotted collecting the early-morning milk for their husband's breakfast coffee. The priest's disconcertment at these men's suggestive remarks is matched only by his embarrassment when their joviality is directed against himself in the form of an obscene music-hall song which his saintly riposte 'Pax vobiscum',<sup>10</sup> does little to repel. A more direct parody of Coppée's 'Bénédiction' and one which gives a particularly comic turn to the dogged determination of Coppée's catholic priest who pursues his religious activities in spite of the hostilities of the marauding army and finally during a physical attack on his own person, is provided by 'Pieux souvenir' of the Album satique. Written by Léon Valade, this comic dizain merits inclusion here as a representative example of this latter poet's unique wit and genuine sense of fun, both traits often lacking in the parodies of Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud:

Le jour où j'abordai pour la première fois  
La Sainte Table, - c'est d'une onctueuse voix  
Que le curé d'abord, dont la main potelée  
Tenait entre deux doigts l'hostie immaculée,

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<sup>9</sup> In Promenades et intérieurs Coppée had made occasional use of incidental religious figures, the 'bonne sœur' of XVIII, for example and the 'discret abbé' of XXX. It was also in the Promenades et intérieurs that Coppée had voiced the somewhat unfortunate, if lighthearted, desire to be 'non pas curé, mais seulement vicaire/Dans un vieil évêché de province' (XXXI).

This avowal may have strengthened the parodists in their determination.

<sup>10</sup> Cros, O.C., p.147.

Dit: "Corpus domini nostri Jesu Christi ..."  
Une quinte le prit, rauque ... L'accès parti,  
"Custodiat ani ..." fit-il. Pire et plus grasse  
La toux revint. - Enfin, secouru de la Grâce,  
Ce bon prêtre pieux qu'admirait Ozanam  
Acheva: "...mam tuam in vita aeternam!"<sup>11</sup>

Valade's effect in this poem relies on the same technique of incongruity exploited by Nouveau in his dizains. Coppée's noble theme which arouses feelings of patriotism and faith in his audience, is replaced by the laughable triviality of a coughing fit. Valade, however, effects his substitution surreptitiously since his opening lines with their reference to the 'Sainte-Table', the 'onctueuse voix' and the 'hostie immaculée' lead us to expect a serious conclusion to his poem. At line 6, the picture begins to dissolve as the priest's voice disappears in a spasm of coughing which fractures the service at a critical point. The parody's similarity to Coppée's 'Bénédiction' is retained by its parallel use of Latin phrases from the mass and by its appropriation in lines 7 and 8 of rhymes from the closing section of the Coppée poem where the dying breaths of his martyred 'moine' are described:

Pour la troisième fois il traça dans l'espace  
Le signe du pardon, et d'une voix très basse,  
Main qu'on entendit bien, car tous bruits s'étaient tus,  
Il dit, les yeux fermés: Et Spiritus sanctus.  
Puis tomba mort, ayant achevé sa prière.<sup>12</sup>

Complementing the use of religious figures, which while featuring in Coppée also illustrates the parodists' bravado and wish to dissociate themselves from bourgeois religion in general, is their use in the imitative dizains, of insignificant, lower-class figures of the kind employed by Coppée in his Promenades et intérieurs and especially in Les Humbles of 1872. Though our study of Coppée has revealed him to have been aware of the comic potential of these lower-class figures as heroes, his knowledge only rarely affected blatant attempts at creating audience sympathy for the trifling objects of his attention through affective vocabulary and sentimental detail in their portrayal. These latter two idiosyncrasies naturally

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<sup>11</sup> Album satirique, p.124.

<sup>12</sup> Poésies, 1864-1869, p.204.

drew fire from the parodists. Their distaste for Coppée's potentially touching reliance on the poor and simple of the city manifests itself in three different ways. Firstly, through a use of obscenity and innuendo (the former particularly apparent again in the Album zutique) which refutes Coppée's implied belief in the moral superiority of Paris' simple folk (the 'poor-but-honest' theme). Secondly, through a use of comic exaggeration with the 'humblés' portrayed as more wretched, mundane and uninteresting than in reality. This derides the lack of dramatic tension marking the Promenades et intérieurs. Thirdly, through a portrayal of inanimate objects associated with menial tasks, as possessing almost human moral qualities and physical characteristics. This obliquely comments on Coppée's reliance on the banal occupations of the poor, and his attempted idealisation of their menial tasks. This final category while still mainly composed of poems which are clearly recognisable as exaggerated comic imitations of Coppée, nevertheless embraces some memorable images and lines which match Coppée's manner and style very closely. It also includes a Rimbaud poem which despite its inclusion in a somewhat unconventional collection of parodies, displays high potential as an independent work of art.

Charles Cros' 'Vue sur la cour' falls into the first category of parodies employing obscenity and innuendo for comic effect. The poem features in the Dixains réalistes as XXXIII of that collection but it had previously occurred in a different form in the Album zutique. The two existing versions of the Cros poem clearly reveal the contrasting tones of the two volumes containing parodies of Coppée, the former carefully collated and printed in discreet italics and the latter hand-written and punctuated by obscene drawings. For its Coppesque framework, the poem draws for setting and characters on the lower echelons of society. Like Nouveau's 'À l'église' it also borrows the final line of 'Le Banc' and moreover exploits this latter poem's famous if mundane central characters of a 'bonne' and a 'troubade'. In the Dixains réalistes collection, the text of the poem is as follows:

La cuisine est très propre et le pot-au-feu bout  
Sur le fourneau. La bonne, attendant son troubade,  
Epluche en bougonnant légumes et salade,  
Ses doigts rouges et gras, avec du noir au bout,  
Trouvent les vers de terre entre les feuilles vertes.  
On bat des traversins aux fenêtres ouvertes.  
Mais voici le pays. Après un gros bonjour,  
On lui donne la fleur du bouillon, leur amour

S'abrite à la vapeur du pot, chaud crépuscule...

Et je ne trouve pas cela si ridicule.<sup>13</sup>

This final version of the Cros poem merely highlights the insignificance of the lower-class characters involved, the prosaism of the setting and the unromantic occupations of these rustic figures: airing bedlinen, cleaning vegetables,<sup>14</sup> eating soup and so on. The variants of lines 8-9 appearing in the Album zutique however offer much more obscene a significance to the parody:

On lui donne la fleur du bouillon, - par amour

Il prend la bonne émue, il la baise, il l'encule.

While instantly distancing Cros' poem from Coppée's chaste creations of the Promenades et intérieurs these two lines create a closer parallel with Nouveau's equally false imitation of Coppée in 'A l'église' and 'Après-midi d'été'.

Three further parodies of Coppée (by Cros and Rimbaud) also offer obscurely suggestive details in their attempts to undermine the latent sentimentality of the first poet. Rimbaud's 'État de siège?', for example, recalls the title of Coppée's war collection Écrit pendant le siège. Also, as the question mark suggests, it has punning relevance for the wretched character evoked by Rimbaud in his poem, a 'pauvre postillon':

Le pauvre postillon, sous le dais de fer blanc,  
Chauffant une engelure énorme sous son gant,  
Suit son lourd omnibus parmi la rive gauche,  
Et de son aine en flamme écarte la sacoche,  
Et tandis que, douce ombre où des gendarmes sont,  
L'honnête intérieur regarde au ciel profond  
La lune se bercer parmi la verte ouate,  
Malgré l'édit et l'heure encore délicate,  
Et que l'omnibus rentre à l'Odéon, impur  
Le débauché glapit au carrefour obscur! <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Cros, O.C., p.146.

<sup>14</sup>The somewhat unpoetic verb 'éplucher' which Cros employs in line 3 of his poem has also been taken from Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs. In VII Coppée mentions 'Ces couples de pioupious qui s'en vont par les champs/Côte à côte épluchant l'écorce des baguettes' and in XV he uses the scent of a freshly peeled orange as a poetic stimulant: 'Si j'épluche le soir une orange échauffée/Je rêve de théâtre et de profonds décors.'



The poem is reminiscent in its opening line of two of Coppée's poems involving lone male figures observed in Paris; Promenades et intérieurs XIII where a 'dur charretier [...] de fatigue abreuvé' returns home from a day's work in the city, and XXVIII where a solitary fisherman 'Assis les pieds pendants sous l'arche du vieux pont' becomes the focus of the poet's attention. The pitiful circumstances of the working class and the poet's resolute idealisation of them is apparent especially in the first of these Coppée poems and is played on by Rimbaud. He mimicks Coppée by using the adjective 'pauvre' to describe his coach driver and calls upon our sympathy in the incongruous detail of line 2; a huge chilblain which the driver nurses under his glove. 'Odéon' (line 9) and 'rive gauche' (line 3) similarly reveal the parodist picking up Coppée's frequent use of real locations in Paris (practiced mostly in his early verse), as well as this poet's personal fascination with the Left Bank. Finally, 'verte ouate' (line 7) picks up 'ouatés' of Promenades et intérieurs XXII and 'honnête intérieur' of line 6 subtly alludes in a highly Coppesque phrase to the title of this latter collection.<sup>16</sup> Lines 9 and 10 however invest the poem with a certain ambiguity as we focus on the driver '[qui] de son aine en flamme écarte la sacoche' and on a mysteriously 'impur' figure of a 'débauché' who 'glapit au carrefour obscur'. We are reminded here of Rimbaud's own early 'Accroupissements' and 'Vénus Anadyomène' rather than of Coppée's city verse.

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<sup>15</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., p.116. Léon Valade's 'Intérieur d'omnibus', from the Album satique reveals in its similarity to Rimbaud's piece the common interplay between the parodies themselves as well as between them and Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs. His opening phrase for example is 'Le lourd omnibus' which repeats words from Line 3 of the Rimbaud parody. 'Odéon' also occurs in the detail of the 'chevaux [qui] s'acheminent/ vers l'Odéon'. See Album satique, p.180.

<sup>16</sup> Direct references to the titles of Coppée's works are especially prevalent in the parodies of Léon Valade. In 'Epilogue', for example, he refers to Fais ce que dois (a play by Coppée performed at the Odéon on 21 October 1871) and in the same poem, in the line 'forgé longuement le métal de ma Grève', to Coppée's 'La Grève des Forgerons'. In 'Intérieur d'omnibus' he alludes to Le Rendez-vous, also a play by Coppée first performed in 1872. See Album satique p.140 and p.180 for the texts of these poems.

In Charles Cros' two dizains the sexual innuendoes are more obscure since they are couched in nineteenth-century slang expressions. They are also less offensive, having passed safely into the Dixains réalistes for publication. 'Croquis de dos' for example reverses the popular contemporary leaning towards city prostitutes as poetic muses by taking the male go-between (potentially a much less romantic choice), as its subject. This change of emphasis is indicated in the poem's title, a 'dos' being a nineteenth-century slang term for a pimp or procurer. It is further reinforced by line 7 of the poem where this figure's 'connaissance' is obliquely described as having 'de l'ouvrage ce soir'. Cros' colourful description of the overweight, pompous figure of the 'dos' (lines 3-7) contradicts Coppée's preference for phthisic and undernourished city folk. Nevertheless it does rely on the over-used 'ettes' rhyme which occurs on eight occasions in the Promenades et intérieurs:

Sa casquette est la plus superbe des casquettes,  
En soie, et fait valoir ses courbes roufflaquettes.  
Un foulard jaune tourne autour de son cou gras  
Et rouge, que font voir ses cheveux tondus ras <sup>17</sup>

The poem's resounding final line, 'Gargon! un mazagran!' mimicks the frequent use of rhetoric or direct speech in the last lines of Coppée's dizains (see Promenades et intérieurs IX, XIV, XX, XXV, XXXIV and XXXIX).<sup>18</sup> It also appears to draw on a detail of Coppée's private life since his favourite drink was reputedly the eau-de-vie and coffee mixture known as mazagran.<sup>19</sup>

'Gagne-petit', also by Cros, purports to describe as its title suggests one of the minor Parisian figures of the Promenades et intérieurs. The character's modest existence, idealised in Coppesque fashion, is lived out far from the corruptive influences of a city-centre life: 'loin du bruit, loin des cris de l'envie/Et des ambitions vaines du boulevard'

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<sup>17</sup> Cros, O.C., p.144. This characteristic rhyme is also featured in the parodies of Rimbaud and Léon Valade. The former poet borrows the 'guinguette', 'baguette' rhyme of Promenades et intérieurs VII in his 'je préfère sans doute...' while Léon Valade, in imitation of the 'cigarettes', 'fleuriettes' rhyme of Promenades et intérieurs XXXIX, rhymes 'bleuettes' and 'statuettes' in his 'Epilogue' of the Album satirique.

<sup>18</sup> 'Gargon, un grog!' which occurs in 'Le Naufragé' of Les récits et les élégies (see Poésies 1874-8, p.177) is the most markedly similar line in Coppée to the final line of Cros' parody. Intriguingly, the Coppée poem was not published until 1878, two years after the appearance of the Dixains réalistes. It thus seems as if Coppée were answering Cros in his poem.

<sup>19</sup> Louis Forestier believes Charles Cros' 'Pituite' also contains a reference

(lines 2-3).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, his survival on the day he is observed by the poet (and in a sentimental detail, the survival of his expected child) is dependent, like that of the flower-girl in Intimités, on the generosity of the richer members of society: 'Il compte, pour dîner, sur ses verres noircis'. In this final detail, 'gagne-petit's profession (as his colleagues in 'Croquis de dos') is accorded its full ambiguity. A 'marchand de verres pour éclipses' in the nineteenth century, had in addition to its literal meaning, the sense of a souteneur or mauvais garçon.<sup>21</sup>

Exaggeration as well as obscenity and euphemistic suggestion plays a major role in the parodists ridicule of Coppée's use of lower-class figures for inspiration in the Promenades et intérieurs and in his early verse in general. Charles Cros, for example, pokes fun at poems such as XXIII of the Promenades et intérieurs which briefly evokes a nameless and consumptive female figure spotted in the city environment. Illogically it is his heroine's uniquely dull physical appearance and the supremely commonplace nature of the activity in which she is engaged that fascinates and enchants the poet in his 'Récipiscence':

Celle qui m'apparaît, quand j'ai clos mes yeux las,  
Tricote un bas de laine. Elle a des bandeaux plats,  
Elle a passé la fleur des ses jeunes années.

Son corsage montant et sa petite mante,  
Cachent probablement un corps grêle et fiévreux.  
Il n'est pas étonnant que j'en suis amoureux.<sup>22</sup>

Hector de l'Estras offers a similarly overdone imitation of Coppée in XIV of the Dixains réalistes where typically Coppesque adjectives such as

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to Coppée's life in the lines 'Je voudrais une soeur/Une femme rêvant avec moi, côte à côte' as Coppée lived with his sister Annette; it is also possible his 'Morale' with its 'caniche expert aux dominos' alludes to one of Coppée's favourite pastimes.

<sup>20</sup> Cros, O.C., p.143.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Forestier explains in Cros, O.C., p.1131 that one popular venue for these disreputable Parisian figures was the 'carrières de Montmartre' which Cros refers to in his poem.

<sup>22</sup> Cros, O.C., p.146. These lines especially offer a direct parody of Promenades et intérieurs XXXIII where a similar female figure is 'pâle', 'rousse' and 'laide' and is occupied in sewing underwear.

'honnête', 'humble' and 'douce' abound as well as sentimental details contrived to play on the reader's sympathies. The woman's occupation as a simple seamstress, her dependent and disabled father are both examples of this:

Près d'une femme à toque, et qui fait de l'esbrouff,  
une fillette, à l'air honnête, en waterproof,  
ayant sur ses genoux un grand carton de mode,  
et serrée en son coin de peur d'être incommode,  
s'en va reporter son ouvrage au boulevard.  
Sa mine est humble et douce. - Et dans son bleu regard  
je lis que son travail fait vivre son père  
qui n'est pas décoré, -quoiqu'ancien militaire,  
quoiqu'ayant rhumatisme, et goutte, et cheveux gris!  
Et de la fière enfante je sens mon coeur épris!<sup>23</sup>

Numerous other examples of the parodic dixains also play on Coppée's predilection for the city poor in his poetry. One might mention Verlaine's 'Dédaigneux des plaisirs de mon âge', where the poet himself, 'ayant changé de sexe en esprit', evokes the 'bonheur des femmes de ménage'. XXXIX and XXXVII from the Dixains réalistes by Maurice Rollinat similarly undermine Coppée's serious treatment of the poor by conjuring up a 'belle tripière rousse' and a shapely crayfish seller respectively.<sup>24</sup> V of Dixains réalistes (written by Charles Cros' brother Antoine), is also significant in its picture of a Parisian chip-seller, euphemistically described as a 'servant du légume ingrat'.<sup>25</sup> This could be a sly allusion either to 'Olivier' where Coppée speaks of 'des fritures' in Paris, or to Promenades et intérieurs II where he draws an unfortunate parallel between birdsong in a Parisian park and the sound of an 'immense friture'. Léon Valade's 'Intérieur' of the Album satique also conjures up a bizarre scene of nascent love between a refined female patient and a 'beau pédicure',<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Dixains réalistes, p.49.

<sup>24</sup> Dixains réalistes, p.43 and p.41.

<sup>25</sup> See Dixains réalistes, p.9.

<sup>26</sup> Album satique, p.192. In a fascinating illustration of telepathy between the poetic and artistic worlds, Valade's poem provides an almost perfect verbal counterpart for Degas' painting 'Le Pédicure' (1873) now housed in the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris.

while Nina de Villard in IX and in XXIV of the Dixains réalistes evokes two contrasting female city inhabitants both earning attention in Coppée's early works: firstly, the 'poudre de riz Rachel' and secondly the respectable but fallen-on-hard-times figure of the 'ange en waterproof'.<sup>27</sup> Further examples range from the sublime to the ridiculous including Nina's nostalgic and sensitive account of a boy toy-seller whose job of demonstrating spinning tops has given him a premature horror of childish sports,<sup>28</sup> to Jean Richepin's incongruous allusions to a Parisian truss-maker, prior to philosophical comment on the trials of love: 'Pourquoi le coeur n'a-t-il pas son orthopédie?'<sup>29</sup>

Germain Nouveau's contribution to the parodies relying on exaggeration rests on three poems: 'Muses, souvenez-vous du guerrier' and 'J'entraîs chez le marchand de meubles' of Dixains réalistes and 'Garçon de café' from the Album satique. The first seizes on Promenades et intérieurs XXIX where a disabled veteran soldier enthusiastically explains military tactics to a young conscript:

Malgré ses soixante ans, le joyeux invalide  
Sur sa jambe de bois est encore solide.

[.....]

Son bâton à la main, le bonhomme échauffé  
Conte au jeune soldat et lui rend saisissable  
La bataille d'Isly qu'il trace sur le sable.

Opening his poem with an apostrophe to the poet's Muse (a device employed frequently by Coppée in the Promenades et intérieurs), Nouveau swiftly echoes Coppée's 'joyeux invalide' in the ancient hero of his own dizain who 'était la gaîté de son dôme', (line 4):

Muses, souvenez-vous du guerrier, -de l'ancien  
qui ne fut général ni polytechnicien,  
mais qui charma dix ans les mânes du grand Homme!  
Ce invalide était la gaîté de son dôme.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Dixains réalistes, pp.13 and 28.

<sup>28</sup>Dixains réalistes, VIII, p.12.

<sup>29</sup>Dixains réalistes, IV, p.8.

<sup>30</sup>Nouveau, O.C., p.419.

Line 5 of Nouveau's poem inevitably picks up the unpoetic detail of the old soliers wooden leg claiming 'Mon coeur est plein du bruit de sa jambe de bois',<sup>31</sup> while the poem's final line 'et j'ai fait encadrer le mot de faire-part' alludes in typically veiled Coppesque fashion to the death of the 'pauvre vieux', subject of the poet's attention.

'J'entrais chez le marchand de meubles' has a less easily identifiable Coppée dizain as its model. It prefers to parody in a general fashion Coppée's use of professions as poetic introductions to a portrayal of his working-class heroes, a device especially prevalent in the collection Les Humbles. His frequent wish to establish a relationship with his poetic subjects is also imitated in Nouveau's falsely sensitive appreciation of the furniture-seller's trade, which encourages the naïve 'marchand' to recognize in him a like-minded commercial spirit:

J'entrais chez le marchand de meubles, et là, triste,

[.....]

C'est vers toi que je vins, Canapé-Lit-Leroux.

J'observai le ressort, me disant que cet homme  
fit une chose utile, étant donné le somme.

J'appréciai le tout d'un mot technique et fin;  
si bien que le marchand, ému, me tend sa main

honnête, et dit: 'Monsieur fabrique aussi sans doute?'<sup>32</sup>

The handshake motif of the poem's final lines, (construed by Nouveau as a sentimental addition to his poem), provides an interestingly prophetic indication of the direction of Coppée's poetry in later life. A similar handshake in the poem 'L'Homme-affiche' becomes central to the relationship established between poet and wretched poetic subject in this work.

Nouveau's final parody centering on the poor city inhabitants, 'Garçon de café', is a particularly successful piece. The poem contains a mixture of lines recalling Coppée, and others apparently original to Nouveau yet trite enough to have come from the pen of the former poet:

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<sup>31</sup>This detail vies with the final line of 'Le Banc' for popularity with Coppée's parodists. Léon Valade's comic invalid in Album zutique, p.40, for example has an impossible 'tête de bois', while Maurice Rollinat in XLVII of the Dixains réalistes shudders at the thought of the 'cuir élégant' of a fashionable display shoe hiding a macabre 'pied de bois'.

<sup>32</sup>Nouveau, O.C., p.420.

L'établissement riche et fameux a grand air.  
Las d'avoir trop servi l'absinthe et le bitter,  
Le garçon, déjà vieux, de qui le front s'appuie  
A l'humide vitrage où vient couler la pluie,  
Songe: quelle existence, hélas! matin et soir,  
Toujours crier, toujours courir, jamais s'asseoir;  
N'avoir pour horizon que l'humide bitume  
Du boulevard; porter un éternel costume,  
Et ne jamais sortir de ce monde étouffé!  
-J'ai toujours plaint le sort du garçon de café.<sup>33</sup>

Nouveau's 'porter un éternel costume noir', of line 8, imitates Coppée's 'regret de porter du drap noir tous les jours' expressed in Promenades et intérieurs VI, and his 'monde étouffé' of line 9 recalls the 'soirs étouffants' of Intimités IX. The parody's final line also brings to mind that of Promenades et intérieurs XXXVII, on deaf mutes: 'Je penserai souvent aux pauvres sourds-muets'. However the evocative description of lines 3-4, where the waiter presses his head against the damp window pane and watches the monotonous rain outside, offers a nostalgic and distant echo of Baudelaire. In his Spleen poem ('Quand le ciel bas et lourd'), falling rain in the city 'imite les barreaux d'une vaste prison'. Other details from the poem also avoid direct parody of a particular Coppée work yet nevertheless accurately imitate the style and techniques of this poet. The sentimental contrast between the 'établissement riche et fameux' and the 'garçon déjà vieux' and the choice of adjectives as in 'humide bitume' and 'éternel costume' are significant. The bizarre rhyme between 'air' and 'bitter' in lines 1 and 2 could also have occurred in Coppée's poetry as could the rhythmic and memorably balanced construction of line 6: 'Toujours crier, toujours courir, jamais s'asseoir'.

In its drawing on the theme of imprisonment, Nouveau's 'Garçon de café' also connects with a further small group of Coppesque dizains interesting as much for the light they shed on their individual authors' lives and personalities as for the revelations they offer concerning these authors' attitudes towards Coppée in his city verse. These particular dizains reveal and comment on, in Nina de Villard's words 'l'horreur qu'à l'employé fait son chef de bureau'.<sup>34</sup> In so doing they plumb an experience as familiar to the parodists, despite their bohemian pretensions, as to

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<sup>33</sup>Nouveau, O.C., p.787.

<sup>34</sup>In VIII, Dizains réalistes, p.12.

Coppée himself; the deadly routine of Parisian office life. Nina de Villard's ode to a 'petit employé de la poste restante' (Dixains réalistes XXIII) relies on this theme and is also in the style of other parodies ridiculing by exaggeration Coppée's use of insignificant city inhabitants in his poetry. Like Coppée's 'épiciier' Nina's 'employé' is 'petit', yet he is also 'obscur' and 'triste'. Like Coppée himself who in Intimités X is one of the 'réveurs qui n'ont pas voyagé' Nina's hero 'ne voyage pas' and 'n'est pas aimé' (line 8). The very tediousness of his occupation is accurately conveyed in lines 2-5 of this poem describing the character's reluctant arrival at work and dismal contemplation of the day ahead of him:

Il vient tard à son bureau; son allure est très-lente;  
il s'assied renfrogné sur son fauteuil en cuir,  
car il sait qu'au client il lui faudra servir  
les lettres, les journaux à timbre coloriste,  
et même les mandats!..... Cet homme obscur est triste.<sup>35</sup>

Maurice Rollinat and Paul Verlaine's contributions to this same parodic motif involve as pronounced a sense of humor as Nina de Villard's, however they are arguably only Coppesque in rhyme and in vague personal allusions to the latter poet. Their lively detail seems rather drawn from the personal experiences of Rollinat and Verlaine themselves. In XLIII of the Dixains réalistes, for example, Maurice Rollinat conjures up a humorous picture of a clandestine office smoking-session interrupted by the inopportune arrival of the chef de bureau. Though possibly alluding to Coppée's passion for cigarettes, this poem no doubt also voices the frustrations of generations of Parisian office workers to whom a necessary source of relaxation was denied:

Défense de fumer au bureau! - mais, qu'importe! -  
J'entr'ouvre la fenêtre, et je ferme la porte.  
Je m'assure que tout est bien enregistré;  
et, sur mon fauteuil vert à clous jaunes, vautré,  
pour que la rime d'or au bout du vers se pose,  
je fume lentement, la paupière mi-close! -  
Mais voilà que le chef, exécration bourreau;  
décapite mon rêve en entrant au bureau,  
et comme le garçon n'a pu me crier: 'Gare!'  
je me rôtis les doigts pour cacher mon cigare.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Dixains réalistes, p.27.

<sup>36</sup>Dixains réalistes, p.47.



The poet fully exploits the elasticity of his verse to convey in the staccato phrases of lines 1-2 the brisk preparation of the office and in the flowing rhythm and soporific vocabulary ('vautré', 'se pose' 'lentement') of lines 4-6 the employee's total absorption in his secret activity. The barbed comment of line 5 however and the appropriation of the 'gares' and 'cigares' rhyme from Promenades et intérieurs XXVII bring us back to Coppée and his often unlikely choice of rhyming words which on certain occasions leads the sense of his verse in rather unexpected directions.<sup>37</sup> A direct stylistic criticism similar to Rollinat's (this time of Coppée's use of the disain form and the uniformity of rhythm often marking his ten-line poems), occurs in Verlaine's 1874 parody, 'Pour charmer tes ennuis ô temps qui nous dévastes', written during his detention in prison. Here Verlaine claims he will 'servir aux amateurs un plat de ma façon' consisting of 'notes bien égales' in 'dizains chastes/Comme les ronds égaux d'un même saucisson'. In 'Endiguons les ruisseaux', also a prison 'Coppée', he refers again to the 'cent vers que scande un rythme équidistant'.<sup>38</sup>

Verlaine's disain, 'Le sous-chef est absent du bureau' also employs the theme of office life and alludes vaguely to Coppée's verse notably Promenades et intérieurs II where the poet enjoys a leisurely flânerie in the banlieue after a day's imprisonment in the Ministère de la Guerre where he worked. Verlaine's parody accelerates the action of Coppée's original poem by evoking an employee's hurried escape to a convenient café in the absence of his superior, for a surreptitious mazagran and a flick through the morning paper:

Le sous-chef est absent du bureau: j'en profite  
Pour aller au café le plus proche au plus vite.  
J'y bois à petits coups, en clignotant des yeux,  
Un mazagran avec deux doigts de cognac vieux  
Puis je lis - et quel sage à ces excès résiste -  
Le Journal des Débats, étant orléaniste.

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<sup>37</sup> Examples are 'hystérique' and 'rhétorique' of Promenades et intérieurs IX, 'vitres' and 'écailles d'huîtres' of IV and 'espiegle' and 'pains de seigle' of XXXIII.

<sup>38</sup> Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.298.

Quand j'ai lu mon journal et bu mon mazagran  
Je rentre à pas de loup au bureau: mon tyran  
N'est pas là, par bonheur, sans quoi mon algarade  
M'eût valu les brocards de plus d'un camarade'<sup>39</sup>

Coppée's relaxed enjoyment, conveyed in Promenades et intérieurs II by vocabulary such as 'loisir', 'lentement' and 'je me délasse', is replaced in the opening lines of the Verlaine poem by a scene of frenzied activity emphasized by the frequent use of plosives and repetition. After line 6 however, the frantic pace slows as the poet's guilty tension, no doubt assisted by the 'deux doigts de cognac vieux', turns to restfulness. Nevertheless, Verlaine is still clearly playing with the comic possibilities of the disain form as the internal echoes of 'lu' and 'bu', 'brocards' and 'camarades' and 'pas de loup' and 'n'est pas là' reveal.

The final and novel undermining of Coppée's choice and treatment of human subjects in his Promenades et intérieurs occurs in Rimbaud's 'Le Balai' and in some of the Dixains réalistes composed by his minor contemporaries. Where Nouveau, Cros and Verlaine had exaggerated the wretchedness or nobility of Coppée's Parisian characters or ridiculed by humour and obscenity, these latter poems caricature Coppée by taking inanimate or non-human subjects which are treated as if they were intelligent beings by the parodists. The reader is thus urged to feel incongruous sympathy for them. Maurice Rollinat, for example, is moved to tears at the sight of a blind man's dog rather than at its human master in Dixains réalistes VI.<sup>40</sup> Auguste de Chatillon in XXII of the same collection waxes lyrical over a horse chestnut tree.<sup>41</sup> Finally in a couple of more extreme examples Maurice Rollinat inquires nostalgically in the final line of a disain: 'Hélas, où donc es-tu, petite poêle à frire?',<sup>42</sup> while Antoine Cros, in his turn swears everlasting loyalty to his 'cher baromètre'.<sup>43</sup> Rimbaud's 'Le Balai' is on the whole more subtle in its approach than these four examples and, parodic intent aside, is a potentially excellent poem:

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<sup>39</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.166.

<sup>40</sup>See Dixains réalistes, p.10.

<sup>41</sup>See Dixains réalistes, p.26.

<sup>42</sup>See XXXIV, Dixains réalistes, p.38.

<sup>43</sup>See XLII, Dixains réalistes, p.46.

C'est un humble balai de chiendent, trop dur  
Pour une chambre ou pour la peinture d'un mur.  
L'usage en est navrant et ne vaut pas qu'on rie.  
Racine prise à quelque ancienne prairie  
Son crin inerte sèche, et son manche a blanchi.  
Tel un bois d'île à la canicule rougi.  
La cordelette semble une tresse gelée  
J'aime de cet objet la saveur désolée  
Et j'en voudrais laver tes larges bords de lait,  
O lune où l'esprit de nos Soeurs mortes se plaît.<sup>44</sup>

In an opening line which echoes the title of Les Humbles and imitates the beginning of 'Le Petit Epicier' from that collection ('C'était un tout petit épicier de Montrouge'), Rimbaud establishes the banal identity of his poetic subject. Like Coppée's figures who are simple workmen or worker's wives, Rimbaud's broom is a prosaic kitchen instrument; 'trop dur/Pour une chambre ou pour la peinture d'un mur'. Also like Coppée's simple human figure for whom the author anticipates ridicule and protects against it by safety phrases such as 'Vous en rirez/ Mais', Rimbaud in his poem demands the reader's respect for his inanimate subject: 'ne vaut pas qu'on rie' (line 3). Subsequently in an attempt to heighten his poem and invest its subject with an incongruous spiritual dimension as Coppée does in 'Le Chien perdu' and in 'Le Vieux Soulier',<sup>45</sup> Rimbaud has recourse to imagery after line 4 of the parody. In this section, despite vague allusions to Coppée's poetry (as in line 6),<sup>46</sup> one senses that Rimbaud's own imaginative talent is animating the poem. In an image reminiscent of 'Les Assis' (stanza 17) where Rimbaud recalls the 'soleils vifs' which ripened the rush surface of the librarians' seats and draws them into a natural framework removed from the provincial world of Charleville, the poet places his 'humble balai' in its evolutionary setting

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<sup>44</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., pp.116-7.

<sup>45</sup>Although 'Le Vieux Soulier' was not published until the 1874 collection Le Cahier rouge, as Coppée admits in the Avertissement to this volume, most of its contents can be compared to 'des fleurs sèches' written many years previously and conserved carefully by the poet.

<sup>46</sup>Promenades et intérieurs XVII includes six lines beginning with the words 'Tel un'.

(line 4) by investing its whitened handle with exotic significance: 'Tel un bois d'île à la canicule rougi'. In a similarly subversive manner the details of the broom's 'crin inerte sèche' and its 'tresse gelée', attribute to it animal and human characteristics at variance with its inanimate nature. At line 8, Rimbaud himself intervenes in a very different manner from the directive authorial interventions of Coppée, and gives the poem much more personal a turn. The 'l' sound-patterning of these final lines ('laver', 'larges', 'lait' and 'lune'), the use of the wistful conditional tense and the final apostrophe, suggest a longing for a future era which raises the dizain above its banal point de départ in the real world. This forward-looking movement parallels rather Verlaine's use of the future tense in 'Kaleïdoscope' rather than Coppée's early city pieces which tend to remain anchored in the substantial world or even linked nostalgically with the past era of the poet's childhood.

In addition to the religious theme and to Coppée's reliance on lower-class figures which received parodic attention from his contemporary poets, is his often overlapping use of city setting and décor which in its turn drew fire from them. In Promenades et intérieurs and Les Humbles for example, Coppée relies on the use of real locations in Paris to create an authentic atmosphere for his poems. In a comparable manner, even as early as Le Reliquaire and Intimités he had employed the banlieue as a favoured personal setting conducive to the workings of his imagination. The parodists imitated both Coppée's penchant for actual locations in the city and his attraction to the banlieue in their dizains. Moreover, they also made great play of more minor details of the city scene, some of which (like gaslight and the railway) feature in Coppée's poetry, others of which, like the use of advertising in the city, rather reveal the parodist's own susceptibility to the poetic possibilities of the more unusual aspects of urban décor and their desire to express them in a semi-serious poetic form.

Charles Cros' 'Toute la semaine' (Dizains réalistes XXIX) offers a direct parody of Coppée's dizain 'Dans la rue le soir' of Le Cahier rouge. It selects for imitation Coppée's suggestive evocation of evening crowds milling in the city.<sup>47</sup> Though temporal notations set the scene in both poems, Cros replaces Coppée's 'neuf heures', (the time when the 'grisettes

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<sup>47</sup> See Cros, O.C., p.149.

s'en vont du côté des faubourgs/Après avoir fini la tâche journalière') by 'onze heures', 'la fin de la demi-journée' as 'on déserte l'atelier'. Contradicting Coppée's observation of Paris' female inhabitants escaping towards their 'amours clandestines', Cros focuses in his turn on the city's male workers for whom he only predicts a vague emotional involvement. They will 'peut-être lier/Connaissance avec cette enfant, frêle ouvrière,/Chez le traiteur fumeux où l'on sert l'ordinaire', (lines 4-6). The poet's real sympathy is reserved for the young apprentice however who, like Nouveau's 'manoeuvrier', is denied even the simplest pleasures of his social superiors. The ouvrier's seedy cafe meal and his 'ordinaire', ironically described by Cros as 'ces luxes' (line 7) are replaced in the life of the 'apprenti' by a meagre picnic of 'saucisse plate', 'pain sec' and water from Paris' 'fontaines Wallace'.<sup>48</sup> The poem's parodic effect thus relies on a technique of anticlimax, Cros' subject is not even an 'ouvrier' but an 'apprenti' for example. It also depends on deliberate contradictions of a specific Coppée text. Cros replaces Coppée's female characters with male ones, he replaces the former poet's night setting with an early morning scene in his own poem and so on. Interestingly enough this choice of a morning city setting in the parody also contradicts Cros' own personal preference for night poetry observed in his serious urban compositions.

A second Cros parody where the theme of urban décor is significant conversely displays his characteristic and serious city theme. The poem is 'Fiat Lux', and if it shows affinities with Coppée in its pretentious latin title, the use of the adjective 'humble' and the borrowing of the 'reverbères' rhyme from Intimités IX, like Rimbaud's 'Le Balai', it also reveals its author's own creative personality as well as his talent for imitation:

Il marche à l'heure vague où le jour tombe. Il marche,  
Portant ses hauts bâtons. Et, double ogive, l'arche  
Du pont encadre l'eau, couleur plume de coq.  
Il a chaud et n'a pas le sou pour prendre un bock.  
Mais partout où ses pas résonnent, la lumière  
Brille. C'est l'allumeur humble de reverbère

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<sup>48</sup> These were actual edifices provided in the early 1870s by an English philanthropist for the benefit of the Parisian poor. The use of the proper name in the last line of Cros' parody imitates the reference to the actual areas as Montparnasse and Menilmontant in the original Coppée dizain.

Qui, rentrant, pour la soupe, avec sa femme assis,  
L'embrasse, éclairé par la chandelle des six,  
Sans se douter - aucune ignorance n'est vile  
Qu'il a diamanté, simple, la grande ville.<sup>49</sup>

The poem centres on the nineteenth-century phenomenon of gaslighting which features repeatedly in Intimités and Promenades et intérieurs and evokes the shadowy outlines of a real city illuminated by its mysterious glow. The poem also draws on Coppée's use of Parisian people in poetry but not in a ridiculous or comic manner for Cros' self-effacing lamplighter presents a new and sympathetic figure appreciable in his own right. 'Fiat lux' begins with an unidentified solitary figure walking in the night city. The 'heure vague' of line 1 echoes both Cros' 'L'Heure verte' and his 'L'Heure froide' of Le Coffret de santal as well as Coppée's use of the crépuscule motif in his verse. Gradually the scene opens out revealing the surrounding urban environment of arched bridges over the green-black water of the river, and unmasking the identity of the lone protagonist carrying the 'hauts bâtons' of his profession: 'C'est l'allumeur humble des réverbères'. As the rhythmic steps of the lamplighter ('Il marche [...] Il marche') marks his progression through the silent city, so his echoing footfall signals the approach of night and the arrival of artificial lighting to replace the day-time sun: 'partout où ses pas résonnent la lumière/Brille'. Briefly concentrating on an intimate interior vision of the lamplighter's evening reunion with his wife (lines 7-8) the final lines of Cros' poem expand to embrace the cosmic theme in a naive yet modern image reminiscent of the conclusion of Intimités X where stars and Parisian street lamps illuminate simultaneously. Here, the poet's lyrical turn of phrase shows the modest human lamplighter responsible for the almost magical transformation of the city gaslights which now appear set like diamonds on a background formed by the nocturnal metropolis:

Sans se douter - aucune ignorance n'est vile  
Qu'il a diamanté, simple, la grande ville.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Cros, O.C., p.149. This poem featured as XXX of the Dixains réalistes.

<sup>50</sup>Nina de Villard's poem VII from the Dixains réalistes exploits a similar image in a much more mundane fashion. Her poem begins with the words 'On allume les becs de gaz; dans la nuit bleue/les étoiles aussi s'enflamment;'. Such an overlap between these parodies could indicate joint composition between Cros and his mistress in the 1870s.

Among the remaining themes related to city décor and environments genuinely favoured by Coppée and featured in the parodies of his contemporaries are those of the fairground (occurring in XXXVIII of Promenades et intérieurs and in 'Noces et festins' of Le Cahier rouge), the banlieue and the railway. Once more the dizains of Charles Cros are those which seek most determinedly to establish parallels with Coppée's poems or are those in which a certain standard of non-iconoclastic poetic achievement is reached. The opening line of 'Morale' for example, 'Sur des chevaux de bois enfiler des anneaux',<sup>51</sup> contains a scarcely veiled reference to Coppée's 'Noces et festins' where a wedding party spins on a carousel 'en enfilant des bagues'. Similarly, the sideshows and bizarre activities Cros suggests in lines 2-3 of his poem: 'Regarder un caniche expert aux dominos/Essayer de gagner une oie avec des boules' are merely exaggerations of details in the Coppée poem where 'le beau-père' and 'les gens murs [...] /Vont jouer aux bouchons, et mettent habit bas'.

Oddly enough for a major theme in Coppée's city verse the banlieue receives comment in only one of the parodies, that is Charles Cros' 'Songe d'été' from the Dixains réalistes.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps this is an indication that this particular theme, which occurs in the more evocative and successful of Coppée's early verse, found favour with the parodists. It may also point to a similarity between Coppée's concept of a fascinating half-world possessing attributes of both city and country and the parodists' own interest in the enigmatic relationship between city and country displayed in such poems as Nouveau's 'Retour' and Rimbaud's 'Métropolitain'. If such is the case it would have been unlikely for them to have wished to interfere with the banlieue theme in a comic fashion. Charles Cros' 'Songe d'été' is however a direct parody both in style and content of a specific Coppée dizain, namely III of his Promenades et intérieurs. Both poems are based on a series of contrasts between aspects of the natural world attractive to the lofty sentiments of some poets, yet incompatible with the simple sights and pleasures of Parisian suburbia. In the Promenades et intérieurs poem 'la vaste mer' and 'les pics neigeux' are set against a 'faubourg plein d'enfants', 'un coteau tout pelé' or 'un bout de Bièvre' which Coppée finds attractive. In that of Cros, 'les ciels bleus' or

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<sup>51</sup>Cros, O.C., p. 50. This poem featured as XVI of the Dixains réalistes.

<sup>52</sup>See Cros, O.C., p.145. This poem featured as XIII of the Dixains réalistes.

'tourmentés', 'la neige des hivers', 'le parfum des étés' and 'les monts' contrast satirically with the 'clairières/Où la charcuterie a laissé ses papiers', the 'sentiers où l'on sent encore l'odeur des pieds/Des soldats avec leurs payeses' and the 'presqu'île/De Gennevilliers, où croit l'asperge tranquille', (lines 4-8).<sup>53</sup> Cros' technique, as observed elsewhere in the parodies, is one of imitation and demolition whereby he takes typically Coppesque details like the soldier and his girlfriend or the idiosyncratic 'asperge tranquille' and explodes them by strategically placed distasteful or incompatible phrases; in the first case by the 'odeur des pieds', in the second by the 'irrigation puante des égouts'.

A comparable method is employed in 'Tableau', a parodic dizain by Cros which bears an uncanny resemblance to XXXV of Promenades et intérieurs, and which shows Cros' reaction to the railway theme as exploited by Coppée in this latter collection as well as in poems such as 'Emigrants' from Les Humbles. In model and parody the poets focus on the family of a points' operator whose humble dwelling is necessarily situated in close proximity to the railway track. Coppée naturally seeks to idealise his subjects by establishing first a disparity between the powerful and deafening 'convoi furieux', 'cheval de fer', 'sifflement atroce' and 'fracas' of the railway and the calmness of the 'honnête intérieur' of the worker's diminutive 'maisonette' which he has observed enviously from a passing train. His picture is one of comforting, mutual well-being and peace despite alien surroundings and the intrusive effects of modern life. The supremacy of family life and simple human values is conveyed in the concluding image of the embracing mother and child unmoved by the rocking of the 'humble logis' around them as a train passes. Charles Cros not only captures and overstates elements of the Coppée poem in his own parody, however, but actively refutes others:

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<sup>53</sup>Cros' 'presqu'île/De Gennevilliers' provides a satirical parallel for Coppée's 'île de Grenelle' in his poem.



Enclavé dans les rails, engraisé de scories,  
Leur petit potager plaît à mes rêveries.  
Le père est aiguilleur à la gare de Lyon.  
Il fait honnêtement et sans rebellion  
Son dur métier. Sa femme, hélas! qui serait blonde,  
Sans le sombre glacis du charbon, le seconde.  
Leur enfant, ange rose éclos dans cet enfer  
Fait des petits châteaux avec du mâchefer.  
A quinze ans il vendra des journaux, des cigares:  
Peut-être le bonheur n'est-il que dans les gares!<sup>54</sup>

Though Cros uses the exact characters of the original in the 'aiguilleur' and his wife and child and he borrows words and phrases such as 'honnêtement' and 'hélas' which recall Coppée, the enviously idyllic family scene disappears in his dizain. Coppée's 'humble logis' and 'intérieur honnête' are reduced by the second poet to a slag-covered 'petit potager' and to 'cet enfer'. The characters are similarly transformed from one poem to the other. The father, for example, only mentioned incidentally in the Coppée text, is pinpointed more exactly by Cros as working at the real location of the Gare de Lyon. He discharges his task honestly yet submissively ('sans rebellion') as if weighed down by the routine and responsibility of his 'dur métier'. Cros' signalman's wife, as opposed to Coppée's who cheerfully assists her husband with his job, is also portrayed as a victim of her wretched circumstances. This is revealed in the comic detail of lines 5-6 which evokes the inevitable veneer of coal dust occasioned by her daily occupations near the railway: 'Sa femme, hélas! qui serait blonde,/Sans le sombre glacis du charbon'.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, where

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<sup>54</sup>Cros, O.C., p.148. This poem featured as XXVII of the Dixains réalistes.

<sup>55</sup>This particular phrase points to Coppée's daring attempt at synaesthesia in the final line of Intimités VII, 'Quelquechose comme une odeur qui serait blonde'. Like 'Je n'ai pas trouvé cela si ridicule' of 'Le Banc' this phrase was used by more than one parodist in comic imitations of Coppée. La Lune rousse of 17 November 1878 for example features a 'Vieux Coppée' by André Gill entitled 'Impressionisme'. This dizain ends with the line 'Une espèce de point d'orgue, qui serait roux'. See Appendix II.

the children of the two poems are concerned, certain similarities can be found in their evocations. Both are children of the industrial, urban age and, having known no other existence, seem quite at home in it. The child in Promenades et intérieurs XXXV is oblivious to the deafening noise of a passing train while his fellow in 'Tableau' (incongruously described as an 'ange rose'), plays happily amongst the shale at the side of the railway track using it as a substitute for the sand of the beach he is never likely to see. In the case of the Coppée poem we have the impression that this idyll of domestic bliss will last for ever against all odds whilst in the Cros poem, the temporal notation in the last but one line, 'A quinze ans il vendra des journaux, des cigares', places insistence on the depressing future ahead of the child, surely a more realistic view of events.<sup>56</sup>

A second parody with relevance for the railway theme yet whose allusions are much more restricted than those of Cros' 'Tableau', is Rimbaud's piece from the Album satirique beginning 'J'occupais un wagon'. Though set in a third-class railway carriage this parody could equally fit into the section on religious figures concentrating as it does on the character of a 'vieux prêtre' encountered by the poet on his train journey:

J'occupais un wagon de troisième: un vieux prêtre  
Sortit un brûle-gueule et mit à la fenêtre,  
Vers les brises, son front très calme aux poils pâlis.  
Puis ce chrétien, bravant les brocards impolis,  
S'étant tourné, me fit la demande énergique  
Et triste en même temps d'une petite chique  
De caporal, - ayant été l'aumônier chef  
D'un rejeton royal condamné derechef -  
Pour malaxer l'ennui d'un tunnel, sombre veine  
Qui s'offre aux voyageurs, près Soissons, ville d'Aisne.<sup>57</sup>

The poet presents a scene reminiscent of Charles Cros' 'Bénédiction' with a saintly cleric set against worldly characters and their 'brocards impolis'.

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<sup>56</sup> The rhyme 'gares' and 'cigares' is drawn from Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs XXVII. It is also used by Maurice Rollinat in lines 9-10 of Dixains réalistes XLIII.

<sup>57</sup> Rimbaud, O.C., pp.112-3.

If Cros' nervous priest is intimidated and embarrassed by the blasphemous mockery of the 'trois débauchés' Rimbaud's subject seems to be made of sterner stuff as 'bravant les brocards impolis' he asks his fellow-passenger for a modest refill for his pipe. While the 'triste' and 'petite' of line 6 recall Coppée, the 'énergique', 'chique' rhyme and the 'chique/De caporal' itself (of lines 6-7) are clearly tongue-in-cheek allusions by Rimbaud to his own poem 'Le Coeur volé' written probably in early 1871. There in stanza I the poet's heart is 'couvert de caporal' while in stanza III the rhymes 'chiques', 'bachiques' and 'stomachiques' occur. Other clear parallels with Coppée's verse are equally brief. They include the 'chef' and 'derechef' rhyme of lines 7 and 8 for example (which imitates the latter poet's frequent use of something that resembles a rime équivoque),<sup>58</sup> the melodramatic description of the railway tunnel as a 'sombre veine',<sup>59</sup> in line 9 and the direct use of Soissons the birthplace of the 'petit épicier', in line 10. In Pascal Pia's opinion, these allusions are too vague for 'J'occupais un wagon' to measure up to the closer imitations of Coppée perpetuated by Verlaine or Valade.<sup>60</sup> Also, as Pia fails to observe, they could hint at a different source for the Rimbaud poem, far removed from the topic of Coppée's city verse and (like Germain Nouveau's 'Cheminant Rue aux Ours') possibly part of its author's own experience. I would suggest that this source is perhaps to be found in a brief article in the local newspaper Le Courrier des Ardennes on September 1871 (shortly before Rimbaud's departure for Paris) and available to the poet in Charleville's Bibliothèque Municipale. There, Ad. Bourrée describes a scene in a railway carriage markedly similar to Rimbaud's own text:

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<sup>58</sup> Examples might include 'd'hivers' and 'vers' in Promenades et intérieurs I, 'des pas' and 'm'est-ce pas' of IX and 'cour' and 'basse-cour' of XXVII.

<sup>59</sup> In Maurice Rollinat's somewhat distasteful parody beginning 'O muse incorrigible' (XXXVIII from the Dixains réalistes) a railway tunnel also plays a key role. On a train journey the poet is intrigued by a fellow passenger repeatedly drinking from a mysterious bottle. Seizing the opportunity of a tunnel to sample the bottle's contents, the poet is disappointed to find merely a tasteless liquid inside. The mystery is solved in the dixains final lines:

- Que buvez-vous? lui dis-je en frisant ma moustache.

- Elle me répondit: Je ne bois pas! Je crache!

<sup>60</sup> Album satique, p.34.

Hier dans un wagon de chemin de fer de  
Saint-Germain je me suis trouvé en  
compagnie (mauvaise compagnie) de trois  
gamins portant un uniforme du lycée  
dont ils suivaient les cours comme externes.  
Le plus âgé de ces trois petits  
voyous n'avait pas quinze ans; le plus  
jeune en paraissait douze. Il est  
impossible d'avoir une tenue plus  
choquante. Ils parlaient haut, criaient  
gesticulaient, gênaient sans pitié les  
autres voyageurs. Enfin ils se sont  
mis à fumer, crachant dans le wagon,  
provoquant leurs voisins, et tenant des  
propos à faire rougir un bataillon de  
zouvas.

Judging from Rimbaud's own contemptuous attitude towards more mundane human beings and from the numerous anecdotes available concerning his own antisocial behaviour in the autumn of 1871 the likelihood of his remembering key details of this article, if he had read it, is a strong one. In fact the initial setting 'un wagon de chemin de fer', the key opposition between young and old and the 'propos à faire rougir un bataillon de zouvas' are all woven into the texture of his poem. Ultimately then, 'J'occupais un wagon' reveals more of Rimbaud's own personality than it comments on Coppée. The same could be argued for Rimbaud's 'Les soirs d'été' from the Album zutique which, apart from the 'annonce d'Ibled' of line 7 which vaguely echoes the 'ancienne affiche' of Promenades et intérieurs IV, is far removed from Coppée's city verse:

Les soirs d'été, sous l'oeil ardent des devantures,  
Quand la sève frémit sous les grilles obscures  
Irradiant au pied des grêles marronniers,  
Hors de ces groupes noirs, joyeux ou casaniers,  
Sucours du brûle-gueule ou baisers du cigare,  
Dans le kiosque mi-pierre étroit où je m'égare,  
- Tandis qu'en haut rougeois une annonce d'Ibled,  
Je songe que l'hiver figera le Filet,  
D'eau propre qui bruit, apaisant l'onde humaine,  
- Et que l'âpre aquilon n'épargne aucune veine.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.118.

The poem in fact involves an intriguing mixture of imagery drawn from the natural and urban worlds indicative of the influence of these two contrasting milieux at a period of transition in Rimbaud's life. It is also prophetic of the future linking of the two themes in the city Illuminations. The poem opens in an appropriate combination of the two motifs with a sunset scene in a city park. The natural order is represented by the dying rays of the sun blazing on the glass shop-fronts and by the rising sap of the trees hemmed in by the man-made park railings. Urban details of 'devantures' and 'grilles obscures' aside, the scene primarily recalls Rimbaud's early Charleville poems such as 'Roman' where 'un beau soir, foin des bocks et de la limonade/Des cafés tapageurs aux lustres éclatants!/- On va sous les tilleuls verts de la promenade'. It is also reminiscent (as Antoine Adam suggests) of 'A la Musique' which was also constructed around a park scene.<sup>62</sup> In this latter poem the bourgeois who 'savoure son onnaing d'où le tabac par brins/Déborde' or the soldiers glimpsed 'fumant des roses', reappear as the 'sucours du brûle-gueule ou baiseurs du cigare' of the parody. The 'marronniers verts' of the first poem also recur in the 'grêles marronniers' of 'Les soirs d'été'. As lines 1-5 of the Rimbaud poem reveal closer affinities with the poet's own early verse than with the Parisian poems of Coppée, so the oblique evocation of an 'urinoir' ('le kiosque de mi-pierre étroit où je m'égare') and the poet's philosophical reflections on the human condition from his ignominious position inside this building would have also been anathema to the elder poet.

If it dismisses the possibility of links with Coppée, Rimbaud's use of his 'urinoir' as a site for advertisements, (the 'annonce d'Ibled' refers to the name of a chocolate manufacturer) creates ties with the final group of Coppée parodies with relevance for the theme of urban décor; those parodies exploiting the ephemeral aspects of the city theme provided by hoardings and shop window advertising. These poems pick up a theme almost non-existent in Coppée's early verse and so do not offer direct parodies of this particular poet. However, as Giorgio Sozzi has argued, they do reveal 'le potenza poetica che può assumere perfino la pubblicità' and are therefore relevant to a study of city poetry.<sup>63</sup> Incidental to

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<sup>62</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., p.21.

<sup>63</sup> Giorgio Sozzi, Germain Nouveau (Urbino, Argalla, 1969), p.63.

their comic intent, they also provide the modern reader with first hand information on the streets of Paris in the late nineteenth century.

Verlaine's dizain 'Bouillons-Duval' is slightly different from Nouveau and Rimbaud's impressionistic dizains with relevance to advertising which for the most part bring together in collage fashion, those disparate visual fragments offered to an urban scene by aspects of publicity. Verlaine's poem is based on a descriptive scene conjured up by a well-known contemporary trade name 'Bouillons-Duval'. This refers to a chain of Parisian restaurants designed to cater especially for the tastes and pockets of members of the petite bourgeoisie and was doubtless familiar to all five poets in our study:

Digne et modeste dans sa chaire d'acajou  
Le timide employé parmi le luxe fou  
Que l'Entreprise doit à ce noir Bonaparte,  
Tend au fier gastronome arrivant la pancarte  
Qu'une servante va tout à l'heure pointer.  
En le voyant si pâle, oh! qui voudrait douter  
Que c'est un orphelin de la guerre dernière?  
Un poète, peut-être! A coup sûr un bon frère  
Qui peine, pour sauver un jour d'un sort si bas,  
Sa soeur, fille de joie au loin, qui n'écrit pas!<sup>64</sup>

Within this poem Verlaine alludes to Coppée's 'poor-but-honest' theme in his 'digne' yet 'modeste employé', who lures customers into the restaurant with his menu. He is as pathetically 'timide' and 'pâle', as Coppée himself in Intimités X and is orphaned like 'La Nourrice' of Les Humbles. As such he offers an ironic contrast to the 'fier gastronome' of line 4. In a tongue-in-cheek personal reminiscence, the employé's unhealthy pallor, yet noble spirit, identifies him in Verlaine's mind with a fellow poet forced into worldly employment to the detriment of his imagination. His sacrificial action, on behalf of his perverted sister, is as much a comment by Verlaine on the unfortunate practical necessity of a soul-destroying job, as it is an incident worthy of the Coppesque imagination. In XXXVI from the Dizains réalistes, Maurice Rollinat effectively turns the tables on Verlaine and on his philanthropic 'employé' who is portrayed working to change the fortunes of his

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<sup>64</sup>Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.167.

'fille de joie' sister. His 'Bouillons-Duval' is transformed from an honest working place into a rendez-vous point for prostitutes and their clients. The poet himself arrives for his meal with 'cent francs outre l'appétit', while the 'bonne alerte' states her personal terms as she offers him the menu.<sup>65</sup>

The parodies of Germain Nouveau, however, offer the truest examples of publicity poems and though dizains, are clearly cast in the mould of Rimbaud's longer poem from the Album zutique in which the advertising theme is dominant, 'Paris'. This work consists of an amalgum of trade slogans and proper names in which Parisian manufacturers, notorious criminals and men of letters jostle for space. It also adapts the formal restrictions of a six-syllable sonnet to the dictates of its subject as Verlaine was later to transform the traditional sonnet in alexandrines for his urban 'Sonnet boiteux':

AL. Godillot Gambier,  
Galopeau, Wolf-Pleyel,  
- O Robinets! - Menier,  
- O Christs! - Leperdriel

Klink, Jacob, Bonbonnel!  
Veuillot, Tropmann, Augier!  
Gill, Mendès, Mamel,  
Guido Gonin! - Panier

Des Grâces! l'Hérissé!  
Cirages onctueux!  
Pains vieux, spiritueux!

Aveugles! - puis, qui sait? -  
Sergeants de ville, Enghiens  
Chez soi!<sup>66</sup> - Soyons chrétiens.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Dizains réalistes XXVI, p.40.

<sup>66</sup>A reference to this brand of spa water occurs also in 'L'Enfant qui ramassa les balles' (see Rimbaud, O.C., p.21). Line 8 of this poem reads 'O son doux rêve ô son bel Enghien!'. In its tone of rhetorical exclamation this phrase parallels that of lines 3-4 of 'Paris'.

<sup>67</sup>Rimbaud, O.C., p.211.

Visually 'Paris' is sonnet-shaped with its quatrains and tercets. It also adheres to a regular syllabic count. However its rhyme scheme which mixes 'rime croisée' and 'rime embrassée' in the first two stanzas is not typical of the sonnet form. This allows Rimbaud to place aural emphasis away from end-of-line rhymes onto different parts of the poem and so to reinforce the impression of turmoil central to this work. Internal rhymes occur between 'onctueux', 'spiritueux' and 'vieux' in lines 10-11, while echoes between words, such as 'Panier' in line 8 and 'Pains', line 11, are also employed. Rhetorical repetition occurs in lines 3-4 in 'O Robinets!' and 'O Christs!' and violent enjambement in 'Panier/Des Grâces' links the traditionally separate octave and sestet. Chains of sound emphasise other words such as 'Godillot, Gambier' and 'Galopeau' in the poem's opening lines for example, 'Mendès' and 'Manuel' in line 7. The frequent exclamations featuring in lines 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14 also possibly suggest the street cries of a commercial and residential centre. The sounds of Rimbaud's poem thus assault us auditorily as the brightness and wealth of visual stimuli in the city world might offend our visual senses. In that the words the poet employs also have substantial as well as suggestive meaning (they refer to well-known figures or aspects of contemporary life) they also conjure up a pictorial vision composed of fragments of Parisian existence arranged collage-like before us. As well as a fascinating literary puzzle for the modern reader, the poem could also thus provide interesting source material for the social historian.

As regards artistic technique, Nouveau's 'J'ai du goût pour la flâne' (Dixains réalistes XIX) draws on the Rimbaud poem, yet also alludes briefly to Coppée's early verse. The poem opens with a subtle parody of Promenades et intérieurs II, for example, where Coppée wanders in the banlieue and senses with pleasure his own 'fci naïve du flâneur'. Nouveau, in his version, expresses 'du goût pour la flâne'. From line two in the Nouveau poem, however, the advertisement motif prevails as the poet evokes a colourful picture of the gaudy posters decorating the walls of the capital as observed by him in his day-to-day life:

J'ai du goût pour la flâne, et j'aime, par les rues,  
les réclames des murs fardés de couleurs crues,  
la Redingote Grise, et Monsieur Gallopan;  
l'Hérissé qui rayonne au-dessous d'un chapeau;  
la femme aux chevaux faits de teintes différentes.



Je m'amuse bien mieux que si j'avais des rentes  
avec l'homme des cinq violons à la fois,  
Bornibus, la Maison n'est pas au coin du Bois;  
le kiosque japonais et la colonne-affiche...  
et je ne conçois pas le désir d'être riche.<sup>68</sup>

Actual trade names occur, such as 'Bornibus', a mustard manufacturer and 'La Redingote Grise', a firm of men's outfitters. 'L'Hérissé', the hat maker alluded to in 'Paris' line 9, also features as does 'Gallopeau', a well known chiropodist whose name also appears under a different spelling in 'Paris' line 2. 'Gallopeau' also recalls Léon Valade's Album zutique dizain evoking a 'beau pédicure' and his nascent love for a female client. It thus underlines a frequent overlap between the parodies of different poets which witnesses their common source of inspiration. Commercial slogans such as 'la Maison n'est pas au coin du Bois' are also used. This parallels lines 13-14 of Rimbaud's sonnet where the poet claims 'Enghiens/Chez soi!' the battlecry of a firm which manufactured therapeutic sweets with Enghien water thus permitting members of the public to have the medicinal source 'chez soi'. Finally Nouveau alludes to imaginative and bizarre brand symbols and display models, such as the 'femme aux cheveux faits de teints différentes' and the 'homme des cinq violons à la fois'. This reveals both the eccentric variety of Parisian life in the nineteenth century and also the poet's own powerful observation of a visual scene before him. Significantly both the inspiratory value of pictorial scenes witnessed in the city and the poet's dual talent as a painter and a writer which allowed him to transform visual miniatures into memorable verbal phrases and images are evident in Nouveau's later Petits tableaux parisiens.

'C'est à la femme à barbe' (Dixains réalistes XLI) follows in the steps of 'J'ai du goût pour la flâne' and Rimbaud's 'Paris' by employing similar techniques of observation, contemporary allusion and juxtaposition of proper names as are evident in these two poems. As its opening phrase suggests, however, 'C'est à la femme à barbe' is more burlesque in its content and effect than its fellows. Nouveau evokes a 'coiffeur inconsolé' who has fallen in love with a fairground bearded woman and who (in an attempt to improve his idol's complexion) offers her various contemporary

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<sup>68</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.419.

cosmetics. Only the use of the vague and minor figure of the 'coiffeur' gives Nouveau's parody a Coppesque touch before the poet digresses from his imitation to the theme of advertising of interest to him personally. The products offered by the 'garçon' to his 'femme à barbe' provide both the advertising and the comic note in this poem. As well as the emollient 'savon de Thridace' and 'lait d'Hébé', the desperate figure buys the incongruent 'vinaigre [...] Bully' and a certain 'eau de Botot' for the object of his love. This latter substance, as suggested by Nouveau's ingenious use of rhyme and parenthesis in lines 5-6 of his poem, appears to have been a medical aid to digestion!:

Pour elle il se ruine en savon de Thridace.  
Ce lait d'Hébé (que veut-on donc que ça lui fasse?)  
ce vinaigre qu'un sieur Bully vend, l'eau (pardon!)  
de Botot (exiger le véritable nom),  
n'ont pu mordre sur cette idole de la foire.<sup>69</sup>

In comparing Nouveau's genuinely amusing poetic exercise, 'C'est à la femme à barbe', with the obscene parody which opened our discussion, one can perceive the vast difference in style and content marking the parodies of even individual authors. It is therefore impossible to generalize as regards the output of four contrasting poetic personalities,

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<sup>69</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.422.

although some patterns of similarity and difference in their writing may be indicated. At the outset it is important to remember that the parodies were intended to be 'plaisanteries',<sup>70</sup> and thus were largely inspired by a positive sense of fun and a wish to imitate in a humorous manner the well-known works of a fellow city poet. They were not motivated by a negative contempt for Coppée nor primarily by envy of his undeniable popular success. Hence, for the most part, they are not merely iconoclastic or malevolent in their intent and effect. If on occasions they do seem cruel or unfair in their mockery, as in the more obscene of the parodies, this can be explained by the parodists' wish to fulfil the salacious demands of the Album Zutique, or merely by their own dubious taste.

Though the parodies have an intentionally comic framework, this does not, however, prevent them from also offering informed comment on vagaries of Coppée's style and choice of subject matter. This comment is often implied in the very ways in which their humour is expressed and developed. In the direct parodies, for example, notorious lines or phrases from Coppée, such as the famous 'jambe de bois' and the 'J'en'ai pas trouvé cela si ridicule', are repeated in incongruous settings. This reflects back on Coppée's often debatable choice of expression. Elsewhere recognisably Coppesque characters or settings are purloined only to be sabotaged through exaggeration. This in turn could have jeopardized serious considerations of the original poems though its prime aim was to amuse by its effrontery. Where a disparaging assessment of Coppée's works can be inferred in what the parodists select for overstatement in their disains, such as his use of lower class characters, sentimentality and idiosyncratic rhyme, evaluation is also discernible in those aspects of Coppée's early city verse conspicuous by their absence in the comic imitations. The banlieue theme, notably, is featured in only one parody which, when compared to the frequent use of Coppesque

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<sup>70</sup> Nouveau, O.C., p.39.

<sup>71</sup> It is unlikely that the parodies posed a serious threat to Coppée's popularity. The parodies of the Album Zutique had a limited circulation among the Zutiste group while the Dixains réalistes (published 7 years after the Promenades et intérieurs) also appeared in only a limited edition.

city inhabitants in the dizains, seems to suggest contemporary approval of this evocative and personal theme of the poet's early urban verse.

Such comment and cataloguing of the parodies of Coppée in dizain form as has been the object of this Appendix is a comparatively easy task when compared to the assessment of the literary worth of these poems in hand. For such an evaluation it is firstly necessary to make a distinction between the different kinds of imitation attempted in the Dixains réalistes and the Album zutique as not all can be described as successful parody. Though the Promenades et intérieurs are outwardly a gift to parodists because of their simple formal restraints and because of their instantly recognisable subject matter, these dizains are not always easy to imitate in the subtle way which distinguishes parody from the related forms of travesty and burlesque.<sup>72</sup> Much of the vocabulary and many of the situations described in Coppée's poems are overtly trite and sentimental at the outset, hence imitation needs to be blatant if it is to be discernible. This pushed many attempts at parody such as Nouveau's 'A l'église' (where even the rhymes are appropriated from Coppée), and Cros' 'Dans la cour' (where characters are borrowed from 'Le Banc'), into the bounds of travesty. In their final form neither of these two poems could mistakenly be attributed to Coppée. Secondly, it is also necessary to point out that even where the more subtle attempts at parodic imitation are concerned, traditional criteria of literary evaluation are forcibly overturned as these poems exaggerate and point to the very worst in another author's output. They depend for their comic effect on an accumulation of those aspects of versification and content which would be totally unacceptable if offered within the context of a serious work of art. Certain of these aspects such as painful rhymes and hackneyed turns of phrase and excruciating dramatic situations are already embarrassing to the modern reader when they occur in Coppée's original poems. When they reappear in caricature form they clearly cannot be judged by usual standards of literature. It would therefore be true to say then that, paradoxically, often the best attempts at parody produce the worst poems in a traditional sense. On the other hand, where a poem fails to match up to the expected standards of imitation for a parody (and this is certainly true of some

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<sup>72</sup> Dwight Macdonald has described the difference between parody, burlesque and travesty in the following words. 'Parody [...] concentrates on the style and thought of the original, if burlesque is pouring new wine into

of the imitative dizains), it might be commendable as an independent imaginative creation in other respects.

Among the more successful attempts at parody, as opposed to travesty, are poems like Verlaine's 'Bouillons-Duval', Cros' 'Tableau' and Nouveau's 'Garçon de café'. The visual miniatures they present of the timid 'employé', the signalman's child and the exhausted waiter all ring true as imitations of Coppée. Certain phrases such as Cros' 'Peut-être le bonheur n'est-il que dans les gares', and Nouveau's 'Toujours crier, toujours courir, jamais s'asseoir', could also have come from the pen of the elder poet. Other parodies which rely on the poets' own experience of city life, rather than on their knowledge of Coppée's poetry, occupy the middle ground between accurate comic imitation and original composition. These include poems such as Nouveau's 'Cheminant rue aux ours' which apparently comments on Nouveau's own arrival in Paris in 1872 as much as it draws on Coppée. They also embrace Rimbaud's 'J'occupais un wagon de troisième', which betrays a personal rather than an imitative source, and the series of dizains commenting on office life, which was an experience familiar to many poets other than Coppée in their daily lives.

The final category of attempted parodies which really lose little of their effect even if read in ignorance of Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs reveals the central problem of the poet engaged in parodic imitation: that of surrendering his own originality to the style and techniques of a fellow writer. For Verlaine, in his parodies of Coppée this resignation of self seems to have been a fairly easy exercise, perhaps it was facilitated by his earlier close friendship with the latter poet. For Nouveau, Rimbaud and Cros, who were denied Verlaine's insight into Coppée's literary débuts, the process of self-identification with an inferior poetic contemporary hindered their imitative success. On the other hand it gave some of their parodies relevance beyond the limited arena of the 1870s as it forced them to create rather than merely mimic an original. Their creations often escaped the rapid dating process which parodic poems tied to a specific original must suffer. Poems which

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old bottles, parody is making a new wine that tastes like the old but has a slightly lethal effect. Travesty is the most primitive form.

It raises laughs from the belly rather than from the head'. Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm and after, edited by Dwight Macdonald, (London, Faber and Faber, 1960), page 557 and page 559.

can be enjoyed beyond the limited arena of Paris in the 1870s include Cros' 'Fiat Lux', Rimbaud's 'Le Balai' and Nouveau's 'J'ai du goût pour la flâne'. The first reflects Cros' own concern with the theme of the nocturnal city and shows him inventing a sympathetic city character valid in his own right not merely as a comment on Coppée's use of the city poor in his verse. The second has no real relevance for the city theme but nevertheless shows Rimbaud's concern with the material universe (often displayed in his urban poetry) expressed in comic form. The third reveals Nouveau's personal interest in the varied aspects of the Parisian scene which ultimately occupied him in his Petits tableaux parisiens. (Rimbaud's 'Paris', though not a comic dizain, similarly indicates in its fragmentary technique, the direction to be taken in the 'Villes' series of the Illuminations where visual and auditory collages are frequently presented to the reader).

In this brief survey of the parodic dizains constructed by Cros, Verlaine, Nouveau and Rimbaud, largely around Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs, the present author has been content to select those aspects of the parodies which comment directly on Coppée's use of the city's human population and inanimate décor in his early urban verse, or which are relevant for the theme of the city in nineteenth-century French poetry in other respects. It has therefore not been possible to dwell at length on non-urban parodies such as Verlaine's 'Souvenir d'une enfance austèrement bête' and 'Dites, n'avez-vous pas, lecteurs, l'âme attendrie',<sup>73</sup> nor on Rimbaud's 'Je préfère sans doute, au printemps la guinguette', 'Aux livres de chevet, livres d'art serein' and 'L'enfant qui ramassa les balles, le Pubère'.<sup>74</sup> Neither has it been possible to give detailed attention to the parodies of the many colourful contemporary figures such as Nina de Villard, Jean Richepin, Maurice Rollinat, Auguste de Chatillon, Charles Frémine, Hector de l'Estraz and Antoine Cros, who all contributed to the Dixains réalistes but whose works fall largely outside the sphere of the present study. Much remains to be discovered à propos of the parodic and creative talents of these minor yet equally fascinating personalities. Finally there is the question of

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<sup>73</sup> See Verlaine, O.C. poétiques, p.166 and p.297.

<sup>74</sup> See Rimbaud, O.C., pages 113, 118 and 121.

those isolated parodies of Coppée published separately from the Dixains réalistes and not appearing in the Album zutique. These have been listed for reference in Appendix II. They reveal a significant indication of late nineteenth-century poetic taste and could form an interesting point de départ for further study of this absorbing period of French literature.

## APPENDIX II

Apart from the parodies of Coppée published in the Dixains réalistes or occurring in the Album zutique a number of independent imitations of Coppée's poetry found their way into print in different reviews. The following is the list of such works with which the present author has come into contact during the course of this study.

- 1869 La Parodie, 20-27 November. A parody of Coppée's 'La Grève des Forgerons' entitled 'La Grève des Poètes'.
- 1869 La Parodie, 5-12 December. In a section entitled 'Caprices et variations sur les thèmes parnassiens', a poem called 'Chérubin' and attributed to François Coupé.
- 1878 Le Hamneton, 28 July. A parody of Coppée's 'Le Petit Epicier' entitled 'Le Homard à la Coppée'. The poem is dedicated to Coquelin Cadet and is signed Dr Camuset. This parody provoked a reply on 4 August from a real Dr Camuset protesting about the fictitious name attributed to the Coppée parody.
- 1878 Le Hamneton, 17 November. A parodic dizain imitating Coppée entitled 'Impressionisme'. The poem is unsigned but it is likely that it was the work of André Gill.
- 1882 Le Chat noir, 4 March. Republication of 'Le Homard à la Coppée' signed D.C.
- 1882 Le Chat noir, 13 May. A parodic dizain by Amélie Villetard entitled 'Rêverie'.



- 1883 Le Chat noir, 1 December. Two parodic dizains under the title Cigarettes. (This is a clear allusion to Coppée's Promenades et intérieurs XXXIX where he says 'Je fais ces vers ainsi qu'on fait des cigarettes'). The parodies are subtitled 'Belleville au Louvre' and 'Plaisirs purs'. They are attributed to Léon Duvauchel.
- 1889 Le Chat noir, 3 August. A parodic dizain based on Promenades et intérieurs XIX signed by Fernand de Rocher.
- 1956 Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique, 21 contains two apocryphal dizains attributed falsely to Germain Nouveau and entitled 'Ancien régime' and 'Charité'.

### SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

All books and articles referred to in the footnotes to the thesis are listed in this bibliography as well as the most useful of books consulted during the course of the research. The bibliography is divided into six sections, one for each of the poets studied and one for general works. The first five sections are divided into primary and secondary sources, books and articles and they also indicate where more extensive bibliographies of the poets are available. They contain a certain overlap necessitated by works relevant to more than one poet. The final section contains both primary and secondary sources of significance to the city theme in general and not listed in the other sections of the bibliography. All books in French are published in Paris and all those in English are published in London unless otherwise indicated.

FRANCOIS COPPÉE

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