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Editors: Daniel Bakşi, Surya Bowyer, and Julien Leprêtre

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Edward Grimble
University of Oxford

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The deaths in Paris of Charles Baudelaire and Jim Morrison were separated by just over six kilometres, and just over a century. In a clinic at 1 Rue du Dôme on 31 August 1867 Baudelaire finally succumbed to the syphilis which had left him debilitated for almost two years; Morrison, having left America for Paris in voluntary exile in March 1971, was found dead in his apartment at 17 Rue Beautreillis on 3 July that year.

Cities, wrote the late A. A. Gill, are ‘full of ghosts’, and in Paris more than most the curious and attentive can feel the presence of the remarkable group of writers and artists who have walked its streets.¹ In much the same way as Charles Dickens has sculpted London, so that George Gissing could stand on one of its bridges and feel as though he were in one of ‘Mr Guppy’s “London particular[s]”’, so too does the Paris of the twenty-first century owe much to the imaginations of its nineteenth-century inhabitants: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hugo, and Huysmans, among a score of others.² However, while Baudelaire’s place among the greatest poets of the city and of the urban experience is undisputed, Morrison’s remains unacknowledged. Paris, in the myth of Jim Morrison, has become little more than a sepulchre, and when we think of his life it is characterised by the wild pageantry of rock stardom. In cultural memory he exists in arenas, not in avenues; illuminated by stage-lights, rather than streetlights.

The aim of this essay, then, is to articulate Morrison’s place within the Baudelairean lineage, to illuminate the links between their oeuvres and, in doing so, to affirm Morrison’s

¹ A. A. Gill, ‘My London, and Welcome to It’, *New York Times*, 27 April 2012, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/travel/a-profile-of-london-by-aa-gill.html>> [accessed 25 March 2018].

² George Gissing, *The Immortal Dickens* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1925), p. 10.

position as a provocative and insightful poet of the urban experience. Tragically, given his desire to be recognised as such, Morrison's position as a poet was only affirmed posthumously: his death certificate reading 'James Douglas Morrison, poet'.³ Both Baudelaire and Morrison engage with the city as a space defined by ephemeral encounters, in which the individual experiences life—so Walter Benjamin writes—as a relentless 'series of shocks and collisions'.⁴ Indeed, Benjamin's insightful writing on Baudelaire and on the city's tendency to atomise and alienate will inform this essay throughout.

Life in the city engenders feelings of alienation and isolation, as the ceaseless movement of the city leaves the poets' speakers in a form of irrepressible exile. Cultivating an indiscriminate poetic gaze to palliate this *ennui*, they are drawn to members of the sinister, tawdry group of stragglers and freaks who wander their streets. They are the drifters, the destitute or the deranged, and each is part of the grotesque gallery to which Baudelaire in 'Les Petites vieilles' gives the title: 'débris d'humanité pour l'éternité mûrs'.⁵ In the city, the poet confronts the most sordid and frightening aspects of life, and this essay will seek to interrogate that co-mingling of the alluring and the appalling and, in relation to the theories of the grotesque, the disquieting coexistence of beauty and horror in the city. In their verses, Baudelaire and Morrison deliver a vision of an urban grotesque, revealing the city to be a fundamentally uncanny space. The essay will conclude by examining the relationship between the poet and this parade of grotesques at the moment of encounter, both in terms of their magnetic hold over him and the feelings of recognition, doubling, and abjection with which these encounters are charged. Wallace Fowlie, in his writings on Morrison and the poet Arthur Rimbaud, suggests that Morrison came to Paris, in part, to 'evoke' the spirits of French writers, Baudelaire included.⁶ This essay, then, draws attention to those evocations of Baudelaire in Morrison's poetry.

³ Dylan Jones, *Jim Morrison: Dark Star* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), p. 177.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *The Writer of Modern Life*, trans. by Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 170–212 (p. 191).

⁵ 'The debris of humanity, ripe for eternity', Charles Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine, 1983), p. 274. Unless otherwise stated, further references to Baudelaire's poetry will be to this edition and translations will be my own.

⁶ Wallace Fowlie, *Rimbaud and Jim Morrison* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 98.

Holy Solipsism

Baudelaire's conception of modernity rests on the daily experience of 'the transient, the fleeting, [and] the contingent', as he writes in his seminal 'The Painter of Modern Life', and no more is this true than in the city.⁷ His poetic project is inseparable from urban experience. It is an endeavour to adapt language to the rhythms and cadences of life in the metropolis: 'c'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant'.⁸ Baudelaire lauds the artist Constantin Guy as one who embraces this fundamental aspect of urban life to great effect:

He has gone everywhere in quest of the ephemeral, the fleeting forms of beauty in the life of our day, the characteristic traits of what, given the reader's permission, we have called 'modernity'. Often bizarre, violent, excessive, but always full of poetry, he has succeeded, in his drawings, in distilling the bitter or heady flavour of the wine of life⁹

The crowd provides a dizzying potential for spectacle and encounter, and 'any man [...] who is bored in [its] midst' is a fool, declares Guy, as the 'passionate observer' of the crowd is beset by the beautiful and the poetic.¹⁰ Walking the city, then, is to be immersed in life, and to surrender oneself to chance. 'Chance', writes Morrison in an untitled fragment in *The Lords*, 'is a survivor of religion in the modern city'.¹¹ In Morrison's city, providence appears to have given way to the irrepressible rules of possibility and to chance encounters, where the waters of the baptismal font have been replaced by Baudelaire's 'reservoir of electricity'.¹² Indeed, the figure of the gambler recurs often in both poets' works; he is someone whose life is ruled by resolute chance and happenstance, the 'alien power' to whom Morrison 'feels in service'. Synecdochally, the gambler comes to stand for the urban experience and for the poet's praxis, roaming the streets for aesthetic subjects.¹³

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, trans. by P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 17.

⁸ 'It was, above all, out of my exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations, that this haunting ideal was born', in Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen, 1869*, trans. by Louise Varèse (New York, NY: New Directions, 1970), p. x.

⁹ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 12.

¹¹ Morrison, *The Lords and The New Creatures* (London: Omnibus Press, 1985), p. 9.

¹² Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 13.

¹³ The figure of the gambler can be found in 'Le Vampire', 'Le Jeu', 'Le Vin du solitaire' and 'Le Crépuscule du soir' in *Les Fleurs du Mal*; Morrison, *The Lords*, p. 9.

Although Baudelaire's urban walker may never find himself starved of spectacle in the city, this by no means constitutes an unambiguous celebration of the urban experience. Baudelaire's poetry shows, Benjamin wrote in his unfinished magnum opus *The Arcades Project*, 'the gaze [...] of the alienated man'; here, the vibrant and shifting crowds tend towards an atomised quotidian experience.¹⁴ Olivia Laing, in her work of criticism-cum-memoir *The Lonely City* (2016), defines loneliness as the 'unhappiness [which occurs] as a result of being without the companionship of others'.¹⁵ The tragedy of urban crowds can be distilled to the fact that physical proximity does not correlate with emotional connection. Rather, its opposite occurs: the concentration of individuals positioned tightly together only serves to raise awareness of the gulfs which actually exist between them. Frederick Engels describes this as the fundamental 'brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest', which grows as more and more individuals share the same space.¹⁶ Indeed, in *Wilderness* Morrison is able to marry this quasi-religious elevation of the ruling principle of the fleeting encounter in the city with the necessary isolation that has beset the individual when he writes of the state of 'holy solipsism' in which he wanders the streets.¹⁷ In deceptively simple verse, he encapsulates the unsettling effect of walking through a crowded city, jostling with fellow pedestrians:

I can't walk thru a city
street w/out eyeing each
single pedestrian. I feel
their vibes thru my
skin, the hair on my neck
—it rises.¹⁸

The streets for Morrison's speaker engender a kind of paranoia, where the individual treats his or her fellow city-dwellers with mutual suspicion, afraid perhaps of what they might be thinking, or of what they might be capable of doing. The 'vibes' of the crowd are unsettling, unnerving, and the reaction of the individual shows a primal fear. This anonymity in the city, antagonistic as it is to meaningful and wholesome social interactions, fosters lacunae where

¹⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 10. Indeed, Stephen Miller notes that, originally, Baudelaire's influential *Spleen de Paris* (1869) was to be titled *The Solitary Walker*, in *Walking New York* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 7.

¹⁵ Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2016), p. 4.

¹⁶ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 37.

¹⁷ Morrison, *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 39.

¹⁸ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 39.

interpersonal relationships should be. The imagination of the pedestrian fills these lacunae with all manner of fears and suspicions. Benjamin articulates this agitation when he writes that each person, from ‘the most worthy as well as the most despicable, carries around a secret which would make him hateful to everyone else if it were made know’.¹⁹ For Morrison, this experience seems almost nauseating: he writes in *The Lords* that ‘everything is vague and dizzy’ as he is surrounded by ‘an encroaching sound of threatening, mocking, monotonous voices’.²⁰ Each scrap of these evoked sounds is immediately displaced by the next, as consistency of image gives way to an incessant series of disparate voices; in Morrison’s asyndetic list the adjectives collide in the verse in the same way that the voices speak over each other as they assault the speaker. In this maelstrom of Parisian sights and sounds, writes Dylan Jones, Morrison felt simultaneously ‘relieved’ and ‘lost and alone’.²¹ Without *The Doors* and the black leather, Morrison was liberated from the claustrophobia of his American conspicuousness, becoming a lonely man, ‘bloated by alcohol’, drinking at café tables.²²

Morrison’s emigration to Paris was a kind of orchestrated *fugue*, as he attempted to disown his life as just ‘a tawdry pop star’, to borrow Dylan Jones’s phrase.²³ It was an act of voluntary *exile*, a word which lies at the heart of the ways in which Baudelaire and Morrison conceive of the individual’s relationship to the restless modern city. In ‘Le Cygne’, the speaker laments that ‘la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel’. He sees himself reflected in the image of a lost swan, broken free from its cage and stumbling across the cobbles:

[U]ne image m'opprime:
Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous,
Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime
Et rongé d'un désir sans trêve!²⁴

¹⁹ Benjamin, ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’, in *The Writer of Modern Life*, pp. 46–133 (p. 69).

²⁰ Morrison, *The Lords*, 6.

²¹ Jones, *Jim Morrison: Dark Star*, 173

²² Jones, *Jim Morrison: Dark Star*, 9.

²³ Jones, *Jim Morrison: Dark Star*, 9.

²⁴ ‘The appearance of a city, / Alas, changes more quickly than the human heart’; ‘One image oppresses me: / I think of my great swan, flapping madly, / Like all exiles, ridiculous and sublime / And gnawed by a ceaseless longing’, Baudelaire, ‘Le Cygne’, 268 ¶ 269.

In *The Lords*, Morrison transposes the scene from the dusty Place du Carrousel to the ‘reeking seats’ of a car, echoing Baudelaire’s sentiments in depicting the present as a state of alienation in which one feels the same dislocation in one’s own city as in a foreign one:

Modern life is a journey by car. The passengers change terribly in their reeking seats, or roam from car to car, subject to unceasing transformation. Inevitable progress is made towards the beginning (there is no difference in terminals), as we slice through cities, whose ripped backsides present a moving picture of windows, signs, streets buildings. Sometimes other vessels, closed worlds, vacuums, travel along beside to, move ahead or fall utterly behind.²⁵

In a passage replete with images of restless itinerancy, Morrison seems to echo Benjamin’s recognition of the fundamental inscrutability of those with whom one shares the streets – each is a ‘closed world’, a ‘vacuum’. Here, too, the city changes faster than the speaker is able to process and comprehend. This succession of ever-shifting moments, in their ‘unceasing transformation’, denies the individual a meaningful present, forcing him to live in a perpetual state of longing, for the vanished past or, as Morrison writes in *Wilderness*:

I sit, & listen to the hiss
of traffic & invoke
into this burned and gutted
room some ghost, some
vague resemblance of a time²⁶

The city’s present is hostile, ‘hissing’ at those who sit in its paralysis, clinging to a memory and history which seems fragile – only a ‘ghost’. A ‘vague resemblance’ of a dwindling past is all one can see through the smoke or hear over the din of traffic. It is a necessarily solitary fate, too; it would seem that no matter how close these individuals appear to come to one another, each is condemned to the isolation of their ‘closed world’. Baudelaire looks to the collective or mythic memory for some sense of solidarity, to ‘Andromaque [...] [a]uprès d’un tombeau vide en extase courbée’, ‘la négresse [qui est absente] de la superbe Afrique’ or ‘[des] maigres orphelins’, Morrison’s speakers, conversely, can only ever hope to identify with the other lost, solitary inhabitants of the city.²⁷ They are the ‘beat musicians / beat poets

²⁵ Morrison, *The Lords*, 11.

²⁶ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 164.

²⁷ ‘Andromache [...] standing before an empty tomb, bowed in rapture’; ‘a black woman [who is separated] from beautiful Africa’; ‘meager orphans’, Baudelaire, ‘Le Cygne’, 269–270.

& beat / wanderers' described in 'Paris Journal' who, as they drift in a tiresome, fissiparous urban quotidian, are all 'beat' in more ways than one.²⁸

If these feelings of 'vague[ness] and dizz[iness]', or the dissatisfaction caused by an alienating, dislocated present, overwhelm the poet, then he will be condemned to *ennui*, fatigue or, as Jonathan Culler describes it, a 'youthful world-weariness'.²⁹ The feeling never left Baudelaire during his lifetime, asserts Kerry Weinberg.³⁰ *Ennui* is the vice in the city which is 'un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde'; 'il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris / Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde'.³¹ For Baudelaire, it is a glimpse into hell itself, and one which, as 'il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka', tends towards the murderous or the suicidal.³² The great poetic 'I' is always under threat from disintegration, depersonalisation, and destruction. Baudelaire, more so than Morrison, articulates clearly in verse the combative stance with the city which the artist must then take if he is not to succumb to the dizzying paradoxes and debilitating *ennui* of urban experience. In 'Le Soleil', Baudelaire writes:

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 pavés³³

The poet must strike out into and at the city, and struggle in order to find meaning there. In the next stanza, the poet sees 'le soleil [qui] eveille dans les champs les vers comme les roses'.³⁴ This pun on 'vers', a word which can be translated as both 'poetic verse' and 'worms', already yokes together the poet's art and a kind of urban squalor. It is towards these verses, which the poet draws out from the dark corners of the city, that I will now turn. Both Baudelaire and Morrison embrace a kind of damnation among the freaks of the city, cultivating an indiscriminate, even voyeuristic, poetic gaze. This damnation, wrote T. S. Eliot

²⁸ Morrison, 'Paris Journal', in *The American Night* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 197.

²⁹ Morrison, *The Lords*, 6; Jonathan Culler, 'Introduction', *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James N. McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xvii.

³⁰ Kerry Weinberg, *T. S. Eliot and Charles Baudelaire* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1969), p. 55.

³¹ 'uglier, more spiteful, viler'; 'it would gladly turn the earth to ruins / and would swallow the world in a yawn', Baudelaire, 'Au Lecteur', 184.

³² 'smoking its hookah, it dreams of the scaffold', Baudelaire, 184.

³³ 'I am going out alone, to practice this bizarre fencing, / picking up in every corner the scent of a rhyme / and stumbling over words like cobblestones', Baudelaire, 'Le Soleil', 266.

³⁴ 'The sun [which] in the fields awakens here a line of verse and there a rose', Baudelaire, 266.

in his own essay on Baudelaire, was however ‘a form of salvation—salvation from the *ennui* of modern life, because it at least gives some significance to being’.³⁵

Man and Beast

The sprawling metropolis that is Baudelaire’s Paris harbours many secrets, and horror lurks in its dark alcoves and shady alleyways. There, the poet studies that odd and charming ‘débris d’humanité’, negotiating the urban wasteland for material for verse. Baudelaire and Morrison present a grotesque inversion of the urban encounter, in a shifting and unstable relation between poet and subject, hunter and hunted. Here, Baudelaire writes, poetic inspiration is a kind of ‘convulsion’, in which ‘every sublime thought is accompanied by a nervous shock’.³⁶ In ‘Les Sept vieillards’ the poet, nagged by *ennui*, goes in search of stimulation. He is accosted, ‘tout à coup’, by a haggard old man:

Je suivais, roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros
Et discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse,
Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombereaux.

Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,
Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,
Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,

M'apparut. On eût dit sa prunelle trempée
Dans le fiel; son regard aiguissait les frimas³⁷

Initially sympathetic to the impoverished man who approaches him, the encounter – and the verse – swerves towards the frightening at the *volta* between ‘les aumônes’ and ‘sans la méchanceté’. In the realm of the grotesque, writes Wolfgang Kayser, ‘our world ceases to be reliable’, as people, images, and scenarios are perverted or subverted.³⁸ ‘The grotesque instils fear of life rather than fear of death’.³⁹

³⁵ Eliot, quoted in John Mayer, *T. S. Eliot's Silent Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 90.

³⁶ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 10.

³⁷ ‘I roamed, stiffening my nerves like a hero / And arguing against my already weary soul, / Through backstreets shaken by heavy carts. // Out of nowhere came an old man in yellowed rags, / Mirroring the colour of the dripping sky, / And whose appearance would have warranted much charity, / Were it not for the wickedness which shone in his eyes, // Eyes which seemed to make me feel the cold— / It was as if their pupils had been steeped in bile’, Baudelaire, ‘Les Sept vieillards’, 270–271.

³⁸ Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 185.

³⁹ Kayser, 185.

In *Wilderness*, Morrison's speaker has a similarly spontaneous and frightening encounter, as he witnesses the 'appearance of the devil / on a Venice canal'.⁴⁰ Running, it moves 'beside [him], a fleshy shadow / of [his] secret mind', in lines that seem to cast ambiguity over whether this apparition exists in the city itself, or simply in the deranged mind of the poet.⁴¹ Both the Satanic figure and Baudelaire's old man seem to appear out of the very air itself. They exist between reality and imagination, as what Victor Turner calls 'liminal entities', existing 'betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom [or] convention'.⁴² If the grotesque demands that we question the reliability of the world around us, then here we must also question our own facilities of perception and cognition.

Indeed, the liminality of these encountered grotesques extends too to their physical form. These cities are populated by those figures who, as Baudelaire observes in his criticism of Goya's 'Los Caprichos' series, 'are halfway between man and beast'.⁴³ This special ambiguity can be seen in Baudelaire's 'Les Petites vieilles' as the poet encounters women who appear so twisted as to have lost not only their gender, but their very humanity:

Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes,
Eponine ou Laïs! Monstres brisés, bossus
Ou tordus, aimons-les! Ce sont encor des âmes.
Sous des jupons troués et sous de froids tissus

Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques⁴⁴

As they drag themselves along, 'se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés', these are the tragic creatures who prowl the streets, and who in turn are stalked by the poet who, with the imperative 'aimons-les', implores the reader to share his unsettling feelings of desire and attraction.⁴⁵ The aforementioned old man is described in similarly dehumanising language: he is a 'spectre en plein jour [qui] raccroche le passant', and his silhouette is not merely deformed or misshapen with age or illness, but broken entirely: 'son échine / faisant avec sa

⁴⁰ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 37.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 37.

⁴² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), p. 95.

⁴³ Baudelaire, 'Some Foreign Caricaturists', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 232–243 (p. 237).

⁴⁴ 'These broken monsters were once women, / Eponine or Laïs! These shattered monsters, hunchbacked / Or twisted, we must love them! For they still have souls. / Under torn skirts and cold fabrics // They crawl, scourged by iniquitous kisses', Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', 272.

⁴⁵ 'drag themselves along, like wounded animals', Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', 272.

jambe un parfait angle droit'.⁴⁶ The old man appears not as a solid human figure, but as a kind of assemblage of lines, nothing more than a hastily sketched cartoon. In his own essay on the grotesque, 'On the Essence of Laughter', Baudelaire notes the potentials for the 'significant comic' to give way to the 'absolute comic' of the grotesque; the old man's posture, described in impossible hyperbole, seems to suggest this elision of the boundaries between the comic and horrific.⁴⁷ Moreover, he walks 'si bien que son bâton, parachevant sa mine, / Lui donnait la tournure et le pas maladroit / D'un quadrupède infirme', and finds himself getting tangled up, 'allait s'empêtrant', between the street's mud and detritus and his own unstable gait.⁴⁸ Perpetually off-balance, and with the same uneasy steps that Charlie Chaplin would later perfect in his iconic Tramp routine, his ungainly movement evokes a kind of dark humour, even as we are repelled by his misshapen appearance and malicious gaze. Baudelaire's stumbling, haggard subject is also emblematic of Victor Hugo's formulation of the grotesque. In his preface to *Cromwell*, Hugo argues that the grotesque is ubiquitous in modern life, and that at its centre is the co-existence of 'the abnormal and the horrible' on one hand, and the 'comic and the burlesque' on the other.⁴⁹ Indeed, these moments elide the boundaries between sympathy, pity, and disgust.

Where Baudelaire lingers on the shifts between the comic and the abhorrent that the grotesque engenders, Morrison far more consistently portrays its savagery. The speaker of one of the untitled fragments of *Wilderness* extends a menacing invitation:

I am a guide to the labyrinth
Come & see me
in the green hotel
Rm. 32
I will be there after 9.30 P.M.

I will show you the girl of the ghetto
I will show you the burning well
I will show you strange people
haunted, beast-like, on the
verge of evolution⁵⁰

⁴⁶ 'a spectre [who] in broad daylight accosts the passer-by'; 'his spine / formed with his leg a perfect right angle', Baudelaire, 'Les Septs vieillards', 271.

⁴⁷ 'From now on I shall refer to the grotesque as the absolute comic, in contrast to the ordinary comic, which I shall call the significant comic', Baudelaire, 'On the Essence of Laughter', in *Selected Writings*, pp. 140–161 (p. 152).

⁴⁸ 'so that his stick, completing his appearance, / gave him an awkward gait and step / like a lame quadruped'; 'was getting tangled up', Baudelaire, 'Les Septs vieillards', 271.

⁴⁹ Victor Hugo, 'Preface to *Cromwell*', trans. by J. R. Effinger, in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), pp. 354–408 (p. 365).

⁵⁰ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 84.

Night, then, is the time when the city's grotesques emerge from their dens – the time of 'moonlight' and 'mad-light', as the radical publisher Leigh Hunt wrote in his 1828 essay 'Walks Home by Night'.⁵¹ Morrison's anaphoric lines build to a manic conclusion as he implores his interlocutor to join him in the streets and witness a spectacle that is at once repelling and compelling. These lines also question the ethics of the speaker, who treats the outcasts of the city as something of a grotesque pageant. The rising crescendo in Morrison's verse echoes his accusation elsewhere that the poet is 'the voyeur, the peeper, the Peeping Tom [...] repulsive in his dark anonymity'.⁵² These humanoid creatures, with their stumbling gaits and twisted features, exist 'on the / verge of evolution': they are less than human and, driven by animalistic impulses, they engender a strong sense of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny. The uncanny is felt, writes Ernst Jentsch, when 'the boundary between the pathological and the normal is crossed', a feeling which is heightened in each of the poets' encounters with the mad denizens of the city.⁵³ The stunted evolution of Morrison's figures similarly stirs a fear of our primal, animal origins – those impulses and instincts which civilisation has suppressed but which Baudelaire and Morrison bring to the fore. 'Here', writes Sigmund Freud, 'the layman sees a manifestation of forces that he did not suspect in a fellow human being, but whose stirrings he can dimly perceive in remote corners of his own personality'.⁵⁴ In this case, the uncanny is a return to an ancient, bestial state. In some instances there is more at stake than the humanity of these subjects; rather, there is a doubt as to whether they live at all. The old women move with erratic, jerking movements that seem almost not to be their own:

Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes;
 Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés,
 Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnettes
 Où se pend un Démon sans pitié!⁵⁵

⁵¹ Leigh Hunt, 'Walks Home by Night in Heavy Weather. Watchmen', in *The Companion* (London: Hunt & Clarke, 1828), pp. 40–46 (p. 40).

⁵² Morrison, *The Lords*, 13.

⁵³ Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2.1 (1997), pp. 7–16 (p. 13).

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 150.

⁵⁵ 'They trot about, each an identical marionette / Dragging themselves along, like wounded beasts, / Dancing, without wanting to dance, poor bells / In which swings a pitiless demon', Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', 272.

'From what swamp or under-rock / did you crawl to remind / us what we choose / to leave'.⁶¹ This scene, too, is pervaded by a sense of the *unheimlich*. The woman synecdochally comes to represent those elements of the city which lurk in the shadows or which are ignored and forgotten, and she embodies Schelling's assertion that the uncanny rests in 'something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open'.⁶²

Decrepit and Charming

If, as Morrison writes in one of *The New Creatures* fragments, these are cities 'gone mad w/ fever', then it is a condition to which the poet himself is certainly not immune.⁶³ All of the figures examined here engender a disquieting attraction in the poet, and he is compelled to seek them out to take a perverse enjoyment from their grotesque spectacle. Baudelaire's observations on Honoré Daumier's work are equally applicable to his own, and indeed to Morrison's:

Look through his work, and you will see parading before you in its fantastic and gripping reality all living monstrosities a great city can contain. All the fearful, grotesque, sinister and ludicrous treasures it gathers together⁶⁴

The feeling is an abnormal one, shifting between a visceral repulsion and an ineffable allure. Baudelaire reiterates the sentiment in the opening of 'Les Petites vieilles':

Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales,
Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,
Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,
Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants.⁶⁵

Here, even the city's shady recesses are ambiguously eroticised. The reader is drawn down not into darkened alleys strewn with debris but rather into the folds of a dress, Baudelaire's 'plis sinueux'. In the febrile city this attraction, this 'enchantment' to squalor and 'horreur' is contagious, and Baudelaire's narrator offers the reader a warning against the insidious

⁶¹ Morrison, *Wilderness*, 85.

⁶² F. W. J. Schelling, quoted in Freud, 148.

⁶³ Morrison, *The New Creatures*, 12.

⁶⁴ Baudelaire, 'Some French Caricaturists', in *Selected Writings*, pp. 209–231 (p. 221).

⁶⁵ 'In the sinuous pleats of old capitals, / Where everything, even horror, is enchanting, / I study, according to my irresistible moods, / Singular beings, at once decrepit and charming', Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', 272.

overriding of autonomy which leads the poet to succumb to the twisted allure of the city's grotesques:

Que celui-là qui rit de mon inquiétude
Et qui n'est pas saisi d'un frisson fraternel
Songe bien que malgré tant de décrépitude
Ces sept monstres hideux avaient l'air éternel!⁶⁶

The speaker, a restless and alienated exile of the city, craving aesthetic stimulation in order to feed the appetite of his growing sense of *ennui*, shudders because in these depraved outcasts he sees himself, uncannily doubled and staring back at him. Baudelaire's *flâneur* – the disinterested Parisian stroller who, in Benjamin's now famous phrase, 'goes botanising on the asphalt' as he takes in the sights and sounds of the modern city – cultivates a form of privileged and liberating anonymity.⁶⁷ To Baudelaire, he is the 'perfect idler' who is able 'to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world'.⁶⁸ He is a 'prince enjoying his incognito', inconspicuous and curious.⁶⁹ In these encounters, however, the city demonstrates its own adept responses to the speaker's cut and thrusts, as his curiosity gives way to obsession. In 'Les Petites vieilles' the speaker confesses both that 'j'en ai suivi de ces petites vieilles! / Une, entre autres', and:

Mais moi, moi qui de loin tendrement vous surveille,
L'oeil inquiet, fixé sur vos pas incertains,
Tout comme si j'étais votre père, ô merveille!
Je goûte à votre insu des plaisirs clandestins⁷⁰

The poet stalks the old woman through the streets, possessed by the frightening and unconscious enchantment that the grotesque holds. In not only fostering a bizarre familial tie with the old woman but also appearing to share in her pleasures, the delineation between the speaker and the woman, between subject and object, appears to break down. This paradoxical co-existence of feelings of communion and repulsion produces a version of what

⁶⁶ 'Let he who laughs at my worry / And who is not seized by a fraternal shudder / Realise that in spite of their decrepitude / These seven hideous monsters had an eternal look', Baudelaire, 'Les Septs vieillards', 271.

⁶⁷ Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 68.

⁶⁸ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 13.

⁶⁹ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 13.

⁷⁰ 'These little old women, one of them I followed'; 'But I, who followed you discreetly from a distance, / A worried eye, fixed on your uncertain footsteps, / As if I were your father, oh you marvel! / Unbeknownst, I shared in your secret pleasures', Baudelaire, 'Les Petites vieilles', 274.

Julia Kristeva calls ‘abjection’, a process which exposes ‘the precarious grasp of the subject on its own identity’.⁷¹

The *flâneur*-poet encounters the most frightening and arresting potentials of abjection. In Morrison’s ‘Car Cemetery’, the narrator surveys the mangled wrecks of old automobiles; ‘the dead reside in cars’, he muses, and for Morrison the endless circulation of vehicles in the city renders its inhabitants either lifeless or, perhaps worse still, condemned to the terminal illness of the urban quotidian:

Cancer city
Urban fall
Summer sadness
The highways of the old town
Ghosts in cars
Electric shadows⁷²

If, as has been discussed earlier, the city is fundamentally a crucible in which one experiences the fleeting and the transitory, then these grotesque verses refigure that experience as an encounter with the horror of death. Baudelaire’s shuffling women, like Morrison’s drivers, suffer a chilling, proleptic death:

Et lorsque j’entrevois un fantôme débile
Traversant de Paris le fourmillant tableau,
Il me semble toujours que cet être fragile
S’en va tout doucement vers un nouveau berceau⁷³

Integral to Baudelaire’s attempts to celebrate the crowd is the way the poet, as *flâneur*, is able to enjoy his individuality whilst exploiting anonymity. As Baudelaire writes in the prose poem ‘Les Foules’, ‘[il] jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu’il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui’.⁷⁴ Together these grotesque poems destabilise the impulse to exercise that privilege: knowledge of the urban ‘other’ would, in this case, necessitate a confrontation with death and with the poet’s own annihilation. I would suggest these kinds of encounters sit, as Kristeva writes of the abject, ‘on the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality

⁷¹ Andrew Benjamin and John Fletcher, eds., *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 90.

⁷² Morrison, ‘Car Cemetery’, in *The American Night*, 144; Morrison, *The New Creatures*, 18.

⁷³ ‘And when I catch sight of one of these feeble ghosts / Crossing Paris’s swarming scene, / It always seems to me that this fragile creature / Is going slowly towards a new cradle’, Baudelaire, ‘Les Petites vieilles’, 273.

⁷⁴ ‘[he] enjoys this incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or others’, Baudelaire, ‘Les Foules’, in *Les Fleurs du Mal et Oeuvres Choisies*, ed. and trans. by Wallace Fowlie (New York: Dover, 1992), pp. 130–131.

that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me'.⁷⁵ In the case of Baudelaire's 'Les Aveugles', this is 'le noir illimité' – the 'infinite dark'.⁷⁶

Just as he did in Rimbaud, Jim Morrison found a kindred spirit in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. In the works that address the phenomenon of life in the modern city, Morrison echoes Baudelaire's rich oeuvre.⁷⁷ Both articulate, in their verse, the paradoxes, perplexities, and pressures to which the individual is subjected in the modern metropolis. This is where, in the words of the influential theorist Marshall Berman, one 'experience[s] personal and social life as a maelstrom'.⁷⁸ Despite the uncanniness and repulsion which the city's gallery of grotesques provoke, its alienating effects engender a disquieting commonality between artist and subject. These figures – misshapen, bestial, or grotesque though they may be – attract even whilst they appal. In them, the poems' speakers recognise themselves. Baudelaire's and Morrison's poetic projects take them into the city's darker recesses, where only 'the artists of Hell / set up easels'.⁷⁹ In so doing, they both confront the metropolis in all its sordidness and myriad contradiction.

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⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror*, trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

⁷⁶ Baudelaire, 'Les Aveugles', 275.

⁷⁷ Baudelaire, alongside Rimbaud and Nietzsche, formed the core of Morrison's reading: Jones, 150; John Densmore, *Riders on the Storm: My Life with Jim Morrison and the Doors* (New York, Dell: 1990), p. 273.

⁷⁸ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 345.

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