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Reading the City: An Examination of the Parallels between Charles

Meryon's *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* and the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

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Reading the City: An Examination of the Parallels between Charles Meryon's *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* and the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

by

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Abstract

Reading the City: An Examination of the Parallels between Charles Meryon's *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* and the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

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Charles Meryon is considered to be among the most skilled etchers in the history of French printmaking. Born in 1821, Meryon reached professional maturity during the French etching revival.   His most ambitious and well-known project is his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* (1850-1854), a suite of 22 etchings comrpsing twelve large views of Parisian landmarks and ten smaller prints of poems and other images. What is perhaps most remarkable about Meryon's representations of Paris is that they seem to show objective, detailed views of the city while also conveying the artist's subjective, uncanny perceptions of it. This tension between the real and the metaphysical is often interpreted as an indication of Meryon's mental illness, which was well known by critics of his time.

One of the most frequently touched on but least developed themes in the scholarship on Meryon is his connection with Edgar Allan Poe, who was widely read and embraced in France beginning in the 1840s.   The first French translation of Poe's work was published in 1844 and by the time that Meryon began the *Eaux-Fortes* suite, several of Poe's short stories had been translated in French journals and newspapers. Meryon

began the suite in 1850, just a year after Poe's death, and had completed at least the first state of all of the etchings by 1854. Meryon's suite, like Poe's tales, has an ominous mood and, when considered as a whole, tells a story of a city haunted by corruption and evil and by its own history. In his depictions of the city's architecture and landscape, Meryon penetrates beneath Paris's surface into what he sees as its character and his treatment of his subject aligns closely with Edgar Allan Poe's representations of the modern world. The urban environment's metaphysical underpinnings that are evident in Meryon's *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* merit a thorough examination, and a consideration of Meryon's representation in conjunction with Edgar Allan Poe's tales that were popular in France during the years in which Meryon was working makes it possible to put Meryon's work and his perceptions of Paris into a larger context.

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Introduction

"C'est du reste, un des diagnostics de l'état spirituel de notre siècle que les arts aspirent, sinon à suppléer l'un l'autre, du moins à se prêter réciproquement des forces nouvelles."[1]

Charles Meryon is considered to be among the most skilled etchers in the history of French printmaking. Born in 1821, Meryon reached professional maturity during the French etching revival and his etchings of cityscapes influenced many masters of modern art including James Abbott McNeill Whistler and Edouard Manet. Meryon's most ambitious and well-known project is his suite of 22 etchings of Paris titled simply *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*. The suite comprises twelve large views of Parisian landmarks and streets as well as ten smaller prints of poems and other images. Meryon began the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* in 1850 and had completed at least the first state of all of the etchings by 1854. Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier and Victor Hugo, all contemporaries of Meryon, praised the artist for the poetry of his depictions of the French capital in the years immediately preceding the massive renovation project undertaken by Napoleon III and his civic planner, Baron Haussmann.

One of the most frequently touched on but least developed themes in the scholarship on Meryon is the question of his connection with Edgar Allan Poe, who was widely read and embraced in France beginning in the 1840s. It is easy to see the superficial connections between Meryon and Poe's representations of the modern world; their work evokes a similar gloomy, ominous mood, and several scholars have fleetingly

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[1] Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1968), 531.

mentioned the presence of dark birds in Meryon's prints that recall the bird made famous by Poe in "The Raven." I want to go beyond these superficial comparisons in this thesis, however, and will attempt to show that Meryon and Poe shared a common sensibility that resulted in many similarities in their perceptions and depictions of the modern urban environment. I will examine Meryon's representation of the city in his *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* series, mainly focusing on the years 1850-1854. This examination will begin with a discussion of the flaneur type, and will move on to an analysis of Meryon and Poe's shared physiognomic approach to viewing the city. Finally, I will propose that both Poe and Meryon's visions of the city are characterized by a deep anxiety that is based on the fear of the unknown and of death that both saw in modern urban life. The question of whether Meryon had read Poe's work by the time he began the etchings of Paris cannot be definitively determined; nevertheless, I will argue in this thesis that Poe's work offers a view of the urban environment that can provide insight into Meryon's work.

Charles Meryon

Charles Meryon was born on November 23, 1821 in Paris. He was the illegitimate child of Charles Lewis Meryon, an English physician, and Pierre Narcisse Chaspoux, a dancer in the Paris Opera. In 1837, Meryon entered naval school and by the time that he returned to Paris in 1846, he had been on several long voyages, traveling as far away from home as New Zealand. In 1846 he began studying art with Charles François Philippe, a minor pupil of Jacques-Louis David's who was employed by the War Ministry. Meryon met Eugène Bléry, a minor artist who specialized in landscape etchings, in 1848 and from December of that year until July of 1849 he lived with Bléry

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and studied etching under him. His first etchings were copies of other etchings by older masters, including Reinier Nooms, called Reinier Zeeman, to whom he dedicated *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*. Meryon made his first original etching, *Le Petit Pont* (Fig. 1), in 1850 and showed it at the Salon that year. Initially, Meryon conceived *Le Petit Pont* as an individual work but soon it would become part of Meryon's series *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*. Other prints from the series were shown at the Salon as well; *Saint-Etienne-du-Mont* (Fig. 2) in 1852, *La Pompe Notre-Dame* (Fig. 3) in 1853 and in 1855, and *L'Abside de Notre-Dame* (Fig. 4) in 1855.

Mental illness plagued Meryon for at least the last ten years of his life (1858-1868), however it is impossible to know whether he was exhibiting symptoms of it during the period of 1850-1854, when he was working on the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*. Meryon's sanity was questioned as early as 1855 according to his friend, Philippe Burty, who tells an anecdote to suggest Meryon had become depressed and anxious by the middle of that year. According to Burty, the printmaker, Felix Bracquemond went to visit Meryon and, finding him out, left a sketch of a bird with an open beak approaching a fly as a sort of visiting card. Later, Auguste Delâtre came to see Meryon and remarked to Meryon that he liked the sketch. Meryon said "read on that wall my fate. I can no more avoid what is coming upon me than that fly can that bird."[2] In order to avoid speculation, I will not suggest that any characteristics of the etchings from the series are ascribable to a mental

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[2] Philippe Burty, Marcus B. Huish, and Charles Meryon, *Charles Meryon, Sailor, Engraver and Etcher: A Memoir and Complete Descriptive Catalogue of His Works*, trans. Marcus B. Huish (London: Fine Art Society, 1879), 18. Burty situates this event around March of 1855, explaining that a month after Delâtre's visit, Meryon moved to the rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques. Meryon notified the French officials of his change of address on April 10, 1855.

disorder except in the cases where Meryon produced later states after his first stay in the psychiatric hospital.

Meryon entered the Maison Impériale de Santé de Charenton on May 12, 1858, exhibiting "Deep melancholy, ideas of persecution which he considers to be deserved. Depressive ideas. He considers himself deeply guilty towards Society."[3] Meryon spent sixteen months at the hospital at Charenton, leaving on September 10, 1859. He would return seven years later, however. On October 12, 1866 he entered Charenton for the second and last time dying there in February 1868 of exhaustion and starvation. Meryon's illness was of great concern to his friends and art critics of the time. The day before Meryon admitted himself to Charenton for the first time his friend Leopold Flameng drew a haunting image of him (Fig. 5). This drawing, along with writings from well-known contemporaries helped to cement Meryon's place as an insane artist whose work betrays his mental state and, as a result, interpretations of his oeuvre involve speculation about the ways in which his psychological health is evident in his work.

Yet, while contemporaries like the Goncourt brothers who, in their publication *Journal des Goncourt*, lamented that Meryon "has Lunacy and wretchedness seated nearby on his bench" they also admired his work, calling him a "poet-artist."[4] Baudelaire too lauded Meryon for his poetic treatment of his subject, remarking about the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris:* "Par l'âpreté, la finesse et la certitude de son dessin, M. Meryon

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[3] "Maison Impériale de Charenton. Registre Contenant Tous Les Hommes Aliénés Dans La Maison Impériale de Charenton Le 23 Mai 1858," 1858, Registre 4 x 541*, Archives Départementales du Val de Marne, Créteil, p. 203.

[4] James D. Burke, *Charles Meryon Prints & Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1974), 7.

rappelait les vieux et excellents aquafortistes. J'ai rarement vu représentée avec plus de

poésie la solennité naturelle d'une ville immense." Baudelaire goes on to link Meryon

with Victor Hugo, asserting that if "Victor Hugo a vu ces excellentes estampes, il a dû

être content." [5] In his 1863 catalogue of Meryon's work, Philippe Burty too characterized

Meryon's work as "la poésie intime et supreme de ce vieux" and suggests that his work

evokes "le sentiment de M. Victor Hugo."[6] I want to further explore this idea of the

poetry of Meryon's work, but will argue that Meryon did not only share a sentiment with

Hugo but also with Edgar Allan Poe.

The years 1850-1855 comprised the most prolific period of Meryon's artistic

career and saw the creation of the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris;* for this reason, these years will

form the chronological scope of this thesis. Paris during this period was a city that had

endured much trauma and drastic change. The Revolution of 1848 ended the Orleans

monarchy and brought about the Second Republic of France under Louis Napoleon who

established himself as Emperor of the Second French Empire in a Coup d'état in

December of 1851. Louis Napoleon's reign would bring more than a change of

government to France, however. During the period when Meryon began to conceive of

his series of views of Paris, the demolition of medieval Paris had begun and between

1853-1869 Baron Haussmann would carry out Louis Napoleon's plan of razing most of

the city's medieval streets and buildings to make way for the wide boulevards that form

Paris's topography today. Indeed, many of his contemporaries praised Meryon for

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[5] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 418.
[6] Philippe Burty, "L'Oeuvre de M. Charles Méryon," *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 5, no. 14 (1863): 523.

capturing the spirit and the memory of "old Paris" in his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*. The

notion that Meryon's etchings preserve the soul of old Paris is intricately tied to The

Gothic Revival, characterized by an increased nostalgia for the Middle Ages which led to

an interest in preserving the Gothic monuments of Paris and other great cities in Europe.

Indeed, during the years in which Meryon was working on *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*, the

cathedral, Notre-Dame de Paris, was in the midst of a restoration led by the architect and

acquaintance of Meryon's, Viollet-le-Duc. It was during this period of upheaval and

uncertainty about France's future and a simultaneous clinging to the past that Edgar Allan

Poe's work came to and was embraced by the French.

Poe in France

Poe "was soonest and most fully understood" in France thanks almost entirely to

the work of Charles Baudelaire.[7] Baudelaire was not, however, the person to introduce

the American author to France. Poe's short story, "William Wilson," was the first of his

works to be translated into another language when the French version was published in

La Quotidienne in 1844. In 1846 and 1847 a French woman, Isabelle Meunier, translated

several of Poe's stories including "The Black Cat," which was Baudelaire's favorite of

Poe's stories. It is likely that Meunier's translations attracted Baudelaire to Poe and led

to his translation of "Mesmeric Revelation" in 1848. Baudelaire would continue to be

fascinated with Poe until the end of his life and he worked to make him a celebrated

author in France. In 1852 he published an article "Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses

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[7] Patrick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), 3.

oeuvres," in the *Revue de Paris* and later included it as a preface to the two volumes of

Poe's tales, *Histoires extraordinaires* in and *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*, that he

translated in 1856 and 1857 respectively.   Baudelaire went so far as to refer to Poe as "la

plus puissante plume de cette époque"[8] and indeed, Poe scholars credit Baudelaire for

Poe's renown.

Baudelaire links Meryon and Poe indirectly in his favorable critiques of both, but

he does so directly as well in an anecdote that he told to his friend, Poulet-Malassis. On

January 8, 1860, a few months after Meryon's discharge from Charenton, Baudelaire

wrote to his friend about his concern for Meryon's mental health.

> "Il m'a demandé si j'avais lu les nouvelles d'un certain Edgar Poe.
> Je lui ai répondu que je les connaissais mieux que personne, et
> pour cause. Il m'a demandé alors, d'un ton très accentué, si je
> croyais à la réalité de cet Edgar Poe. Moi, je lui ai demandé
> naturellement à qui il attribuait toutes ses nouvelles. Il m'a
> répondu: A une Société de littérateurs très habiles, très puissants, et
> au courant de tout."[9]

These anecdotes, meant to emphasize the precarious state of Meryon's sanity, imply that

Meryon had read Poe and had found connections, albeit paranoid ones, between himself

and the author.   While these stories certainly make evident the deterioration of Meryon's

mind they also suggest that the artist had an awareness of and an interest in Poe.

Poe and Meryon: The Scholarship

Over half a century later, Gustave Geffroy would link Meryon and Poe, albeit

fleetingly, in his 1926 book detailing Meryon's life and work, writing: "Edgar Poë a fait

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[8] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 7.
[9] Charles Baudelaire, *Lettres: 1841-1866* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1906), 228.

passer à travers les rues des capitales le personage qu'il désigne comme l'Homme des foules. Le graveur inquiet et chercheur est l'Homme des pierres."[10] Walter Benjamin includes this quote from Geffroy in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940) and further connects Meryon and Poe. Indeed, it is Benjamin who arguably does more to suggest the commonalities between Meryon and Poe's work than any other scholar. He notes the similar moods that their representations of the city evoke: "If one compares Baudelaire's discussion of Meryon with [Auguste] Barbier's "Londres," one asks oneself whether the gloomy image of the 'most disquieting of capitals' – the image, that is, of Paris – was not very materially determined by the texts of Barbier and of Poe."[11] Benjamin goes beyond this aesthetic similarity to suggest that Meryon and Poe both engage with physiognomy, the art of reading the face of a person to interpret his character.

Benjamin discusses physiognomy in Poe's work, calling him one of the first students "of the physiognomy of the big city"[12] and suggests that Meryon's etchings encourage a physiognomic reading of the Parisian cityscape. While he does indirectly connect Meryon and Poe by asserting the importance of physiognomy in the works of each, he does not, however, analyze their works in conjunction with each other. An examination of the similar physiognomic readings and use of the art of physiognomy by Poe and Meryon will comprise the second chapter of this thesis, and though this examination is inspired by Benjamin's discussions of physiognomy, it will rely on my

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[10] Gustave Geffroy, *Charles Meryon* (Paris: H. Floury, 1926). FIND PAGE #
[11] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 452.
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own visual and literary analyses, since no scholars have performed such a comparative analysis between the works of Meryon and Poe to date.

Part of the reason for the small number of sources that elaborate on the similarities between Poe and Meryon's work is the relative scarcity of scholarship on Meryon himself. Aside from Burty, who published an article about Meryon's life and work in 1863 and a longer biography in 1879, the references that offer comprehensive accounts of Meryon's work are *Le Peintre-graveur illustré (xixe et xxe siècles): Charles Meryon* by Loys Delteil, published in 1907, Geffroy's *Charles Meryon*, published in 1926, and James Burke's catalog of the first comprehensive exhibition of Meryon's work since 1917, published in 1974. In 1983, Philippe Verdier published Meryon's own comments about his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* for the first time,[13] and Roger Collins wrote *Charles Meryon: A Life* the most complete biography of Meryon that exists to date in 1999. Burty, Geffroy, Burke and "Mes Observtions" have been especially important to the research for this thesis and Collins' work was tremendously helpful in tracing Meryon's mental health history. Poe's work on the other hand has been written on extensively, and for this reason, I have relied mostly on my own reading of his work in relation to my analyses of the themes in Meryon's etchings. The urban environment's metaphysical underpinnings that are evident in Meryon's *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* and in so many of Poe's stories merit a thorough examination. The comparison of the manifestations of these elements in the work of both men will be the object of this thesis

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[13] Meryon wrote "Mes Observations," in 1863 as a response to Philippe Burty's article of the same year, "L'Oeuvre de M. Charles Meryon," but never published it.

and it is my hope that it will provide for a new and more complete understanding of

Meryon's *Eaux-Fortes Sur Paris*.

The Urban Spectator

The Nineteenth-Century Flaneur

The population of Paris was rapidly outgrowing the city's medieval infrastructure by the mid-nineteenth century. Walter Benjamin includes a quote from Maxime du Camp in his study of Baudelaire, *The Writer of Modern Life*, that emphasizes just how dire the situation had become by the middle of the century: "After 1848, Paris was on the verge of becoming uninhabitable. The constant expansion of the railway network...brought increases in traffic and in the city's population. The people were choking in the narrow, dirty, convoluted old streets, where they remained packed in because there was no alternative."[14] It was this toxic, crammed environment that birthed and sustained the flanêur; the enormous crowds that overwhelmed the city's confines were desirable, even necessary, for this type of man who found inspiration and satisfaction observing Paris and its inhabitants while retaining his own anonymity.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who saw the modern city as an environment in which art, poetry, and even life are suffocated, Baudelaire saw it as a setting rich with the potential for intellectual and artistic growth. In his famous essay, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," Baudelaire asserts that the rapid growth of cities, particularly Paris, has created an unfamiliar world that demands exploration and observation. He characterizes flanerie as a desire to know and comprehend modernity, which he defines as "le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et

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[14] Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life : Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

l'immuable."[15] Flanerie, in his conception is, therefore, the observation of the ephemeral and a necessary occupation of any artist who wants to truly understand the modern world. Baudelaire postures Constantin Guys as the artist of modern life because, he asserts, Guys is interested in capturing both the eternal and the fleeting, a true "homme du monde" who "s'interesse au monde entier." [16]

The urban crowd, itself a transitory and ever-changing entity, is the flaneur's most important source of information about the modern world. It is among the crowd, Baudelaire asserts, that the flaneur feels most at home, because it is there that he can endlessly feed his curiosity about the modern world by observing the myriad faces and physical characteristics of the passersby who live in it.

> Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Être hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartiaux, que la langue ne peut que maladroitement définir. L'observateur est un *prince* qui jouit partout de son incognito.[17]

Baudelaire considers this insatiable desire to comprehend the world to be the flaneur's most valuable asset; the part of his character wherein his potential for artistic innovation lies. It is, he asserts, "comme le point de départ de son génie."[18] The flaneur's relationship with the crowd is a complicated one, however, because although he relies on

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[15] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 553.
[16] Ibid., 551.
[17] Ibid., 552.
[18] Ibid., 551.

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it for information and inspiration, he must be careful not to study too carefully a specific part of the crowd. The goal of the perfect flaneur is "voir le *monde*"[emphasis added]. Were he to focus too closely on a single passerby, his view of the modern world would be obscured, perhaps even marred, which is precisely what occurs in Edgar Allan Poe's tale, "The Man of the Crowd."

Poe's Urban Spectator

Baudelaire refers to "The Man of the Crowd," in his discussion of the flaneur's relationship with the crowd, and compares the story's narrator to Constantin Guys: "Supposez un artiste qui serait toujours, spirituellement, à l'état du convalescent, et vous aurez la clef du caractère de M.G."[19] The implication here is that Guys, the painter of modern life, and Poe's narrator share a fascination for the crowd and find inspiration therein. When "The Man of the Crowd" was published in 1840, tales of urban growth and the figure of the flaneur had become commonplace in American journals. Stories like Dickens' *Sketches by Boz* and Nathaniel Parker Willis' about London cosmopolitan life were the most important precedents of the flaneur in American literature and both were well known and written about by Poe.[20]   In the opening paragraphs of "The Man of the Crowd" Poe presents the story's narrator as a typical flaneur who recounts his experience of watching passersby from inside a London café: "At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn…Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage,

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, 69.

and expression of countenance" (648). He goes on to classify the people who pass before him, delighting in his ability to ascribe them to different classes and professions based on their clothing and demeanor.

The narrator's scrutiny quickly changes from leisurely to obsessive, however, when a man whom he is unable to classify crosses his path. The narrator becomes like a madman, tracking the mysterious figure around the city for hours, and although Baudelaire refers to his behavior as symptomatic of "une passion fatale, irrésistible," he attributes it to the narrator's childlike wonder, a positive trait that Constantin Guys and any true flaneur possess.[21] Most people who read "The Man of the Crowd," however, likely find it more difficult to see the narrator's behavior in a positive light. For Baudelaire's flaneur, the crowd is both his home and a source of "immense jouissance" but for Poe's narrator it is a treacherous throng in which he grows "wearied unto death" (654) and is driven nearly mad.

The narrator's obsession with the man of the crowd also gives the flânerie in Poe's story a sinister facet that is not present in Baudelaire's conception of the flaneur. Certainly there is something eerie in the very idea of a man who leisurely watches people while seeking to maintain his own anonymity, but the flaneur is also subject to a certain anxiety resulting from the fact that he too is always being observed even as he hides anonymously within the crowd, but Poe brings this frightening element of flânerie to another level. The narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" is hardly aloof – as a true flaneur is supposed to be – instead becoming frantic and unable to come to terms with the fact

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[21] Ibid, 551.

that his perceived abilities to read the crowd have failed him.   This failure is another way in which Poe's narrator differs from Baudelaire's flaneur figure and it introduces another cause for anxiety: the notion that the world is not always decipherable or comprehensible.

Benjamin's Flaneur

In his unfinished assemblage of quotations and thoughts about the nineteenth-century bourgeois experience, *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin elaborates on the anxieties of flanerie that Poe's tale brings to light. Although Poe, Baudelaire and Meryon had all been long dead by the time that Benjamin began writing about the flaneur and the nineteenth-century, it is necessary to consider his work not only because Benjamin largely relied on "The Man of the Crowd" to establish his notion of the flaneur but also because he does a good deal to suggest the similarities between Poe and Meryon's views of the modern city. In his essay "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin asserts that the first flaneurs were actually journalists and writers who contributed to the *feuilletons* in the 1830s and early 1840's, but he also explains that the Baudelairean flaneur was inspired by another, new professional type: the detective.

Benjamin asserts that Poe's representations of the urban spectator in his detective stories, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Purloined Letter," and, of course, in "The Man of the Crowd" largely informed Baudelaire's flaneur figure. Baudelaire introduced the detective novel to France when he translated the first three of these tales and, according to Benjamin, Baudelaire considered the analytical and scientific method of deduction that Poe's detective, Dupin, employs to

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solve crimes an extremely valuable characteristic of the flaneur. Benjamin argues,

however, that despite Poe's influence, Baudelaire's flaneur figure does not view the city

in the same way as Poe's. Poe's man of the crowd "is devoid of the connivance which

Baudelaire's notion included. To Poe, the flâneur was, above all, someone who does not

feel comfortable in his own company."[22] In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin again asserts

that: "[t]he case in which the flâneur completely distances himself from the type of the

philosophical promenader, and takes on the features of the werewolf restlessly roaming a

social wilderness, was fixed for the first time and forever afterward by Poe in his story

"The Man of the Crowd."[23]

In terms of temperament, the narrator does not seem very different from the man

of the crowd. Indeed, is difficult to say with confidence who is the more disturbed, the

pursued, who cannot be alone, or the pursuer, who stalks his prey for an entire day,

tortured by his incapacity to classify this unknown passerby. Dana Brand, James Werner,

and Keith Tester have elaborated on the distinction that Benjamin makes between

traditional nineteenth-century flanerie and the variety exhibited in "The Man of the

Crowd."[24] Ironically, the stifling urban crowd is tantamount to oxygen for the story's

title character, and he endlessly wanders the London streets, not watching the crowd but

submerging himself in it, unable to ever be satisfied or comfortable. The story's narrator,

however, also exhibits signs of a crowd-induced mania, quickly transforming from a

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[22] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life : Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, 79.

[23] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 417.

[24] For further reading on this distinction, refer to: Dana Brand, *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James V. Werner, *American Flaneur: The Cosmic Physiognomy of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

leisurely observer of the city to a nearly maniacal stalker. In this way, both the narrator

and The Man of the Crowd fit the description of Benjamin's werewolf. By emphasizing

their insatiable thirst for the crowd, Poe turns both the flaneur and the object of his

observation into sinister parts that constitute a new, mysterious type of flanerie. Flanerie

in "The Man of the Crowd" is no longer a way of viewing people and the world. As

Poe's narrator explains, the old man is more than he appears; he "is the type and the

genius of deep crime" (654), and by observing him, the narrator believes that he has seen

more than a man; he has glimpsed into a greater universal truth: evil.

Meryon's Parisian Promenade

This idea that urban spectatorship can reveal things beyond what the visible,

physical world is one of the ideas that Poe and Meryon both address in their work.

Gustave Geffroy – and later Benjamin who quoted him in *The Arcades Project* – briefly

acknowledged a connection between the urban visions of the artist and Poe in his 1926

book about Meryon:

> Edgar Poe created a character who wanders the streets of capital cities; he
> called him the Man of the Crowd. The restlessly inquiring engraver is the
> Man of Stones...Here we have...an...artist who did not study and draw, like
> Piranesi, the remnants of a bygone existence, yet whose work gives one
> the sensation of persistent nostalgia...This is Charles Meryon.[25]

This passage is fascinating because it directly links Poe with Meryon and suggests that

Meryon is a real-life version of the man of the crowd.   More importantly though, it

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[25] Geffroy, *Charles Meryon*, 1–3.

implies that the architecture and landscape of Paris serves for Meryon, the "Man of Stones," the same purpose that the crowd serves for Poe's character.

In discussing the Parisian flaneur's understanding of his environment, Benjamin gives a reason, albeit unintentionally, for considering Meryon's views of Paris in conjunction with flanerie: "Landscape - that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room."[26] It is fascinating to consider this passage alongside Meryon's *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, in which the landscape of the city is the star and the inhabitants play very minor roles. Thinking of Paris as the flaneur's landscape, it is easy to imagine that Meryon occupied the position of the flaneur when creating the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* and, by illustrating his visions of the city, he has made the viewer privy to his perceptions of it. Meryon takes the viewer on his promenade through Paris, from the banks of the Seine to the top of Notre-Dame, but unlike the traditional flaneur, his attempts to understand the city rely on the careful observation not of its crowds but of the streets and buildings that contain them. His etchings not only take us on a tour of the city "but translate a personal, pessimistic reading of urban realities into a sequence of ominous, introspective visions."[27] In this way, Meryon's tour of the city is not unlike that of the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd;" both journeys are related to their audiences only after being filtered through a disturbed temperament.

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[26] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 417.
[27] Ibid, 129.

Also like Poe's form of flânerie, Meryon's guided tour of Paris seems to offer a glimpse through the tangible world and into its more abstract, even supernatural, foundations. The feeling that something ominous or evil is haunting Paris persists throughout the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, beginning with the frontispiece of the series, *Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice* (Fig. 6). In this etching, the old gate to the Palais de Justice is topped by the demon, Mephistopheles, who holds a banner that bears the series' title. The significance of this figure will be addressed in more detail in a later chapter, but it is worth noting now that the placement of this demon above the roofs of Paris establishes Meryon's city as a possessed one, and there is the feeling that something nonhuman may be revealed at any turn of this pictorial promenade. The most famous etching from the series, *Le Stryge* (Fig. 7), features a Mephistopeles-like figure that acts as a sort of sinister flaneur, watching the city from his perch on the balustrade of Notre Dame de Paris and the flaneurs in the city below become objects of another's gaze.

This notion of watching while being watched is what Benjamin dubbed the "dialectic of flânerie," but Meryon takes this idea to a more eerie, supernatural level. Within *Le Stryge* and *Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice* is the suggestion that a spectator more powerful than the flaneur is observing the city. He conveys a similar idea in several of his other etchings from *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* in which areas of intense darkness are also suggestions that perhaps the urban spectator is not the only one watching. *Rue des Mauvais Garçons* (Fig. 8) is an especially strong example of this, and the poem that he etched into the top of the plate directly addresses this notion of hidden realities, and sounds as if it could even refer to the activities of a flaneur:

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Quel mortel habitait,
En ce gîte si sombre?
Qui donc là se cachait
Dans la nuit et dans l'ombre?"

In the following stanzas, however, Meryon proposes that it was not the "mortel" who had

been hiding:

Etait-ce la vertu,
Pauvre, silencieuse?
Le crime diras-tu
Quelqu'âme vicieuse.

Ah! Ma foi, je l'ignore;
Si tu veux le savoir,
Curieux, vas y voir
Il en est temps encore

Meryon suggests that the abstract ideas of "vertu," "crime" or "Quelqu'âme

vicieuse" had been concealed by the shadows and that anyone could find out which by

simply going to the Rue des Mauvais Garçons and observing it for themselves – "vas y

voir." Both Meryon and Poe address the fear and discomfort that are inherent to the

activity of surveillance, but more than that, they both illustrate that this anxiety is

exacerbated when the surveyor is unable to fully see or comprehend the people or things

that he observes. There is in all of the prints of Meryon's series, a feeling that reality or

the modern world is never entirely visible, always concealed by something. In the more

traditional sense, flanerie involves an anonymity in that the flaneur himself never

interacts with, indeed hides in plain sight from, the objects of his observation; but in

Meryon's prints, as in "The Man of the Crowd" and Poe's detective stories, the world is

similarly hidden from the urban spectator.

Reading the Face of the City

Though physiognomy, the pseudoscientific art of interpreting a person's character by observing his or her facial features, had been practiced since antiquity, its popularity in the nineteenth century was due largely to the work of the Swiss minister, Johann Caspar Lavater. His four-volume work, *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-78), made physiognomy seem accessible and reasonable to the general public by acknowledging physiognomy's long history while also establishing it as an important part of several different contemporary discourses. Though no longer considered to be a legitimate science, physiognomy remained popular in the nineteenth century, especially among the bourgeoisie and city dwellers who feared that the individual had become lost in and swallowed by the city crowds. Physiognomy, a practice that assumes that one can understand a person's character based on nothing more than a snapshot view of their appearance, was, for them, a way of restoring a lost connection between individuals.[28]

Poe and Physiognomy

Edgar Allan Poe was interested in physiognomy's usefulness for comprehending the modern world and he often employs it and another pseudoscience, phrenology, in his stories to suggest that deeper, perhaps even metaphysical, meaning can be gleaned from superficial observations.[29] Many of his characters are practitioners of the pseudo-science; the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" relies on it to such an extent that when he

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[28] Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3–.

[29] Brett Zimmerman, *Edgar Allan Poe: Rhetoric and Style* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 195.

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encounters a countenance that he is unable to read he is driven to a nearly insane state.

Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin also depends on physiognomy in a broader sense. He

employs physiognomic techniques to observe the physical characteristics of his

environment and makes inferences based on those observations that allow him to solve

the apparently insoluble crimes that he encounters in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue,"

"The Mystery of Marie Rôget," and "The Purloined Letter." Melissa Percival asserts that

in the nineteenth century, the individual who wanted to comprehend the changing city

relied so heavily on physiognomy that it had become like "a survival kit" for him.[30] This

is precisely how Poe treats the pseudo-science in "The Man of the Crowd," and, to a large

extent, in the Dupin stories; when it is ineffective in the former, the practitioner's sanity

and his perceived safety are endangered, and in the latter stories, the terrifying crimes of

Paris would be unsolved without it.

Dupin's impressive physiognomic skills are most heavily examined in "The

Murders in the Rue Morgue," a story in which the art of analysis is as much the subject as

the mysterious murders. Indeed, before the narrative even begins, the story's narrator

dedicates several paragraphs to a discussion of observation and analysis. He uses the

game, whist, to examine the analyst's nature because it is in this game that his skill

particularly evident:

> "He makes, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. So, perhaps,
> do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information
> obtained, lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality
> of the observation…He examines the countenance of his partner,

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[30]Melissa Percival and Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater's Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware, 2005).

comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents…He notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or chagrin" (657).

This passage could easily be a description of the analytical capabilities that a flaneur desires, and the emphasis on the importance of physiognomic analysis for making informed inferences is noteworthy in that transforms a pseudoscience into a rational mode of collecting information. Poe situates physiognomy in this story as a specific application of a more general way of viewing the world that relies on careful observation of and analysis of one's surroundings; his physiognomy, in other words, is a tool applied in the service of understanding a whole scene and when its practitioner is too heavily focused on a part of this whole, errors are inevitable. This, according to Dupin, is the reason that the prefect of police in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" arrests the wrong man for the murders of the L'Espanaye women: "He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole" (668).

Poe indicates that in order to avoid becoming enraptured by individual parts of a scenario like the prefect in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" or the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd," it is necessary that an analyst or practitioner of physiognomy maintains a deliberate detachment from the people whom he observes. What is so interesting about Dupin's detachment, however, is that it is so well executed that when he exercises his analytic ability, the detective seems to become something nonhuman: "His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression;

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while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded

petulantly, but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation" (659).

For a successful analysis, the skilled practitioner must enter an alternate state of being,

paradoxically relying on an otherworldly state of mind to interpret the superficial aspects

of the world that he observes. Physiognomy, thus, becomes another way in which Poe

engages with the metaphysical. Indeed, Dupin succinctly outlines Poe's notion of finding

the world's metaphysical foundations through observation of its physical characteristics

in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" when he explains: "There is such a thing as being

too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important

knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial" (668).

It is Poe's interest in the idea that studying a person's physical appearance can

lead to an understanding of deeper, even hidden or supernatural information that led

Benjamin to refer to him as one of the early students "of the physiognomy of the big

city." [31] It is under the umbrella of urban physiognomy that Benjamin joins together Poe

and Meryon, however the latter's physiognomic reading of the city involves a study of its

buildings and infrastructure and is all but devoid of the people that the former's

physiognomy requires. Benjamin refers specifically to Meryon's *Le Pont-au-Change*

(1854) (Fig. 9) in *The Arcades Project*:

> Insight into the physiognomy of 'overpopulated Paris' is afforded by the
> background - empty of human beings - in Meryon's *Pont au change*. On
> this background we meet with one or two very narrow (window-wide)
> and, as it were, spindly houses. Their window openings strike the viewer
> like gazes; they bring to mind the gazes of those spindly, hollow-eyed

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[31] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, 189.

children who appear - often gathered together in great numbers - in pictures of poor people from that era, and who stand there abashed and close-packed in a corner like the tenements in Meryon's engraving.[32]

Benjamin's assertion that both Meryon and Poe are physiognomists of the city is important in that it more directly establishes a connection between them than other sources have. However, it is important to realize that his assertion that Meryon's prints encourage a physiognomic reading of the city is part of a longer tradition of reading the "face" of Paris, both the city and Meryon's representation of it.

As Michael Gamper discusses in his essay "'Er lasst sich nicht lessen': Physiognomy and the City," Honore de Balzac was one of the leading practitioners of the physiognomy both the human and the architectural faces of Paris. In *Comedie humaine*, for example, Balzac personifies Paris, describing it as a female body, surrounded by cabarets that confine it like the "ceinture de la plus impudique des Vénus, incessamment pliée et dépliée."[33] In this way, Balzac transforms physiognomy from an art of reading human countenances to an interpretive study of the city's physical features.[34] Victor Hugo also viewed Paris as a face that could be read. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, he laments the loss of the city's great monuments to the surge of houses and tenements that were rapidly being erected. The result is a deterioration of Paris's historical significance, which is physically represented by the decreasing grandeur of its appearance: "Le Paris actuel n'a donc aucune physionomie générale. C'est une collection d'échantillon de

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[32] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 385.

[33] Honore de Balzac, *La Comédie Humaine*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 1.

[34] Michael Gamper, "'Er Lasst Sich Nicht Lesen': Physiognomy and the City," in *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater's Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 154–5.

plusieurs siècles, et le plus eaux ont disparu…la signification historique de son architecture s'efface-t-elle tous les jours…Nos pères avaient un Paris de pierre; nos fils auront un Paris de plâtre."[35] The changing physiognomy of Paris that Hugo describes is lamentable not merely for aesthetic reasons but because it is indicative of the more serious weakening of the spirit of the city.

The Physiognomy of the City in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*

When Meryon began his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* in 1850, nearly two decades after Hugo made these observations about the changing face of the city, the Parisian landscape was still undergoing a massive transformation and, like Hugo and Balzac, Meryon represented the city in such a way that seems to encourage a physiognomic reading. Long before Benjamin commented on the physiognomy of Meryon's city, the art critic Philippe Burty, who was the printmaker's contemporary and friend, praised Meryon's talent for observing and interpreting the "physionomie agitée" of the city. Burty describes Meryon as a sort of sorcerer who restores life to the Parisian streets that are fated to perish under Baron Haussmann: "la ville, la rue, l'édifice, qui ne jouaient jusqu'alors que le role banal du cadre ou de la toile de fond, se sont animés de la vie latente de l'être collectif."[36]

Burty's descriptions of the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* not only provide support for a physiognomic reading of Meryon's city, they also invite comparisons between Meryon's physiognomy of the city and Poe's. He writes:

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[35] Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1912), 127.
[36] Burty, "L'Oeuvre de M. Charles Méryon," 523.

> M. Méryon n'emprunte en quelque sorte à la réalité que sa ressemblance morale; il conserve à l'architecture le détail caractéristique et impose au lieux le reflet mélancolique ou expansif de son âme; sans modifier l'aspect du monument, il lui fait exprimer son sens caché et lui donne une signification plus large en l'associant à sa propre pensée.[37]

Implicit in Burty's descriptions of Meryon's etchings is the notion that it is not only the character of the city that is revealed in a physiognomic reading of Meryon's Paris but also the character of the artist himself. Just as the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd," filters the objective view of the people and streets of London through his interpretations and descriptions, so too does Meryon give us a subjective vision of the architectural features of Paris and present them as characters in *his* story of the city. Another Poe story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," characterizes the relationship between Roderick Usher and his house in a manner eerily similar to that in which Burty describes the link between Meryon's soul and the Parisian landscape. The story's narrator observed "the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people" and explained that the title "House of Usher" "seemed to include…both the family and the family mansion" (534).

Meryon himself offered some commentary on his etchings that suggests that he intended for them to be read as a sort of physiognomy of Paris, and shared with Poe the belief that all of the parts of a scene must be carefully examined and considered together in order to make sense of the whole. In "Mes Observations," his response to Burty's 1863 catalogue and commentary on the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris,* Meryon wrote about his etching, *La Morgue* (Fig. 10):

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[37] Ibid.

"Je soupçonne fort que quelques petites touches du burin ont ici malignement défiguré deux des personages du groupe principal, le cadaver et l'un des homes qui le portent: dans le premier, c'est la tête et le cou qui ont été tailladés; dans l'autre on a notablement changé par cette retouche l'expression de commiseration en celle d'un profond dégoût, qui résulterait alors ici de l'état de putrefaction du cadaver. J'éprouve de ce fait quelque, peine, parce qu'ainsi cette unité d'impression tragique, qui rentrait dans le caractère nécessaire du subject, se trouve malencontreusement détruite."[38]

Tragedy, Meryon explains, defines the character of this scene and every detail of the etching must be in the service of communicating this character. Like M. Dupin, the viewer of Meryon's etchings must take in every detail, never forgetting the place of each in the whole, if the aim is discovering the truth of each.

In 1926, before Benjamin brought attention to the physiognomy of Poe and Meryon's work, Gustave Geffroy published his book on Meryon in which he included detailed descriptions of Meryon's series that pick up on the notion of reading the physiognomy of the Parisian landscape that Meryon and Burty's commentary encourages. In his description of *Le Stryge,* he directly compares the buildings of Meryon's series with the urban crowd:

Meryon a fait tenir un espace immense, un monde de maisons, de fenêtres, de toits, de ruelles, depuis les tuyaux de cheminées qui arrivent au niveau de la galerie de Notre-Dame jusqu'aux confines de l'horizons. C'est la foule des maisons, évoquant la foule humaine dans une mêlée singulière, qui pourrait être confuse, si elle n'avait été ordonnée par un art surprenant habile à équilibrer les lignes det les volumes.[39]

[38] Philippe Verdier, "Charles Meryon: Mes Observations (1863)," *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 152 (1983): 223–35.

[39] Geffroy, *Charles Meryon*.

In this description Meryon is like a flaneur, observing the city's physiognomy and skillfully interpreting it through the precision of his etching technique. Geffroy's implication that Meryon's buildings exhibit the same character as the Parisian crowds is remarkably reminiscent of a passage from "The Fall of the House of Usher" in which the narrator describes Roderick Usher's unusually intense connection to his home: "He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted…in regard to…an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence" (537).

Personification of architecture is an important technique that Meryon employs in his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*. In the poem that accompanies the etching, *Le Pont-Neuf* (Fig. 11), he brings the bridge to life, and compares it directly to the human life within the city:

Ci-gît du vieux PontNeuf
L'exacte resemblance,
Tout radoubé de neuf
Par récente ordonnance.

O savants médecins,
Habiles chirurgiens,
De nous pourquoi ne faire
Comme du pont de Pierre?

like windows" that evoke in him "a sense of insufferable gloom" and "an unredeemed dreariness of thought" (532-3), and his characterization of the House's physiognomy could be applied to a description of several of the buildings in Meryon's views of Paris. Ironically, *La Morgue* is one of the etchings that struck Geffroy as particularly vital in

terms of the architectural elements, and his observations of the buildings, especially his

comparison of the windows to eyes, are not unlike Poe's description of the House of

Usher, which is itself a sort of tomb for the Usher clan. "C'est la morgue," he says,

"environnée, surplombée de ces maisons dont toutes les fenêtres, toutes les lucarnes,

jusqu'aux toits, parmi les cheminées, sont ouvertes sur elle comme des yeux curieux."[40]

Le Petit Pont (1850) is another etching that displays Meryon's tremendous attention to

the minute details of the buildings' facades. As in "The Fall of the House of Usher," the

windows of the tenements are black cavities that seem to gaze like eyes at the viewer,

giving the buildings lives of their own. As is the case in all other prints from the *Eaux-*

Fortes sur Paris, however, people are not prominent figures in *Le Petit Pont*, perhaps

because, as in Poe's story, the buildings convey the spirit of their inhabitants.

    Le Petit Pont is particularly important to the discussion of the physiognomy of

Paris in Meryon's prints because of an interesting detail that suggests that Meryon might

have been consciously playing with the idea of "faces" and facades. He mentioned to

Baudelaire that after he had completed this etching he noticed that a shadow on the left

side of the composition resembles a sphinx. Meryon insisted that this was completely

inadvertent on his part and that its appearance in the etching was "tout à fait

involuntaire," and, according to Baudelaire, although Meryon stated that the print was

made shortly before the coup d'état of 1851, he also said "Or, le Prince est l'être actuel

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[40] Ibid, 63.

qui, par ses actes et son visage, ressemble le plus à un sphinx."[41] Whether or not he

consciously included the physiognomy of a sphinx in the print, Meryon admits that it

could be seen as a symbol of Louis-Napoleon, who he believes exhibits the same violent

mercilessness toward the people of France as the Sphinx did to those who could not solve

its riddles. In short, Meryon asserts that the shadowy face in *Le Petit Pont* represents the

character of the French state, perhaps just as the buildings in his views of Paris represent

the character of the French capital.

The Character of Meryon's Paris

If, as I have tried to demonstrate in the previous section, the buildings in

Meryon's etchings are like people whose faces can be read by careful observers, what is

the character of the city that Meryon observes and tells about in his *Eaux-Fortes sur*

Paris? I want to look at the series as the story of Meryon's Paris, in which the city's

character, like the solutions to the mysteries in Poe's Dupin stories, can be exposed

through careful scrutiny of superficial elements. The viewer of Meryon's etchings or the

reader of Poe's stories, cannot interpret the Parisian physiognomy or, in the case of Poe,

the character of the crowd or of the House of Usher, however; instead, the object of

scrutiny is filtered through another consciousness – Meryon's or the narrator of Poe's

tales. The aim of the viewer of the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, then, is to decipher the

character of the city that *Meryon* perceived; a task that can be difficult because of its

reliance on subjective interpretation of the mood of the etchings but one that is facilitated

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[41] Loys Delteil, *Le Peintre-Graveur Illustré (xixe et Xxe Siècles): Charles Meryon*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1907).

by the poems that accompany many of them and the few instances of written commentary from Meryon about the series.

The first view of the city in the series appears in the frontispiece, *Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice* (1854), which depicts the two medieval towers, Tour de César and Tour d'Argent. James Burke explains that Meryon has enlarged the towers and portal out of scale making them feel "like forbidding city gates."[42] Indeed, the immense, dark *porte* is hardly welcoming, but the presence of a demon floating above the towers makes it truly fearsome. This etching's position as the frontispiece of the series makes the demon's presence all the more significant. With a banner in his hands that bears the title of the series, this figure presents the collection of etchings and indicates to the viewer that the views of Paris that follow are not merely scenic views of the Parisian landscape but offer insight into the darker, evil spirit of the city. Meryon wrote verses to accompany this etching that further emphasizes Meryon's belief that an evil spirit had possessed Paris:

<div align="center">

Qu'âme pure gemisse,
Mais sur ce frontispice
J'ai peint noirs diablotins,
Malicieux Mutins,
Dominant de ses Ailes
Les vieilles tours jumelles
De la cité de Paris,
Paris le Paradis
Des amours et des vices;
La ville ou la Sirène
A la diabolique engeance.
Poussent maints rejetons,
Que greffent les Demons!

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[42] Burke, *Charles Meryon Prints & Drawings*, 33.

Le méchant animal
Augure du mal
A choisi domicile
En notre bonne ville
Le cas vraiment est grave,
Et tristement se grave
Que pour l'exorciser,
Il faudrait le raser.

The last four lines are particularly interesting because they indicate that the task that

Meryon has undertaken is to capture the city *before* it is exorcised of its demon. More

importantly, though, they establish a relationship between the evil spirit and the physical

architecture of the city in which the former is dependent on the latter, further supporting a

physiognomic reading of the city Meryon's city. A comparison of this etching and its

accompanying verses with the following stanza from a poem (540) in "The Fall of the

House of Usher" reveals how similarly Meryon and Poe viewed this relationship:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

The House of Usher, like the old Paris of Meryon's prints, must perish along with the

demons that haunt it.

Of course, the demon from the frontispiece is not the only winged monster that

appears in Meryon's series. The chimera figure in *Le Stryge* similarly represents a

greater evil that Meryon perceived in the modern world. He explained in a letter to his

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father that "this monster which I have represented does exist, and is in no way a figment of my imagination. I thought I saw in this figure the personification of Luxuria."[43] Luxuria is traditionally represented as a woman with snakes hanging from her breast, and it is interesting that Meryon found a connection between this figure and *Le Stryge*. For him, this chimera represented a greater truth, an eternal evil that pervades society, but it also symbolized a personal burden for Meryon, as he explained to Jules Andrieu: "The monster is mine…He means stupidity, cruelty, lust, hypocrisy – they have all met in one beast."[44] The areas of dramatic darkness and shadow that give Meryon's etchings their ominous mood seem to further convey the pervasiveness of this monster. Scholars have noted that the medium of etching alone makes it possible for an artist to represent literal darkness in order to symbolize the isolation, anxiety and melancholy that make up "the troubling shadow of urban modernity,"[45] but Meryon's choice to make a series of Paris views and his inclusion of poems allow him to specify the nature of this shadow: it is that of the demon that floats above Paris in the frontispiece and *Le Stryge*, who like Poe's raven, watches over his victims and serves as a reminder of the omnipresence of evil. The desperate plea of the narrator in "The Raven:" "Prophet!'…'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or Devil" could be directed at Meryon's demons as well.

Along with the sense of terror that is nearly ubiquitous throughout *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, there is an underlying gloom, perhaps explained partially by the tragic

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[43] This translation is from Burke, *Charles Meryon*, 35.

[44] Richard Maxwell, *The Mysteries of Paris and London* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 365.

[45] Elizabeth Helsinger, "The 'Writing' of Modern Life," in *The "Writing" of Modern Life: The Etching Revival in France, Britain, and the U.S., 1850-1940* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art University of Chicago, 2008), 2.

possession of Paris – and Meryon himself – by demonic forces, but also certainly because

of the city's old age and nearness to death. This melancholy is apparent in *Tourelle de la*

Rue de la Tixéranderie (1852) (Fig. 12), in which Meryon depicts an old house that stood

on the corner of the Rue de Coq and was demolished the year before he made the etching.

In the lower right corner of the composition, to figures stand in silhouette, their

physiognomies, and therefore their characters, hidden from the viewer. Similarly,

Meryon leaves the building's interior a mystery, but the smoke spewing from the

chimney indicates that there are inhabitants within who give life to this old house. These

smoky breaths are among its last, however, and Meryon's intense attention to the

façade's details makes this clear. His emphasis on the fractures that mar the building's

face, the shadows that delineate its protrusions and hollows, and the overgrown vines that

climb the tower and encroach upon the windows betray the house's old age and proximity

to its destruction. The house is still standing but we know that its death is imminent the

sense that the house's spirit is a gloomy one, even "melancholy" like that of the House of

Usher. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe's description of the doomed House of

Usher could apply well to the house in Meryon's etching:

> Its principle feature seemed to be that of an excessive
> antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute
> fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine
> tangle web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart
> from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the
> masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild
> inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts
> and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. (534).

Just as the House of Usher, the family as well as the physical estate, has already met its

violent end by the time that the narrator relates his story, so too has the house on the Rue

de Coq already perished by the time Meryon represents it in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*.

Etchings like *Tourelle de la Rue de la Tixéranderie* can demonstrate how, as the

Goncourts said, "some of the soul of the old city had been revived"[46] in Meryon's

etchings. In this way, his attention to the city's signs of age is not necessarily entirely in

the service of conveying the eeriness and melancholy of death and decay. Indeed, there

is a sense throughout the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* that Meryon was greatly interested in the

history of Paris and its changing physiognomy. In addition to his attention to the

buildings doomed to perish in the remodeling of Paris such as the morgue or the house on

the Rue de Coq, Meryon also places a great deal of focus on the medieval aspects of the

city's landscape. Several scholars have pointed out the prominence of the medieval

tower of St. Jacques in the background of *Le Stryge*, for instance, noting that its scale in

the etching is larger than it is in reality and Notre-Dame de Paris, perhaps the most

famous medieval structure in Paris, is featured in six of the etchings in the series.

Saint-Etienne-du-Mont is perhaps the etching in which Meryon is most explicitly

acknowledging the evolution of the Parisian topography (see Fig. 2). In it, he depicts a

spot that he must have known well since he lived only a block away from 1851 to 1852.

The composition features three buildings from three different periods of Paris's history:

at left is the Collège de Montaigu, the oldest structure in the scene; at center is the

Renaissance façade of the church of Saint Etienne du Mont and at right is the Pantheon,

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[46] Burke, *Charles Meryon*, 7.

which was completed in 1789. Like the house from *Tourelle de la Rue de la Tixéranderie*, the medieval Collège de Montaigue is covered with cracks and fissures, the windows dark and impenetrable to the viewer's eye. In fact, the only portion of the building that is in the sunlight is the upper right corner, where the window is equally impenetrable because it has been covered over with cement. The roof of the building appears equally worn, and the building as a whole appears to have endured much wear and many years.

The façade of the church of Saint Etienne du Mont appears to be in much better condition and is decidedly less gloomy, partly because it is nearly entirely in the sun, appearing less haunted and cavernous, and partly because its architecture is less Gothic inspired than that of the college. Finally, the structure of the Pantheon on the right is under construction. Unlike the college, which has apparently been left to die, the Pantheon is being maintained, suggesting that it is the future of Paris; it is not, however, the focus of this print. The building is not visible enough to interpret its physiognomy. These buildings meld together, like people in a crowd, and Meryon seems to be remarking about his city the same thing that Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" thought about the object of his pursuit: "How wild a history…is written with that bosom!" (651)

Urban Anxiety

A feeling of unease pervades Meryon's series. His city is one under constant surveillance by the buildings themselves and, presumably, by the people who reside within but remain unseen. It is a city where shadow is nearly as prevalent as light and keeps much hidden from sight. That the Paris that Meryon presents has an unsettling appearance is not surprising considering the city's instability at the time when Meryon began his etchings. Not only was the physical landscape of Paris scheduled to be largely reconfigured under Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann, its political landscape had been repeatedly leveled and rebuilt. By 1850, when Meryon began the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, France had endured three revolutionary periods in just over half a century and since the Revolution of 1789 it had changed governments several more times. Paris, as the country's capital and most populous city was the epicenter of the turmoil. Meryon's letters and the few other examples of his written commentary indicate that he was at least somewhat politically aware and was concerned about the future of his country and his city.

Perhaps the most politically charged etching from the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* is, *Fluctuat nec mergitur* ("it rocks but it is not sunk) (Fig. 13), in which Paris is represented as a ship sailing over rough seas. Meryon directly acknowledges his concern for the state of Paris. In "Mes Observations," Meryon states that "les hauts faits récents de l'armée" perhaps served as the vague political overtones of this work and the interesting Roman numerals beneath the ship give the dates 1851-1854. In his 1983 publication of

"Mes Observations," Meryon's 1863 commentary about his etchings, Philippe Verdier elaborates on Meryon's mention of these "hauts faits," asserting:

> "[l]a crête du blazon de Paris: *Fluctuat nec mergitur,* étant composée de canons réuis par des courtines percées de meurtrières, aurait pu être interprétée comme une allusion au régime de dictature militaire de Napoléon III dans la période 1851-1854."[47]

One does not need to know Meryon's political motivations, however, to understand that with this symbolic rocking ship he is implying that Paris is in a precarious position.

Fluctuat nec mergitur is the fifth etching in the series and is the last etching to appear before *Le Stryge*, the first of the views of Paris. As one of the introductory images, it sets the tone for the body of work and establishes its subject, Paris, as a troubled place, not without hope but in need of rescue. This feeling of imminent danger persists throughout the series, and the ship in *Fluctuat nec mergitur* is not the only precariously positioned thing in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*. The wear and decay of the buildings in many of the etchings was discussed in the previous chapter as a physiognomic characteristic of the city in the previous chapter, but it is worth noting here that these indications of age also suggest the fragility of the Parisian architecture and landscape. They, like the symbolic ship, do not appear entirely stable and seem to be approaching death. The architecture and infrastructure of the city are the focus of Meryon's prints, but they are not without a human presence. Though the people in Meryon's etchings are small in size, they contribute significantly to the feeling of anxiety that the series conveys.

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[47] Verdier, "Charles Meryon: Mes Observations (1863)," 232.

"Ici la Mort convie tous…"[48]

Several of the prints in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, particularly *Tourelle de la Rue de la Tixéranderie*, *Saint-Eitenne-du-Mont*, and *L'Arche du Pont Notre-Dame*, feature people standing on or dangling from the buildings, only a misplaced step away from plummeting to their deaths. In the upper right corner of *Tourelle*, for instance, Meryon has depicted two figures standing atop a building. Their small size makes their actions ambiguous, but it seems that they are performing some sort of construction on the building. They also do not appear to be harnessed to the building in any way, making their proximity to the ledge of the building's roof all the more disconcerting. In *Saint-Etienne-du-Mont*, Meryon places figures in similarly perilous positions. Four figures are in the midst of what appears to be very strenuous construction on the Pantheon at the right side of the composition. They occupy the three levels of the ramshackle-looking scaffolding that covers the building, working together to hoist up a wooden beam, presumably to add to the scaffolding. The difficulty of their task is evident in their postures; the figure at the top layer braces himself with his legs and seems to be using a tremendous amount of strength to pull the rope attached to the wood and the two figures on the level beneath him work to transfer the beam to him from the figure on the lowest level. *L'Arche du Pont Notre-Dame* (1853) (Fig. 14) also features a figure employed in a hazardous task requiring him to hang from a rope halfway up the side of the bridge's base. The labor of these figures puts them in danger and intricately links their lives with

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[48] This section heading is a line from Meryon's poem, *L'Hotellerie de la Mort*, which he wrote to accompany his etching, *La Morgue*.

the architecture of Paris, whose future landscape is at once the cause and the product of their peril.

In *Pont au Change* (1854) (Fig. 9), the third to last print in the series, Meryon has taken death from a risk to a probability. Just left of center, near the bottom of the composition, there is a figure in the Seine. His outstretched arms reach toward a small boat occupied by three other figures who are distracted by a balloon that floats above the bridge on the composition's left side. In the early states of the etching, the balloon displays the word "speranza," the Italian word for hope, drawing interesting parallel between the figure in the water, whose hope for survival – the group of men in the boat – is just out of reach, and the three men, who watch as the balloon of hope floats away. In a letter from April 1854, Meryon explained that he intended this balloon to be departing the city: "In the part of the sky to the left, reasonably close to the foreground, there passes a balloon which seems to be resuming its flight towards the sky; on the covering, you can read the Italian (I think) word Speranza."[49] The balloon, labeled hope, floats away from Paris, leaving it as doomed as the man in the water.

Poe too creates scenarios in his tales in which his characters are in very close proximity to death because of their habitations in the city. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," emphasize the anxiety that results from the dangers of Paris. In "Marie Rogêt," in fact, the circumstances of the title character's death are quite similar to that of the drowning man in *Pont au Change*. Marie's body is

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[49] Translation of a letter dated April 17, 1854 from Charles Meryon to his father. Roger Collins, *Charles Meryon: A Life* (Devizes, UK: Robert Garton, 1999).

found in the Seine and Dupin determines that she was thrown into the water from a boat. Like the probable death of the man in Meryon's print, Marie's death went unnoticed by anyone, despite her having been a well-known figure in her neighborhood. Similarly, in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye are gruesomely killed, and though they lived in an apartment building surrounded by dozens of people, no one witnesses their deaths.

The notion that there is no safety in numbers plays a role in "The Masque of the Red Death" as well. In the story, Prince Prospero quarantines his friends and acquaintances within his large abbey in an effort to protect himself and them from the Red Death that has ravaged their town. In the midst of a masquerade, the Red Death, dressed in the garb of a reveler, makes his way through the crowd and finally takes the lives of this group that had thought itself immune to him. Part of what makes this story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" so terrifying is that they all address the idea that one can die suddenly and without drawing the attention of anyone else in the midst of a densely populated area. It is as if with these stories, Poe is discounting the conception of his man of the crowd, who erroneously believes that the crowd offers safety and comfort. Indeed, this view is likely shared by many city dwellers, making Poe's stories all the more petrifying. Safety is nothing more than a perception and no city or crowd can offer protection to an individual. In this way, Poe emphasizes the individual's vulnerability in the city, something that Meryon also does by placing figures in precarious positions and by representing them as miniscule,

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emphasizing the immensity of the city that contains them. In Meryon's prints as in Poe's stories, people are less powerful than their circumstances.

Indeed, another quality about the Red Death that makes the story so terrifying is the rapidity and indiscrimination with which it kills: "He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall" (744). No single person is safe from the death; it kills any and everyone that it comes across suddenly and without warning. Along with this idea is the notion that death is never far away, something that Meryon's figures also convey. Indeed, Poe's stories often point out that life and death are not two separate realms, but coexist together in such a way that often one is indistinguishable from another. "Mesmeric Revelation" is the tale that most obviously conveys this view. In the story, an invalid, Mr. Vankirk, asks the narrator to put him into a mesmeric sleep, as he had done several times before, attesting that he needs to be mesmerized because it will help him to know the nature of the afterlife and whether his soul is truly immortal. After a lengthy discussion about the nature of God and death, the narrator awakens the hypnotized Mr. Vankirk, who immediately falls upon his pillow and dies. The narrator observes, "in less than a minute afterward his corpse had all the stern rigidity of stone. His brow was of the coldness of ice. Thus, ordinarily, should it have appeared, only after long pressure from Azrael's hand" (916). The narrator ends the tale by asking: "Had the sleep-waker indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows?" (916). This idea of the "living dead" recalls the doomed buildings of Meryon's prints, particularly the house in *Tourelle de la Rue de la*

Tixéranderie, that was demolished before Meryon made the etching, and the *Rue des Mauvais Garçons*, whose accompanying poem reminds the viewer that the street is to be destroyed soon. The poem accompanying the etching, *La Petite Pompe*, perhaps more blatantly, but also more humorously, than any other in the series illustrates the idea that the structures of Paris are soon to die:

<div style="text-align:center">

C'en est fait,
O forfait!
Pauvre Pompe,
Sans pompe,
Il faut mourir!
Mais pour amoindrir,
Cet arrêt inique,
Par un tour bachique,
Que ne pompes-tu,
En impromptu,
Au lieur d'eau Claire,
Qu'on n'aime guère
Du vin,
Bien fin?

</div>

Although the pompe is destined to perish, Meryon's work has given it a new life, allowing it to straddle, like Vankirk, the world of the living and the dead.

Interior and Exterior

The boundaries between life and death are not the only ones blurred in the works of Poe and Meryon. Both call into question the dichotomy between the interior and the external world by suggesting that shelter, even one's domicile, cannot offer protection from the dangers of the city. Though the interiors of the buildings in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* are hidden from the viewer, Meryon still conveys the sense that these structures offer no protection from the dangers outside. In *Le Petit Pont*, *La Rue des Mauvais*

Garçons and *La Morgue*, for instance, the facades of buildings make up the majority of the composition, and in each of these etchings, the windows of the buildings are entirely dark, impenetrable to the human eye. Their bleakness is uninviting – even repulsive, and instead of seeming to offer protection, these structures appear more like prisons. This is particularly true in *Rue des Mauvais Garçons* (Fig. 8), in which bars cover the windows. Indeed, these buildings seem more likely to trap anyone who enters them than to provide refuge. The shadows of the windows also evoke feelings of anxiety simply because if one cannot see through the darkness, one cannot know what lies inside. There is an unsettling uncertainty about what might be waiting inside these buildings. "The Masque of the Red Death" ends with the bleak final sentence: "And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all" (744). If the "Red Death" is removed from this sentence, it could aptly characterize the situation in Meryon's Paris. Darkness and Decay do seem to reign supreme over the buildings in his representations of the city, and the minions of the darkness, the black birds, fly over the city in nearly every print of the series, as a reminder of this dominion and an indication of the general anxiety from which Paris as a whole suffers.

Indeed, in many of Poe's tales, but especially in "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and his most famous poem, "The Raven," an external force penetrates the barrier between the outdoor environment and the interior, resulting in the death or eternal torment of the unwitting victims within. In "The Masque of the Red Death," Prince Prospero's belief that he could completely separate himself and his friends from the dangers that lie outside is articulated by the narrator, who emphasizes the

fortifications of Prospero's quarantined abbey: "This was an extensive and magnificent structure…A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron…They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or frenzy from within…The external world could take care of itself" (739-40) This last sentence in particular reveals the perceived distinction between the interior and exterior. The paragraph ends with the erroneous assertion: "All these and security were within. Without was the 'Red Death'" (740). The final events of the story prove that the confidence of the prince and his guests in the safety of their fortified habitation was misguided, as the "Red Death" passes through the futile barriers and kills everyone within the abbey.

In "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," death again penetrates the boundary between the interior world and the outside, this time in the form of an orangutan. Here too Poe emphasizes the perception that a separation between the interior and exterior is precisely that – a perception. He describes the house of Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye as a residence nearly always sealed off from the external world: "No one was spoken of as frequenting the house…The shutters of the front windows were seldom opened. Those in the rear were always closed, with the exception of the large back room, fourth story" (664). As Dupin reveals later, it is this fourth story window, a hole in the barrier between the house and the rest of the world that provided the point of ingress for the killer. Indeed, the window not only served as a point of entry but even as an invitation to the orangutan in an effort to escape his master who chased him through the city streets: "In passing down an alley in the rear of the Rue Morgue, the fugitive's

attention was arrested by a light gleaming from the open window of Madame

L'Espanaye's chamber, in the fourth story of her house" (682). Upon entering the

L'Espanaye house, the orangutan brutally kills the mother and daughter with a swiftness

like that exercised by the "Red Death." An open window is also the point of weakness in

the barrier between inside and out in "The Raven" through which the tormenting bird

enters the narrator's chamber. In penetrating the interior of the chamber, the Raven has

likewise entered the mind and spirit of his victim, and once he has entered, there is no

removing him from either, as we learn from the last two stanzas of the poem (1046):

> "'Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend,' I shrieked, upstarting –
> 'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
> Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
> Leave my loneliness unbroken! – quit the bust above my door!
> Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!'
> Quoth the Raven: 'Nevermore.'
>
> And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
> And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
> Shall be lifted – nevermore!

It is remarkable to view *Le Stryge*, after reading "The Raven," because of an

uncanny connection between the two. Poe's poem tells of a demonic bird that breaks the

barrier between the public realm and the private to eternally watch over and haunt the

narrator; Meryon's etching depicts a bird-like demon who overlooks the city of Paris,

watching its inhabitants like a hunter watches prey. In the etching there are also several

black birds, resembling ravens that fly above the city near the chimera. Beyond the

obvious connection between Meryon's birds and Poe's raven, there is a subtler but

perhaps more significant similarity that results from Meryon's treatment of the birds. *Le*

Stryge is remarkable in the series because it is the only one of the views of Paris that is

ovular but also because it is the only etching in which a part of the image breaks the

frame of the picture.[50] On the left side of the composition, two of the birds extend

beyond the line that encloses the rest of the image and separates it from the unetched area

of the plate. Their wings just barely reach into the white background of the paper outside

the enclosed scene, giving the impression that the birds are not contained and are even

capable of intruding into our sphere. Whether this was an attempt by Meryon to engage

with Poe's poem cannot be known for certain, but regardless of his inspiration, the effect

that he achieves is one of unease at the idea of these ominous looking birds penetrating

the picture plane. As in "The Raven," there is an anxiety that results from these birds

leaving their own environment and entering ours.

These black birds emphasize the penetrability of the barrier between exterior and

interior in Meryon's etching, *La Galerie Notre-Dame* (Fig. 15) as well. In this

composition, Meryon situates the viewer inside the gallery of the cathedral. This is the

only scene in the series that Meryon presents from within an enclosed space and the only

one in which an interior is the focus, yet there is an ambiguity of whether this space is in

fact an interior or not. The open spaces between the columns have permitted elements

from the external environment to invade the gallery. Birds perch on stoop at the lower

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[50] The frontispiece, *Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice*, is circular but because it is the frontispiece and because it includes an imaginary element in the form of the demon, it is not considered to be one of the views of Paris.

left side of the composition and their positioning amidst moss and other plants that have taken root inside the structure gives the impression that they have rather laid claim to the space. Two of the birds have just flown into the gallery from the outside and in the distance several more fly over the city. From these heights they can watch over the people below, just as Poe's raven watches over his victim from the bust of Pallas and just as the chimera in *Le Stryge*, the "insatiable vampire" surveys the city. The habitat of these birds may be the outdoors, but they have made themselves at home within that great symbol of France, Notre-Dame de Paris and they are free to come and go as they please. There is also something poignant about the idea of black birds settling in this great monument to Christianity, it is as if Meryon is calling into question the legitimacy of the religious traditions of France and suggesting that they cannot protect Paris from the evil and corruption that he believes have come to reside there.

Birds literally take over the scene in the later states of *Pont-au-Change*. In the eighth, ninth and tenth states of the etching, which he worked on after his discharge from Charenton (1858-9), enormous, dark birds have taken the place of the "speranza" balloon that had existed in the earlier states (see Fig. 16 for tenth state). Baudelaire tells Poulet-Malassis in a letter of January 8, 1860, that he asked Meryon why he had made such an unrealistic addition to the print, Meryon asserted that "this was not groundless, since *those people* [the government of the Emperor] often released eagles to study omens after the rite; and that this had been put into print in the newspapers, even *Le Moniteur*."[51] Meryon removed the birds in the eleventh state, replacing them with several small

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[51] Burke, *Charles Meryon Prints & Drawings*, 63.

balloons. In the twelfth and final state (Fig. 17) he gives the balloons names: *Vasco de Gama*, named after the Portuguese explorer; *L'Asmodée*, which refers to Asmodeus, a demon in the Book of Tobias who was said to raise the roofs of houses and discover the secrets of the inhabitants; *le Protée*, named after the sea god, Proteus, who, according to Greek myth, could change form at will; and *le Saint-Elme*, which refers to St. Elmo's Fire, a phenomenon in which a light or flame appears on a ship during a storm, taken to be a bad omen by sailors. These balloons, the birds that were there before them, and the other winged beings that appear frequently throughout the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* suite seem to at once stand for the freedom that flight allows and the corruption, evil and sense of doom that seems to makes that freedom unattainable for the inhabitants of the city. Their capability of flight suggests a kinship, uniting them in their shared cause of haunting Paris.

Notre-Dame and the French Imagination

Meryon and Poe both rely upon certain supernatural elements convey a sense of a very real anxiety – this anxiety intricately intertwined with the increased interest in Gothic architecture and the medieval past during the 19ᵗʰ century. Indeed, much of the anxiety that comes through in Meryon and Poe's representations of the urban environment is the product of the impression that modern Paris is haunted, not by the demons and other symbols of evil that Meryon illustrates in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* but by its history. The medieval past haunted the imagination of Paris, and resulted in a desire to preserve the Gothic remnants of the city's architecture. The Gothic Revival, as this renewed

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interest in medievalism is called, was characterized by a nostalgia for an imagined past. This nostalgia, commonly associated with Romanticism and an increased interest in the documentation of history during the nineteenth-century,[52] led to an increased interest in the preservation and imitation of medieval structures in cities across Europe.[53] Victor Hugo arguably did the most for the preservationists' cause with the publication of his novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1831, which did much to increase the interest in the Middle Ages in the French imagination. Six years later, the Commission on Historic Monuments was created in 1837 to serve as the authoritative body responsible for making decisions related to matters of preservation. In 1844, the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and his partner J.-B.-A. Lassus won a contest held to determine the restoration plan for the most famous Gothic monument in Paris and the subject of Hugo's novel, Notre-Dame de Paris.

By the time that Meryon began his series, which features Notre-Dame in six of the twelve views of Paris, the cathedral was in the midst of a nearly twenty-year restoration, and the relevance of this medieval monument in the modern world was very much on his and Viollet's minds. For both men, Notre-Dame symbolized France's past, but it also represented modern truths. Viollet was an atheist and did not have the romantic nostalgia for the Middle Ages that so many of his contemporaries, including Hugo and Meryon, did. Despite Notre-Dame's religious function and the extensive amount of

[52]Stephen Bann discusses the development and manifestations of this interest in detail in his book *The Clothing of Clio*.

[53] Georg Germann, *Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain: Sources, Influences and Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1972), 79.

work that he put toward creating new demonic chimeras and grotesques for its exterior,

Viollet saw Notre-Dame as an emblem of the logic that was inherent to Gothic art. His

conception of the cathedral was "that of a perfectly rational entity in which everything is

summed up in an equilibrium of constructive forces. No true monsters dwell here."[54] For

him, the chimeras were integral to the cathedral's structure because they made it more

medieval, their monstrous appearance epitomizing the monstrous and superstitious nature

that he, along with many others, saw in his imagined idea of the Middle Ages.[55] Unlike

Meryon's conception of the medieval past, Viollet's was devoid of superstition and

demonic presences of the past and, instead, focused on acknowledging the continuation

of this past and incorporating it into the present.

Viollet understood restoration as a modern science and defined it as a union of the

present with the past: "Restauration: Le mot et la chose sont modernes. Restaurer un

edifice, ce n'est pas l'entretenir, le réparer ou le refaire, c'est le rétablir dans un état

complet qui peut n'avoir jamais existé à un moment donné."[56] Even the chimeras like *Le

Stryge* are not, in Viollet's conception, representative of the evils of the world. Rather,

they represent the modern imagination's understanding of medieval religious beliefs. He

explains that the chimeras, "tout en sortant de la nature, ont cependant une physionomie à

eux, quelque chose de reel qui frappe l'imagination: c'est une histoire naturelle à part,

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[54] Francçoise Bercé and Bruno Foucart, *Viollet-Le-Duc: Architect, Artist, Master of Historic Preservation* (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Museum Exhibitions, 1988), 15.

[55] Kirk Ambrose, *The Marvellous and the Monstrous in the Sculpture of Twelfth-Century Europe* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), 8.

[56] Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVI siècle* Vol. 8 (Paris: A. Morel, 1875), 14.

don't tous les individus pourraient être classes par espèces.[57] Viollet's imagining of the Middle Ages is, in fact, more focused on the present. For him, the grotesques on the cathedral do not signify demonic spirits as they did for the faithful in medieval Paris, but rather they represent the very real nineteenth-century nostalgia for a romanticized conception of the Middle Ages. They are as the French art historian, Émile Mâle described, "souvenirs of distant ancestors, the last image of a lost world: here the somber and powerful genius of the Middle Ages bursts into full expression."[58]

An understanding of Notre-Dame's place in the nineteenth-century imagination is necessary before considering the significance of Gothic architecture in Meryon's *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*, not only because the cathedral is representative of the French Gothic Revival as whole but also because it is so prominently featured in the series. It is also important to understand Viollet's attitude toward the cathedral and Gothic architecture generally because it differs vastly from Meryon's; what is rational for the former becomes irrational and superstitious in the mind of the latter. There is a quality of madness to Meryon's work that could easily be dismissed as a product of his mental illness. Indeed, discussions of the manifestation of irrationality and madness in the *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris* typically focus on Meryon's insanity and fail to situate the quality of madness in his work within the greater tradition of Gothic art and literature. Madness is not a trope specific to Meryon's work but is a common theme of Gothic art and literature.

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[57] Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire Raisonné de L'architecture Française Du XIe Au XVIe Siècle*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Paris: A. Morel, 1875), 22-23.
[58] Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 59.

Indeed, as Fritz Stahl commented in his 1929 work, *Paris*, from which Benjamin quotes in *The Arcades Project*, the connection between Gothic architecture and madness is strong. He asserts that the gargoyles and chimeras that Viollet designed for Notre-Dame, "are actually descendants of the grotesques created in the Middle Ages by the possessed imagination, everywhere seeing demons, really seeing them."[59] Viollet exhibited the "medieval mania" of the Gothic Revival through his fascination with the rationality of the architecture and through his desire to make it relevant in the modern world. For Meryon, however, the interest in the Gothic architecture was more than a fascination, it was a mania, the symptom of a mind possessed like the minds of the medieval believers.

Anxiety and Gothic Architecture

Meryon himself believed that he shared a vision with the Parisians of the Middle Ages. Speaking about his fellow artists, he explained to his friend Jules Andrieu, who later recounted the conversation to Frederick Wedmore:

> But if they saw, as I see, an enemy behind each battlement and arms through each loophole; if they expected, as I do, to have the boiling oil and the molten lead poured down on them, they would do far finer things than I can do...my comrades are sensible fellows. They are never haunted by this monster…The monster is mine and that of the men who built this Tower of St. Jacques. He means stupidity, cruelty, lust, hypocrisy -- they have all met in that one beast.[60]

This passage is fascinating for many reasons, not least of all Meryon's conveyance of his anxiety. Pitting himself against his "sensible" peers, he acknowledges that he and his

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[59] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 778.
[60] Frederick Wedmore, *Meryon and Meryon's Paris, with a Descriptive Catalogue of the Artist's Work* (London, 1879), 44–45.

medieval counterparts are possessed by the same fears and as a result of this possession

he is unable to live as a rational-minded man in the modern world.   Meryon's attraction

to and interest in this architecture is irrational and emotional, and contemporaries like

Philippe Burty observed that his treatment of buildings like Notre-Dame suggests that

these Gothic structures held "une grande attraction sur l'espirt rêveur de l'artiste."[61]

Meryon's emotional and mental state are so closely linked with the architecture of his

prints because he saw the Gothic buildings of his city as remnants of the medieval

Parisians, with whom he believed he was inextricably linked. He saw them as similarly

possessed brethren, whose worldview was also marred by demons and the superstition,

paranoia and evil that they represent, and it is in the medieval architecture of Paris that

this connection becomes tangible.

Poe frequently includes Gothic architecture in his tales as well, and similarly

forms connections between it and the minds of his characters in many of them. One of

the most obvious manifestations of this relationship is in "The Fall of the House of

Usher." The house itself is described as possessing "an excessive antiquity," and the

narrator goes on to mention the Gothic archway of the door and the windows, which he

describes as "long, narrow, and pointed" (535), evoking images of Gothic cathedrals. I

have already discussed the link between the physiognomy of this house and the condition

of its inhabitant, but the significance of the Gothic elements of the house deserves some

mention. Alan Brown asserts that in this story "the surface gothic details become

realistically psychological. The most iconic of gothic tropes – the haunted castle – is

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[61] Philippe Burty, "L'Oeuvre de M. Charles Méryon II," *Gazette* 5, no. 15 (July 1, 1863): 83.

immediately transformed into the haunted mind in the first paragraph."[62] Poe uses the

idea of a haunted medieval castle to represent the possessed mind of Roderick Usher,

much as Meryon saw the Gothic architecture of Paris as ghosts of possessed medieval

minds.

The Buildings Come Alive

Both Meryon and Poe rely on exaggeration and personification of the architecture

in their scenes to evoke a sense of anxiety or fear. Several of Meryon's etchings from

Eaux-Fortes sur Paris feature medieval structures whose size has been exaggerated or

whose position has been manipulated slightly to make the image more ominous. In *Le*

Petit Pont, Notre-Dame de Paris dominates the scene, looming dark and foreboding in the

background. Certainly the dark shadow that covers nearly the entire structure gives it an

ominous appearance, but the immensity of the structure – it is the tallest building in the

scene – gives the impression that it is towering over the city. As Philippe Burty points

out, however, the cathedral is too large in proportion to the rest of the scene: "Les tours

de Notre-Dame, qui s'élèvent au-dessus de la composition, sont beaucoup trop hautes, eu

égard à leur dimension réelle et aux lois de la perspective." Burty goes on to explain that

this is no mistake, however, but a deliberate manipulation on Meryon's part.[63] This

enlargement along with the dark shadow that covers the cathedral also allows Meryon to

draw more attention to the chimeras, including *Le Stryge*, whose silhouettes are visible

against the light sky, and yet are unseen or unnoticed by the men and women in the

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[62] Alan Brown, "The Gothic Movement," in *Edgar Allan P* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 248.
[63] Burty, "L'Oeuvre de M. Charles Méryon II," 79.

streets below. The people in *Le Petit Pont* seem oblivious to these monsters that serve as reminders of the evil that constantly surveys and haunts them.

Notre-Dame is featured prominently in the last Paris view of the series, *L'Abside de Notre-Dame*. Here, the cathedral is again covered in shadow and looms dark and heavy over the rest of the scene. Meryon wrote a poem to accompany this etching, and although it was never published, it nonetheless gives a more concrete idea of his perception of the cathedral and its significance for medieval and modern Paris:

> O toi dégustateur de tout morceau gothique,
> Vois ici de Paris la noble basilique
> Nos Rois, grands et dévôts, ont voulu la bâtir,
> Pour témoigner au Maître un profond repentir.
> Quoique bien grande, hélas! on la dit trop petite,
> De nos moindres pécheurs pour contenir l'élite.[64]

In this poem, Meryon speaks to the nineteenth-century admirers of Gothic architecture and points out that Notre-Dame, this great testament to the piety of French kings of the past, was in fact the product of sin, since the motivation for its construction was repentance. He emphasizes that the sin that made the cathedral necessary has not diminished in period between its construction and the nineteenth-century and acknowledges the paradox between the Cathedral's grandeur and the impiety of the city. Meryon's representation of Notre-Dame as a dark monstrosity further stresses this paradox and encourages the viewer to reconsider what the cathedral represents.

The Gothic cathedral takes on an active and sinister role in Poe's story, "A Predicament," in which the story's narrator and protagonist, Signora Psyche Zenobia,

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[64] Aglaus Bouvenne, *Notes et Souvenirs Sur Charles Méryon: Son Tombeau Au Cimetière de Charenton Saint Maurice* (Paris: Charavay Frères Libraires Éditeurs, 1883), 49.

comes across a Gothic church during a walk through the town, Edina. In another instance

of associating madness with Gothic architecture, Zenobia demands: "What madness now

possessed me?" and explains that whatever had taken over her mind instilled in her "an

uncontrollable desire to ascend the giddy pinnacle, and then survey the immense extent of

the city" (507-8). Poe, like Meryon, emphasizes the sinister appearance of the cathedral

and Zenobia's growing anxiety, despite her compulsion to enter the structure:

> I entered the ominous archway. Where then was my guardian angel? – if
> indeed such angels there be. If! Distressing monosyllable! What world of
> mystery, and meaning, and doubt, and uncertainty is there involved in thy
> two letters! I entered the ominous archway! (508)

 Zenobia's unease at entering the cathedral is warranted, of course; after entering the

cathedral, she climbs the stairs to the top of the tower and, once there, peers through what

she thinks is a window. She finds her head has become stuck and realizes that the

opening is not in fact a window but rather the cathedral's clock and, unable to remove her

head from the minute hand's grasp, she is slowly decapitated. After several minutes of

turmoil and pain, Zenobia welcomes death, and when the clock has nearly severed her

neck, she explains: "My sensations were those of entire happiness, for I felt that in a few

minutes, at farthest, I should be relieved from my disagreeable situation" (512).

The Gothic cathedral takes on a similar role in Meryon's most morbid etching, *La

Morgue* (Fig. 10). Burty points out that Meryon has again exaggerated the size and

manipulated the positions of the architecture in this etching as he did to Notre-Dame in

Le Pont Neuf:

> Il était impossible de tirer un parti plus émouvant d'un coin de maisons
> qui, dans la réalité, étaient loin de produire sur l'âme une semblable

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impression. Ces toits bizarrement superposes, ces angles qui se heurtent, cette lumière aveuglante qui rend si frappante l'opposition des masses d'ombre, ce monument qui prend sous le burin de l'artiste une vague resemblance de tombeau antique, offrent à l'esprit je ne sais quelle énigme don't les personages vous dissent le mot sinistre.

Like the cathedral in "A Predicament," the morgue is an ominous sight, a sort of cathedral of death. Indeed, in his poem, "L'Hôtellerie de la Mort," Meryon directly connects death with a Gothic cathedral, beseeching the doomed of Paris in the final stanza:

Si vous voyez la Mort
Que Dieu peutêtre envoie,
Par un dernier effort,
En essuyant vos larmes,
Vers la voûte des Cieux
Où cessent les alarmes,
Levez encore les yeux
Là vous lirez peutêtre
Que pour vous va venir
Le jour de doux bien-être
Où pour ne point mourir,
Doit éclore la fleur,
A la fraîche corolle
A la sainte aureole
D'Amour, de Bonheur
Don't le germe est au Coeur!

In this stanza, Meryon depicts Paris as a cathedral, sheltering its people with "la voûte des Cieux." At the beginning of the poem, Paris is, like the cathedral in "A Predicament," the cause of its inhabitants' deaths. It is the city which "Donne en tout temps gratis / Et le lit et la table" in the morgue. Yet, by the end of the poem, the city also gives its citizens salvation from their suffering. Meryon implies in his poem that, just as Zenobia welcomes the death at the hand of the clock, the people of Paris will find

in death "Le jour de doux bien-être." There is no escape from death in this suite, which

ends with *Le Tombeau de Molière* (Fig. 18). This etching recalls *Fluctuat nec mergitur,*

except here the tomb of the great French playwright has taken the place of the ship – the

symbol of Paris – between the two laurel branches. It is as if Meryon is suggesting that

the Paris, which was rocking in the beginning of the series, is no longer afloat after our

journey through it. The series that began with anxiety, uncertainty and demonic

presences, has ended with death.

Conclusion

Charles Meryon is an artist whose life and oeuvre have often been overshadowed by his mental illness and tragic end. It is problematic and overly simplistic, however, to ascribe the gloom and mystery of his views of Paris from his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* to his insanity and his nostalgia for medieval Paris. In this thesis, I have considered Charles Meryon's work from a perspective different than those that previous scholars have taken by examining his series of etchings of Paris alongside Edgar Allan Poe's tales. The motivation behind this project was to understand more fully Meryon's portrayals of the city by suggesting that his mental illness, Victor Hugo and his sentimental desire to preserve his city before Napoleon III changed it forever, were not the only motivations behind his work.

I also wanted to consider Meryon's suite as a whole, thinking of it as a narrative in which the city is the main character and the story is one of evil and corruption but also of history and rebirth. In Poe's stories, the characters are the ones haunted by their pasts or possessed by evil, madness or corruption; in Meryon's story, it is the city that endures the suffering, sometimes overcoming it, other times succumbing to it. I have attempted to show a similar interest in seeing the metaphysical truths beneath the surface. Paris embraced Poe because his work embodied so much of the terror, the mystery, the Gothic spirit, the madness and the humor that melded together in a sort of grotesque whole to form the modern experience of the city. Meryon's narrative of the city in the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* illustrates the themes of Poe's tales, and whether or not his perception of the

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modern world was influenced by Poe or not, the fact that Meryon deals with the same themes as Poe suggests that the two shared a more widespread idea of modern Paris.

I have attempted to show that Poe and Meryon, both artists active in the mid-nineteenth century, engaged with themes related to the expansion of urban centers. The flaneur or urban spectator is a key figure in both men's oeuvres. I have also argued that both men engage with the theories behind physiognomy, as evidenced by the acute attention that each pays to the description and illustration of surface-level appearances in an effort to convey the inner character of a place or person. Finally, I have proposed that the urban environment that they portray is one characterized by an anxiety caused by the nearness of death and the haunting of the past. Examining Poe and Meryon's works together in this way expands the readings of both, but also, I believe, provides a deeper understanding of a common perception of the urban environment in Paris of the mid-nineteenth century.

Certainly we cannot know the extent to which Meryon's mental illness is evident in the *Eaux-fortes sur Paris* suite, nor can one know if Poe had a direct influence on Meryon. I have tried to show, however, that these artists who shared Baudelaire's praise also shared a common sentiment and presented their audience with similarly gloomy, ominous, detailed views of the world. Baudelaire, Geffroy and Benjamin noted some commonalities between Meryon and Poe; this thesis has been an attempt to expound on their comparisons and to suggest how much more there is to find in Meryon's work than has been discussed in scholarship to date.

FIGURES

Figure 1 Charles Meryon, *Le Petit Pont*, 1850. Etching, (262 x 191 mm).

Figure 2 Charles Meryon, *Saint-Etienne-du-Mont*, 1852. Etching, (248 x 129 mm).
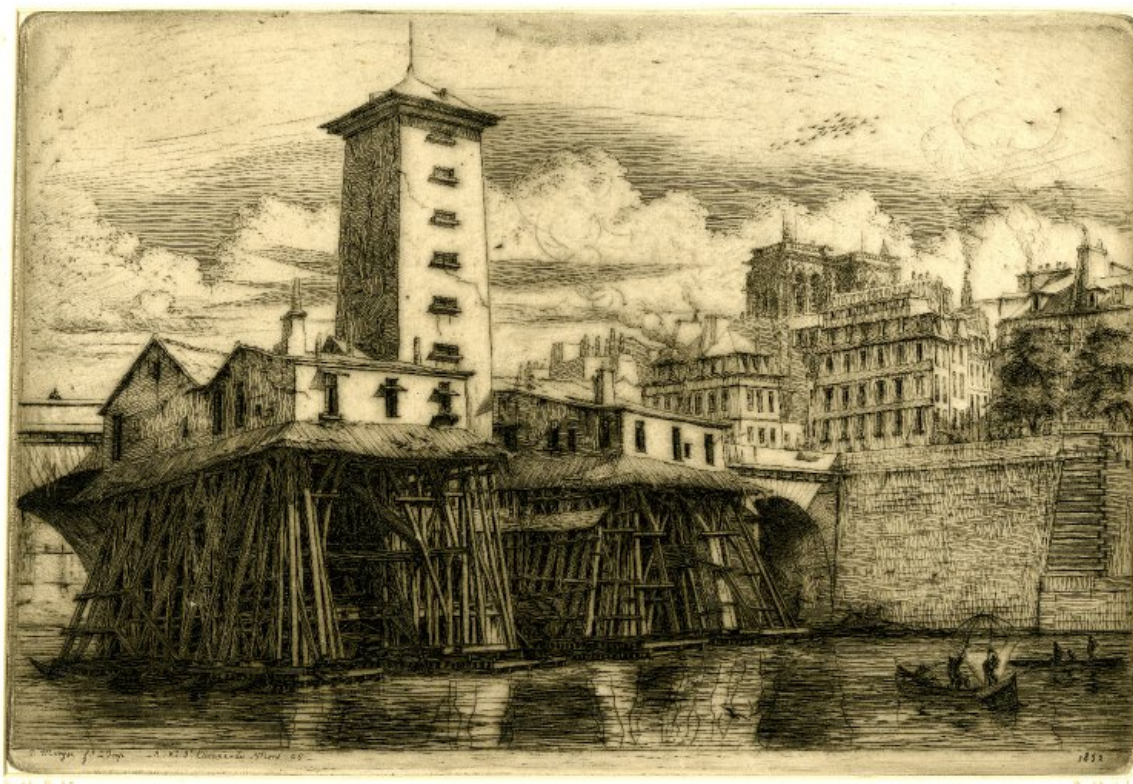
Figure 3 Charles Meryon, *La Pompe Notre-Dame*, 1852. Etching, (172 x 254 mm).
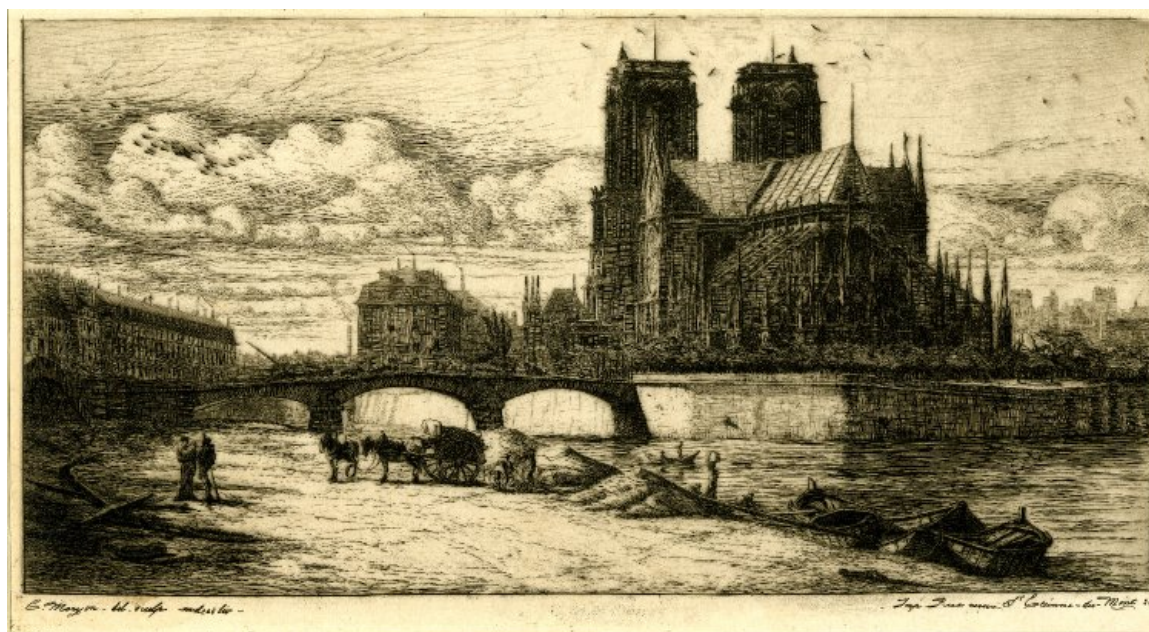

Figure 4 Charles Meryon, *L'Abside de Notre-Dame*, 1854. Etching, (165 x 299 mm).

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Figure 5 Leopold Flameng, *Portrait of Charles Meryon*, 1858. Charcoal touched with white. The Louvre Museum.

Figure 6 Charles Meryon, *Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice*, 1854. Etching, (88 x 86 mm).

Figure 7 Charles Meryon, *Le Stryge*, 1853. Etching, (170 x 128 mm).

Figure 8 Charles Meryon, *La Rue des mauvais garcons*, 1854. Etching, (127 x 98 mm).

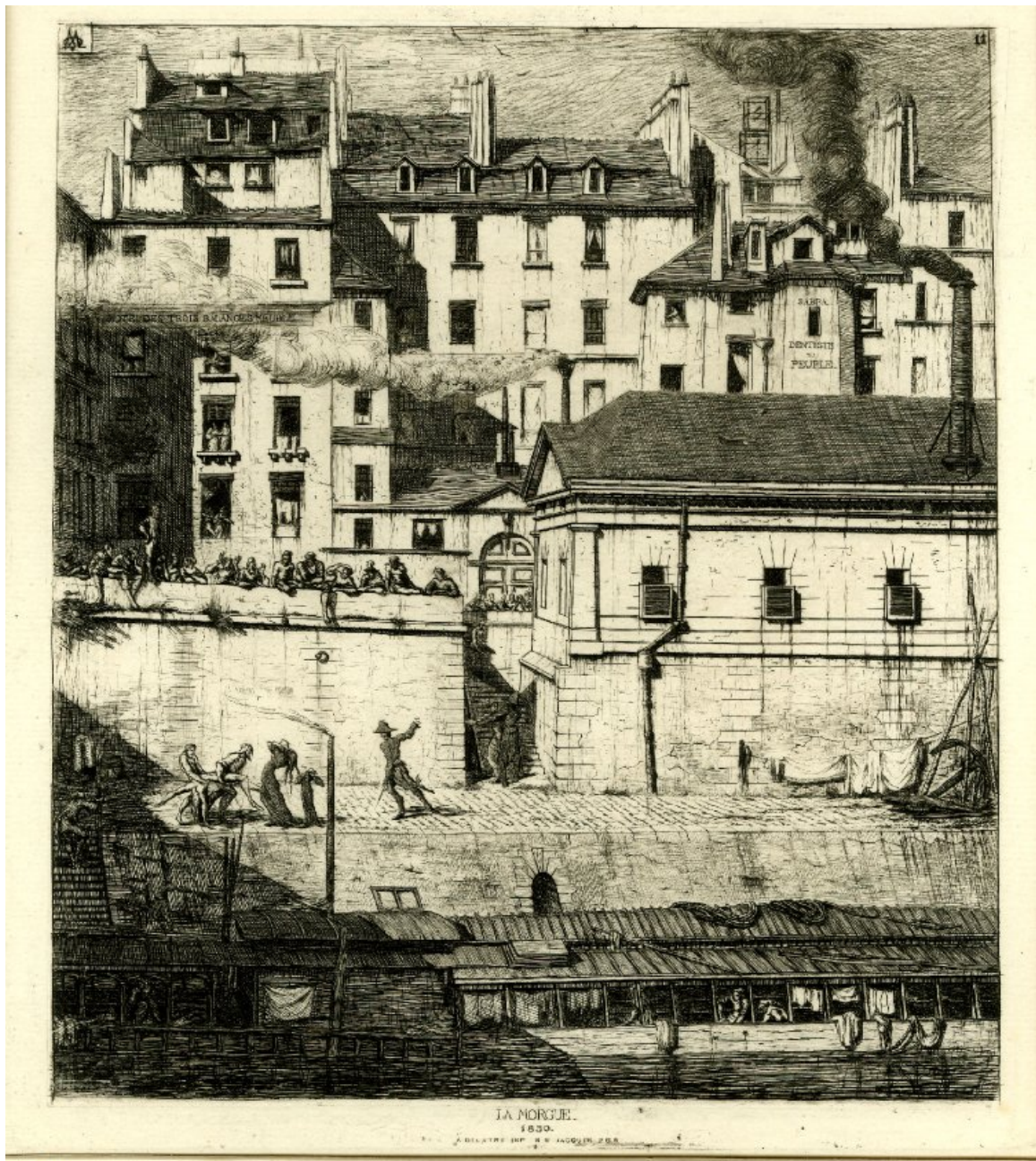**Figure 9** Charles Meryon, *Le Pont-au-Change*, 1854. Etching, (156 x 334 mm).

Figure 10 Charles Meryon, *La Morgue*, 1854. Etching and drypoint, (235 x 207 mm).

Figure 11 Charles Meryon, *Le Pont-Neuf*, 1853. Etching and drypoint, (179 x 170 mm).
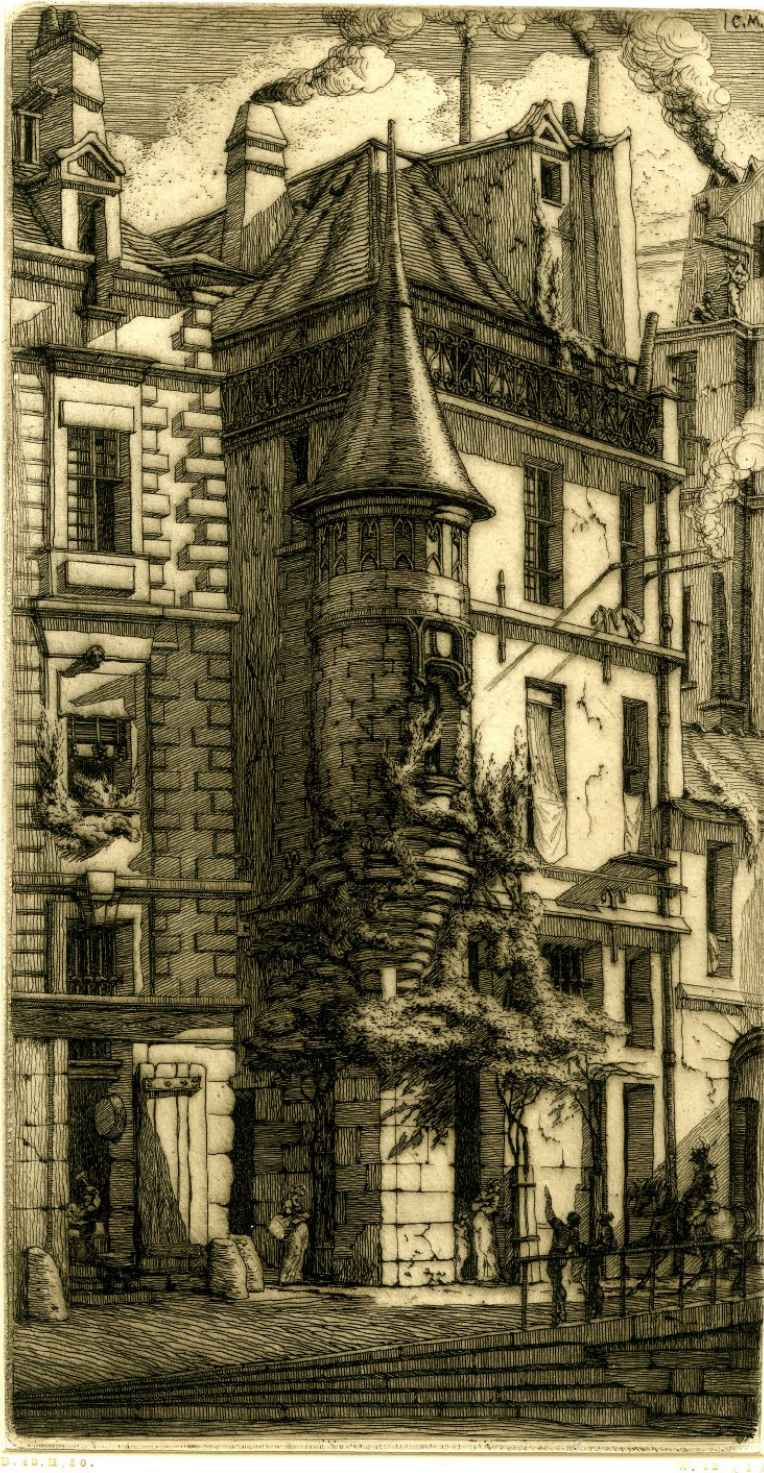
Figure 12 Charles Meryon, *Tourelle de la Rue de la Tixéranderie*, 1852. Etching, (248 x 132 mm).

Figure 13 Charles Meryon, *Fluctuat nec mergitur*, 1854. Etching, (172 x 159 mm).

Figure 14 Charles Meryon, *L'Arche du Pont Notre-Dame*, 1853. Etching, (152 x 192 mm).
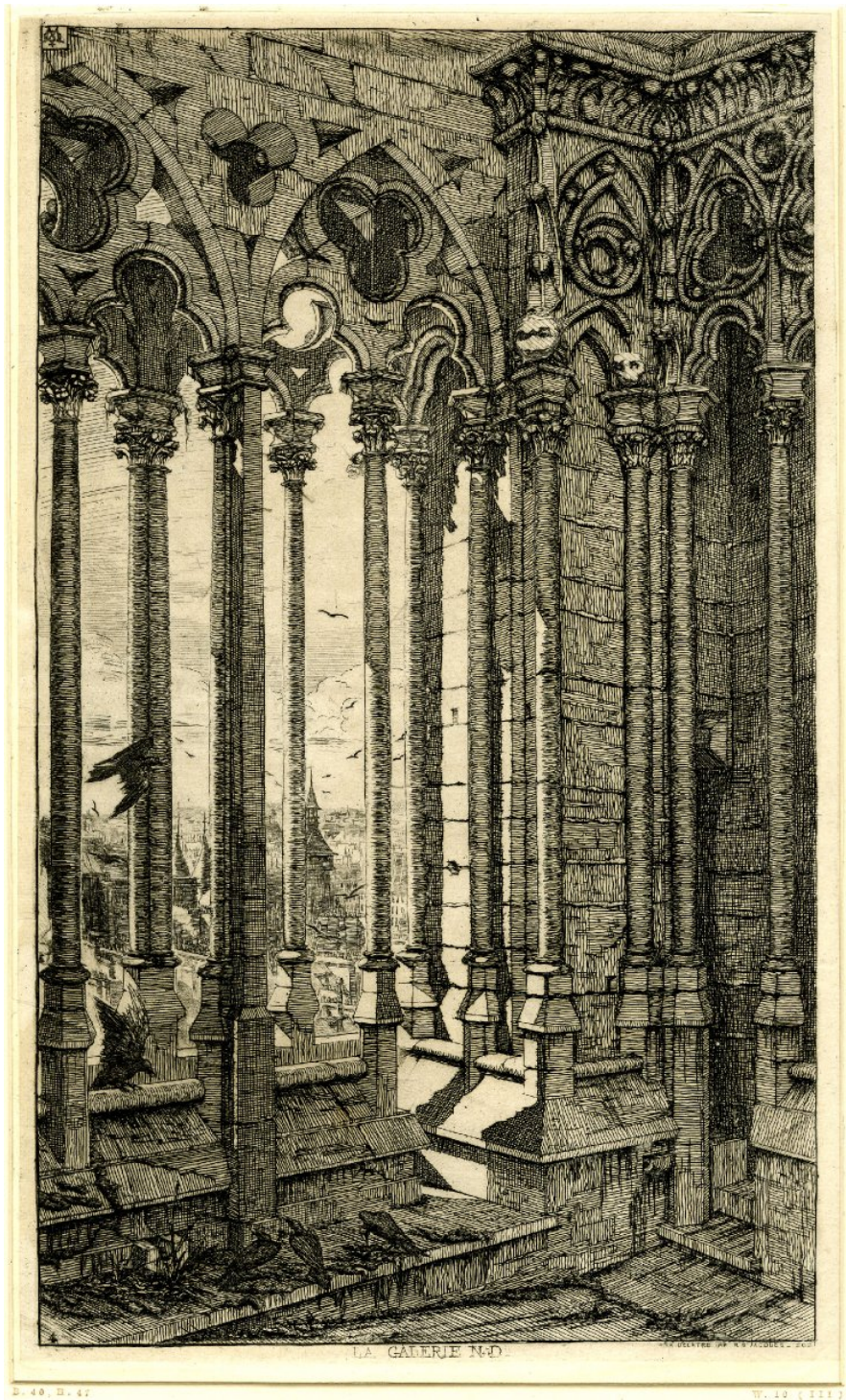
Figure 15 Charles Meryon, *La Galerie Notre-Dame*, 1853. Etching and drypoint, (283 x 172 mm).

Figure 16 Charles Meryon, *Le Pont-au-Change*, 10th state, 1854. Etching and drypoint, (156 x 333 mm).

Figure 17 Charles Meryon, *Le Pont-au-Change*, 12th state, 1854. Etching and drypoint, 5 1/2 x 12 9/16 in. (139.7 x 319.1 mm).

Figure 18 Charles Meryon, *Le Tombeau de Molière*, 1854. Etching, (68 x 70 mm).

Appendix

ORDER OF THE *EAUX-FORTES SUR PARIS*[65]

Eaux-Fortes Title Page (1852)
Dédicace à Reinier Nooms, dit Zéeman (1854)
Ancienne Porte du Palais de Justice (1854)
Armes Symboliques de la ville de Paris (1854)
Fluctuat nec mergitur (1854)
Le Stryge (1853)
Le Petit Pont (1850)
L'Arche du Pont Notre-Dame (1853)
La Galerie Notre-Dame (1853)
La Rue des Mauvais Garçons (1854)
La Tour de l'Horloge (1852)
Tourelle de la Rue de la Tixéranderie (1852)
Saint-Etienne-du-Mont (1852)
La Pompe Notre-Dame (1852)
La Petite Pompe* (1854)
Le Pont-Neuf (1853-1854)
Le Pont-au-Change (1854)
L'Esperance* (1854)
La Morgue (1854)
L'Hôtellerie de la Mort* (1854)
L'Abside de Notre-Dame de Paris
Le Tombeau de Molière (1854)

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[65] Meryon decided on this order in 1861. It is the order that Burty, Delteil and Burke use for the etchings of the suite. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are poems that Meryon etched onto their own plates.

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