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KNOWING THE VICTORIAN CITY: WRITING AND REPRESENTATION

By Anne Humpherys

FROM THE BEGINNING OF the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, the central issues in writing about the Victorian city have remained the same: how did the Victorians "see" the city? how do "we" see the Victorian city? and how do "we" see the Victorians seeing the city? Is the city knowable? What are the modes of representation of the Victorian city?

As Deborah Parsons reminds us in *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, "a city can be analysed demographically, economically, architecturally, as the result of an urban plan or a history of literary and visual representation" (1). Over the last fifty years, while many if not all of these approaches were being tried at any given moment, the main emphases in the writing about the Victorian city have tended to parallel the dominant critical and theoretical modes of the time. Historians, of course, have never quit recovering, collecting, organizing, and analyzing data of all sorts about the Victorian city. But in broader terms, the twentieth-century effort at understanding the nineteenth-century city began where the Victorians left off, that is in the effort to write the lower classes into the urban landscape and to understand the impact of industrialization. Nor have twentieth-century urban studies stopped there; they have moved from marxist approaches through feminist, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, and postmodernist modes of understanding. Cumulative traces of all these modes can be found in subsequent work, with the result that many late twentieth-century studies of the Victorian city are as dense, contradictory, and multi-faceted as their subject itself.

This development began in the 1960s with a new interest in the working classes. Then, as feminist studies burgeoned in the 1970s and 1980s, many commentators on the city took it as their task to write women into the urban landscape. Concurrently, the poststructuralist movement brought up issues of representation: how can "we" understand "their" representations of the city? and how can "we" represent the nineteenth-century city? In the last decade of the twentieth century, in the wake of postcolonial theory, critical interest in the city broadened again to include efforts to write the empire into the city (and the city into the empire). And as the twentieth century fades away and we debate our embeddedness in a postmodern condition, some of the most stimulating current work

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returns with new theoretical sophistication and new material evidence to a persistent question: the relation of the nineteenth-century city to modernity.

The Victorians themselves were fascinated and intermittently horrified by their developing urbanization; for them, the issue was almost always how to "see" the inarticulate lower classes that crowded into both the industrial cities and the metropolitan center of London, and through this seeing, to rationalize and control urbanization and its effects. The early Victorian efforts at seeing the lower classes are the focus of John Marriot's and Matsaie Matsumura's monumental six-volume collection of contemporary documents *Unknown London: Early Modernist Visions of the Metropolis*. Marriott's "Introduction" asserts that what marks these early nineteenth-century city texts is the creation of a new observer who tries to make "the dislocating experiences of urban environments" readable (xxiii). This narrator/observer generally maintains a liminal position "within class relations" and in his portrayal of the city often represents the "troubling manifestations of poverty" comically rather than "through critique" (xxv). The six volumes include fictional, dramatic, and journalistic works by writers such as Pierce Egan, George Cruikshank, W. T. Moncrieff, and James Grant.

The Victorians' efforts at making sense of their cities — in sketches, in press reports, in statistical surveys and parliamentary commissions and legislation, in novels, in illustrations and paintings — have provided the source for twentieth-century literary critics and cultural historians in their attempts to "read" the Victorian city. In large part this has meant London, for even though industrialization initially drove both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries' obsessions with knowing the city, non-industrial London has always dominated the discussions. Of course there have been studies of Manchester and the northern industrial cities beginning with those of Friedrich Engels and the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, among others. And in the twentieth century the local history movement begun by H. J. Dyos has continued to wax strong. But the idea of London — that modern Babylon, that great wen, that spectacle, that dark continent, that city paved with gold — has been the center of critical interest both then and now.

The nature of London, however — as opposed to that of Paris or New York — presents particular difficulties of representation and comprehension. As Julian Wolfreys puts it, "one can have the illusion of order with New York or with Paris, because of geometric regularity or the stateliness and symmetry of Haussmann's conception [of Paris]. But London remains unknowable and ineffable" (26) because of its chaotic street plans and its layering of old and new. As a result, London has increasingly come to represent the heterogeneity of modernism.

The twentieth-century study of the Victorian city literally began in the late 1950s with the work of H. J. Dyos, who founded the Centre for Urban History at Leicester University, and with Asa Briggs's *Victorian Cities* (1963), which used a comparative method to study Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Middlebrough, and Melbourne in addition to London. In the late 1960s and 1970s, a variety of works about the city appeared, including studies of the urban family and social structures, housing and overcrowding (one of the most significant aspects of the Victorian city), workers, crime, religion, popular culture (in Richard Altick's *The Shows of London* we have one of the more important early recoveries of urban, non-print popular culture), local government, artists and writers, and the "idea" of the city. During this period, in the wake of the social and political unrest of the

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1960s, historians such as Gareth Stedman Jones found urban studies a useful entry into discussions of class formation.

Probably the most important publications of the 1970s, in terms of shaping the next two decades of work on the Victorian city, were the two volumes of *The Victorian City: Images and Realties*, edited by Dyos, Joanne Shattock, and Michael Wolff, and Raymond Williams's beautifully written, powerfully conceived, and still influential *The Country and the City*, both published in 1973. *The Victorian City*, magisterial in scope and formative in many of its insights, was nonetheless of its time in that the volumes emphasized the problems of poverty and the working class and the negative contrast between the city and the country. Women and empire were yet to come to the fore. Williams's book is personal and readable, thoroughly knowledgeable about the whole of British literature and culture, scrupulously careful as it traces the structures of feeling in the intertwining of these two "fundamental ways of life" (1) from ancient times to the end of the nineteenth century "in relation to the historically varied experience" (2). It remains one of the indispensable treatments of the subject though it shows signs of its moment in time in the underlying Marxist revision of the pastoral ideal.

By the 1980s, critical approaches to the Victorian city had begun to proliferate: local histories, particularly of Manchester; investigations of novelists' and artists' responses to the city; and as a sign of things to come, one of the first studies devoted to women in the city, Sally Alexander's *Women's Work in Nineteenth-century London: A Study of the Years 1820–50* (1983). Rounding out the decade was another study of popular, even underground culture, Ian McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (1988), which remains unsurpassed in its recovery of the shadowy radical press in the early part of the century.

The work of the 1990s, which is the subject of this essay, expanded again in both subject matter and approaches. A raft of books has appeared in the last ten years encompassing such issues as the culture of the industrial cities; food and eating; housing and overcrowding; the building of the sewers and the embankment; death and dying; women (as mothers, workers, shoppers, walkers, prostitutes, victims, and consumers); urban children; music halls and other popular entertainments; and the persistent concern with the urban poor, though now sometimes with a feminist or postcolonial slant. In addition, there has been a social history of London, along with several collections of nineteenth-century documents. Two of the more compelling books of the 1990s, by Julian Wolfreys and Carol Bernstein, have concentrated on issues of the city and representation. As Wolfreys argues, "the sensory overload that is the teeming life of the capital defies narrative powers and the power of the psyche to comprehend, so that the mind is forced to find ways of articulating London, changing and mutating its non-fixable features in an effort to come to terms with the city's monstrous [Bernstein would say "scandalous"] nature. Yet because language is all the poet — or novelist — has to work with, new articulations, new discourses appropriate to the condition of the city must be wrested out of old material" (90).

In the first years of the twenty-first century, new interests include the idea of the crowd (John Plotz's *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*); the city and empire ("the key to the capital is the British Empire," Roy Porter argues in *London: A Social History* [2]); and a revisiting, in order to complicate, of the relation of the Victorian city to modernism. The Victorian city has always been seen as a harbinger of modern society

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and one of the sources of modernism. But in the last few years, when critics and scholars have taken up the relationship between the Victorian city and the modernist movement, one recurrent question has been, exactly how far back are the beginnings of modernism? Deborah Parsons conventionally puts it in the 1890s, Lynda Nead more informatively in the 1860s, while Julian Wolfreys and John Marriott push the beginnings of modernism back into the first half of the nineteenth century. "If we accept the destabilizing nature of the modern city on the writers of the nineteenth century and their modes of production, then there is a case, at least with regard to urban and metropolitan influence on the act of writing, that the modernist aesthetic begins to take shape much earlier than is conventionally assumed" (Wolfreys 96).

In the last five years or so there have also been a number of attempts, like my own here, to trace the history of the study of the Victorian city, including the "Introduction" to *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History*, edited by R. J. Morris and Richard Rodgers and "Introduction: Social history, cultural studies and the cad," the first chapter of Peter Bailey's book on popular culture. Morris and Rodgers discuss the ways in which after 1970 "energy once directed towards understanding the city was increasingly directed towards the wider projects of social history, gender, nationalism, cultural dimensions of industrialism, racial and sectarian identities and relationships" (12). They identify two resulting themes in urban history: the effort to describe and analyze the "built environment" and the "examination of urban social structures" (12). Bailey, tracing the development of social history which he sees as the investigation of "the social and material reality of class," argues that this project has been "sapped by gender and race" with the result that "class now seems about to collapse into mere difference" (5).

Throughout the history of work on the Victorian city, the dominant mode of understanding it has been the construction of a series of binaries: city and country (the suburb was an invention of the nineteenth century); rich and poor; East End and West End; attraction and repulsion; possibilities and loss; the old and the new; loss of identity and self-fashioning (our terms, not theirs); movement and stasis; closeness and distance; disease and health; dirt and cleanliness; and so on. Though we are more suspicious of binaries today, we continue to use them in our writings about the city and in fact have added a few of our own, such as public and private, margin and center. Nonetheless, much of what I see as the most exciting work in the last ten years has had as part of its agenda to challenge, or at the very least to complicate, these kinds of binaries.

One of our most persistent binaries is that of the *flanêur* and the prostitute, a critical articulation deriving from Walter Benjamin. Hardly a literary analysis or cultural history of the Victorian city has been written in the last decade without reference to the *flanêur* and to Benjamin's positioning of this figure in relation to the urban crowd. But even as this seemingly paradigmatic figure continues to be invoked, his role has been just as persistently critiqued. The *flanêur* — "the expert observer of the urban scene, translating the chaotic and fragmentary city into an understandable and familiar space" (Parsons 3), the "sovereign spectator [who goes] about the city in order to find the things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence; replace the sense of bereavement with a sense of life" (Tester 7) — has been increasingly seen as too exclusive. Perhaps he is relevant only to nineteenth-century Paris. More importantly, seeing the city through the figure of the middle-class male *flanêur* distorts the view by eliminating not only the many working- and lower-class men

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and women traversing it but also the middle- and upper-class women who were certainly a part of the nineteenth-century urban scene. A number of recent works (especially those of Nord and Nead) have critiqued the hegemonic maleness of this figure, while from a different perspective Deborah Parsons has tried to feminize him.

Over a period of several months, I looked at some 34 books on the Victorian city, 23 of them published after 1990. In July 2001, I also attended the annual conference at the University of London of the "Monuments and Dust" group of historians, literary scholars, and art historians devoted to work on the Victorian city. I have learned a great deal about the details of the Victorian city from all this exposure, but the totality continues to escape me — inevitably. The sublimity of the city is that it is always already larger than any representation or even any series of representations. The accretion of information and interpretations does not ultimately lead to a coherent whole, but that does not matter, because that's what the city *is* — an unrecoverable experience. Michel de Certeau, who has recently come to equal Benjamin as the leading theorist of the city, has articulated a double vision of it — one view from above, as from a balloon such as Henry Mayhew's in 1855, or from the London Eye on the South Bank in the year 2000, a panoptic and controlling view that eliminates detail and coheres into a single vision. Another view is at street level, a space of resistance to control, where one sees details in a chaotic, fragmented, and disorganized fashion. There is no way to have the two experiences simultaneously. We have to make choices, and at different times we make different choices.

Since it would be impossible to give my readers a coherent, monolithic view of the last ten years of work on the Victorian city, I have chosen to write in more detail about seven books published since 1990, four of which are literary studies, two historical, and one ostensibly a work of art history but in fact a combination of all three. These seven books, when taken together, represent my own literary and political preferences, for I have scanted a number of excellent historical studies, such as Stephen Halliday's *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Capital* or Roy Porter's very readable *London: A Social History*, which has been followed by Peter Ackroyd's *London: A Biography*. But the titles I have chosen do describe one arc of recent work on the nineteenth-century city — that of cultural history — and they do strike me as among the essential works in the field of Victorian urban studies today.

Carol Bernstein's *The Celebration of Scandal* (1991) is concerned with representation of the city, or more precisely the failure of representation: "the problematic of urban representation must be played out within the labyrinthine vicissitudes of narrative" (11). She writes within a deconstructionist model, and part of her project is to lay out the narrative modes called into being by efforts to represent the city. The scandal in her title is very widely — too widely to be very useful — applied: it covers anything that does not fulfill conventional expectations or forms, or that goes against what she calls "the natural." For example, the city is a "scandal" because it is a "challenge to the natural and a contradiction to conventions of representation" in narrative (2), and the continuing sense that the slums represent the city is also a scandal. The "negative" sublime (negative in that it recognizes the failure of representation), to which her own critical narrative moves as the ultimate mode of urban representation, is for Bernstein the only "theoretical mode" which "frames the recessive referentiality of the city" (171) and "records urban experience in its ambiguity, its narcissism, its negativity and, finally, its strength" (6).

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Like so many others, she begins with the genre of the London sketch, mainly those of Dickens, which "invite" narrative, and ends with *Our Mutual Friend:* "this study starts with the sketch and its penchant for the catalogue, its attempt to seize and record the ephemera of daily existence. It ends with the representation of urban London's 'dust' heaps, those piles of debris that contain treasures and at the same time level or homogenize and obscure the landscape. In between, errant metaphors transport the object life of London and chart the connections between high life and low life or transpose the life of phenomena into the life of signs" (7). Her organization is thematic, not chronological, and she has chapters on the ambivalence resulting from the demands of narrative and the urge for "the real" when writing the slums; the mode of hyperbole used in the "fashionable novel" from Disraeli to Wilde; and the "abandonment of the visual model" (9) in the quest for the city. Bernstein's language is very dense and abstract. The argument is difficult to follow at times, but her central thesis that the effort to represent the unrepresentable — that is, the nineteenth-century city — calls into being "new" modes of narration is in line with the underlying premise of almost all recent studies of the nineteenth-century city, whatever their focus or concern, including even the most factually oriented historical studies. The premise is that the Victorian city is the genesis of the modern.

Julian Wolfreys's *Writing London* (1998) also confronts issues of representation, and he acknowledges Bernstein's prior work. While Bernstein emphasizes material after 1860 and Wolfreys emphasizes material before, both end their studies with *Our Mutual Friend*. The main difference between them, as Wolfreys sees it, is that Bernstein's reading insists on the failure of representation while he "focuses more on a Dickensian celebration of provisionality and ineffability" (229–30 n.3). Further, he wants to demonstrate how a "heterogeneous rhetoric and poetics of the modern city . . . has continued to impress itself as the often spectral *imprimatur* of the city on writers from the 1850s to the present day" (5). Narrative is crucial in this process but so is "a form of architecture or topography" (16). Wolfreys's reading of the writings on London in the first sixty years of the nineteenth century demonstrates "how each writer makes manifest a quite different London from his or her contemporaries; how each novelist, while drawing on similar notions, ideologies, topographies, architectural models, works with an effort to map London in a manner which unfolds, refolds back into view for our comprehension, the contemporary networks of power, discourse, ideology, belief, doxa, all of which flow through the sites and locations of London and which are as much a part of London's constructedness, the structuration of its structures, as are squares, streets, parks, offices, houses, names" (11).

In many Romantic writers, the eighteenth-century sense of "a London which . . . can be depicted, given a common image to be shared by writer, reader and audience alike" (61) dissolves into a "series of discontinuous snapshots" (64) of both the terror and the miracle of London. These fractured images indirectly "critique through the process of writing the city" (64) any larger notions of narrative, continuity, and representation. The critique turns dark in Wordsworth, DeQuincey, and Engels who are, Wolfreys posits, the source of a "citephobia" that comes to dominate much subsequent writing on London, even as late as the end of the twentieth century. This phobia arises out of the threat to identity in the urban experience, a response most famously imaged by Wordsworth's encounter with the blind beggar in Book VII of *The Prelude*. But this is a threat that "the identity seeks to survive through the act of writing" (99), an observation frequently made about Wordsworth's London poems. Counter to this "citephobia," Dickens (like Blake

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before him) recognizes and celebrates the ineffability of the city, taking as a subject the "unspeakability" of London and representing through an "architecture" of lists "the fluid, mobile, abyssal city" which is "ranged against — and through — the solid architecture of whichever power structure is Dickens's target" (153). These two binaries — the darkness of citephobia and the celebration of ineffability (hence possibility) — continue to structure our responses to the modern city.

Deborah Nord's *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (1995) is one of the studies to critique the position of the *flanêur* by focussing instead on the women who walked in the streets. However, the female walker is not simply a female version of the male figure (a *flaneuse*) because no matter her business — strolling or moving from place to place, shopping or doing social work — she was likely to be objectified and sexually marked. As Benjamin himself posited, what is opposed to the controlling gaze of the male *flanêur* is the female streetwalker, or prostitute, the sign of the uncontrollable. In written representations organized around the male *flanêur*, the prostitute becomes the sign for nearly all that is terrifying and fascinating about the modern city. She represents the binary contradictions of comprehending the city: as social pariah, she is a sign both of alienation — cut off from others — and of contamination — coming much too close; she represents both the poverty-stricken sufferer and a dangerous source of suffering in others. If Dickens in his sketches and novels creates a middle-class city, it is the prostitute who comes to represent both the separation of that class from the "lower orders" and the middle-class sense of the sexualized woman on the streets.

But of course the prostitute was not the only woman on the streets: there were also working-class women on the way to and from work; middle-class women shopping (including window-shopping) and moving from place to place, and social investigators from Lady Bountifuls to the professionals who emerged in the last two decades of the century. These "walkers of the streets," when they represent their urban experiences — as Nord argues in a clearly-written and detailed study that complicates the standard (male) view of the Victorian city — derive their vision "from [their] consciousness of transgression and trespassing, from the vexed sexuality [their] position implies, and from [their] struggle[s] to escape the status of spectacle and become a spectator" (12). Nord's project, like those of Bernstein and Wolfreys, is to examine the forms of representation that emerge from the perspective of this female walker of the streets and to trace their role in the creation of a modernist "literature of rambling and urban investigation" (15).

Nord begins by establishing the male perspective with a discussion of the position of the *flanêur* in Dickens and exploring "the formal progression from sketch to novel and a parallel shift in the stance of the male spectator from one of detachment and transience to one of engagement and an awareness of possible contamination" (12). Then she moves to "Fallen Women," analyzing the efforts of Flora Tristan and Elizabeth Gaskell "to take on the role of urban spectator" (13). In her last section she looks at the 1890s and "the fictions, poetry, and social investigations of women bolstered by the rise of new possibilities for urban female community and by a new set of social questions" (14), looking at the life and work in turn of Beatrice Potter Webb, Amy Levy, Margaret Harkness, Helen Bosanquet, Mary Higgs, Florence Bell, and Maud Pember. (Parsons's book *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* essentially takes up where Nord leaves off — Parsons's earliest figure is Amy Levy — and projects a *flaneuse* who is at the heart of modernism.)

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Many of the recent works on the city have focused on the second half of the nineteenth century in general and on its last two decades in particular. In doing so, studies of the city again follow larger trends in literary analysis, a back-formation of sorts that grows out of an increasing interest in modernism as we move farther away from it in time.

Judith Walkowitz takes the 1880s as the focus for her impressive cultural study, *City of Dreadful Delight*, which uses three main historical events of the 1880s as the ground on which to map "a formative moment in the production of feminist politics and of popular narratives of sexual danger" (243). During the 1880s "the prevailing imaginary landscape of London [shifted] from one that was geographically bounded to one whose boundaries were indiscriminately and dangerously transgressed" (29). Her meticulously detailed, richly thickened, and wonderfully narrated study has its genesis not only in her own previous work on prostitution but also in "the internal contradictions of the [Jack the] Ripper story" (5). Her study moves towards the cultural contextualization of the Ripper story through a juxtaposition of it "against competing narratives of gender and sexuality circulating in the late-Victorian metropolis" (5).

The 1880s were a time when women began to feel freer about moving out into the public spaces of the city and speaking out both on sexual desire and against their own sexualization and objectification in the public, specifically urban, sphere. But it was also a time when sexual danger for women and the sexual aggressiveness of men was more and more discussed in the press and in fiction, as well as in the debates surrounding the feminist struggle against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1867 (they were repealed in 1887). Thus Walkowitz reveals yet another binary contradiction: more women going public about sex and being a woman and as at least a corollary, perhaps a result, a heightened sense of the sexual dangers for women. As she phrases it, "utopian projects for a 'new sexuality' flourished alongside new repressive legislation against prostitution, homosexuality, and pornography" (136).

Walkowitz tells this story through examination first of the W. T. Stead "Maiden Tribute" revelations, which she treats as a version of the story of the *flanêur* with its objectification of women, and then of the opposing discourse of Josephine Butler. She examines the "dialectic of sex . . . between sexual possibility and sexual danger" (12) revealed in the correspondence surrounding Karl Pearson's "Men and Women's Club" organized to make it possible for middle-class men and women to talk freely about sex, and the brilliant use made of the press, the stage, and the public forum of advertisements and processions by Georgina Weldon in her struggle against her husband's efforts to have her incarcerated in a lunatic asylum because of her belief in spiritualism. These events taken as a whole display not only the heterogeneous nature of the discourses of sex in late Victorian London but also the contradictory, confusing and exhilarating experience of the city itself.

After reading these stories, among others, we are ready to understand, through Walkowitz's marshalling and analysis of cultural, literary, and journalistic texts, the construction of the Jack the Ripper story as not only a particularly mythic urban story but the ultimate story of the 1880s, and one whose elements lingered well into the second half of the twentieth century. Its mythology was constructed out of established discourses about sexual danger: melodrama (Stead), the Mad Doctor (Weldon), stories of male sexual violence and female victimization. These discourses amalgamated issues of class and race as well as gender in ways that continue to (mis)shape our notions of the potentialities and the dangers of city life.

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Peter Bailey's informative and beautifully written historical study of *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* also focusses on the two decades at the end of the century. He turns our attention to the increasingly emerging world of leisure. Made up of a series of articles written over a twenty-year period, Bailey's collection reveals the pleasures of the music hall and comic art, and, showing the influence of feminist criticism during the two decades in which he wrote the pieces, attempts to write women into the subject of popular culture by closing with two essays on the "parasexuality" (sexuality "deployed but contained" [151]) first of the pub and the barmaid, and second of the "rhetoric of the girl" in musical comedy, which "evoked a more agreeable romantic companion than the 'new woman.'" She "provided a defensive counter-image to the emergent challenge of feminism . . . . Though the musical comedy heroine was a spirited character, she was no threat to male primacy" (172–73). Bailey begins his "Introduction" with a personal sketch of his own working-class background and history, a trope that I found several times in works by British scholars — in Williams's *The Country and the City* and in Porter's *London: A Biography*, as well as in Bailey's book. Bailey explains that "as social history seeks to conflate the social and the psychic and reconstruct collectivities through a fuller understanding of the subject, some form of self-witnessing seems to be a necessary instruction and a likely resource for its practitioners" (10).

Bailey joins other recent critics in challenging the dominance of the middle-class male *flanêur* in traditional analysis. But as a social historian, he counters that dominance by reintroducing the working class into the study of the city and of modernity. He discusses the cad, the cartoon marauder Ally Sloper, the swell, and finally the barmaid and musical comedy heroine. For my part, I think the reintroduction of class into city studies is long overdue. Bailey shows convincingly that the working-class culture of the music hall and the comic newspapers presented a range of specifically working-class roles that the individual could employ in negotiating the flux and contradictions of the late nineteenth-century city and the modern world.

Although Bailey reintroduces class into the study of the Victorian city, the *flanêur* and the prostitute have continued to appear in the most recent critical works, usually in order to be challenged. Walkowitz notes that *flanêur* and prostitute and the opposition of East End and West End in London "took on imperial and racial dimensions, as the two parts of London imaginatively doubled for England and its Empire" (26). This insight becomes the subject of Joseph McLaughlin's *Writing the Urban Jungle*. His period is the 1890s and his argument that writers in this period "appropriated ways of thinking and talking about the colonies and discursively transformed the metropolis into a new borderland space: the urban jungle" (2). After an introduction describing what he sees as "a crisis or confusion in . . . the spatial imagination of empire" (2) where an "absolute geographical difference (a world of us versus them) gives way to a world that is increasingly without boundaries (a world of us *as* them) [and] personal identity becomes a matter of epistemological uncertainty and anxiety" (3). McLaughlin then turns to close readings of the first two Sherlock Holmes stories, Charles Booth's sociological study *In Darkest London*, Jack London's ethnographic *The People of the Abyss*, Conrad's *A Secret Agent*, and finally T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

In the Sherlock Holmes pieces, Conan Doyle sees London as "a frontier under threat of invasions from abroad"; Booth "appropriates the popular rhetoric of African exploration in order to advance" his Christian crusade; and Jack London uses a colonial method of

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description to constitute the inhabitants of the East End as "a new species, a breed of city savages" (21–22). McLaughlin's most original chapter seems to me to be that on *The Secret Agent*, though the discussion of the influence of Eliot's work as a banker on *The Wasteland* is informative. The question posed in the Conrad chapter is, why shift the investigation of the city's underworld from the traditional space of the East End to Soho? McLaughlin argues that this is a sign of "'a crisis in mapping' — a difficulty in representing the urban landscape that is, ultimately, also a crisis in mapping the self" (139). "Where does the East End end?" becomes a question of "Where does the East end?" (141). The global village has arrived.

If I have left Lynda Nead's *Victorian Babylon* to the last, it is mainly because of all the books I looked at, read, and reread, this one — after the rereading of Williams's *The Country and the City* — has given me the most pleasure. Nead takes the 1860s as the decade in which to see — and that is the dominant word in this text — London most clearly being shaped into the modern city and in turn shaping modernism. Magnificently illustrated, her book combines the thorough documentation of the historian, the visual acumen of the art historian, and the deployment of theory and literary analysis of the literary scholar. The combination produces a book difficult to summarize, for it contains a plethora of information, visual images, and impressive historical and theoretical discussion. If readers of this review are going to read only one book on the Victorian city written in the last ten years, I would recommend this one.

Nead, an art historian whose previous two books focused on the representations of women in art, argues that the modern metropolitan experience was mainly a visual one, and this book "examines the forms of visual culture generated by the conditions of this modernity. Part I takes the themes of mapping and water in order to examine the ideals of movement and circulation in the mid-nineteenth-century city . . . . Part 2 is organised around the issues of gas and light and considers the temporality of space in the city and the organisation and representation of the nocturnal city . . . . The third section . . . returns to the streets and focuses on the question of obscenity . . . the symbol of these new forms of visual culture" (9). What Nead makes clear, and reinforces through the illustrations in the first two sections, is that London in the 1860s underwent tremendous disruption — the tearing up of the streets for the installation of sewers, the creation of completely new visual images of the Thames when it was undergoing embankment, the "wrecking" of London through the building of the Metropolitan Underground Railway. She gives the reader a London in the 1860s — "a present haunted by the image of ruin" (10) — that one simply does not get by concentrating on literature alone.

Because of the somewhat haphazard way London was modernized (as opposed to Paris), the nature of London's modernity was more like a maze than a grid, and "its characteristic experience was of disorientation" (4). Further, the old and the new, the past and the present could be all jumbled together, resulting in "a multi-layered nature of modernity" (6) which Nead exemplifies in her chapters on Holywell street, "the topographical embodiment of debates throughout the nineteenth century concerning the look of modernity, its spatial articulation and its relationship to the past" (168). In Holywell Street, old Elizabethan houses were storefronts and business establishments for the book trade, in particular the obscene book trade. It was both celebrated as "picturesque" and vilified as a source of contamination. It was also heavily traveled by pedestrians — women and men, working-class and middle-class — passing through in order to avoid the bottle-

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neck of the Strand. Nead's writing of women into the Victorian city, neither locked in their domestic arena nor let out only to shop, but here seen strolling through Holywell Street (there are a number of contemporary visual representations that show women looking in the windows of the shops) is a crucial move forward in the feminist project to recover agency for women during the period.

All of this modernization of London created a new aesthetic, one based on principles of circulation and movement. For example it was necessary to map London in a variety of ways to make possible the introduction of sewerage, though "even in this ordered world of maps, charts and directories" — a panoptic view of sorts — "the experience of the street may resist planning and the sensory disturbance of the subterranean city may come to the surface" (26). Gas lighting introduced during this same period also brought the submerged to the surface. "If metropolitan improvement was driven by the desire to eliminate disorder and superstition, then the night city represented a return of these old anxieties through the uncertain vision of mist, gaslight or the dream" (106). Nead ends her wonderful discussion of these issues by speculating about ruin — "the resolution of the contradictory impulses of modernity." Ruins bring together "past, present, and future in a physical and psychological continuum" (214–15).

But ruins do not mean the end. London restlessly rebuilds itself: one hundred and forty years after its modernization in the 1860s, London has turned the ruin of a nineteenth-century power station into a magnificent museum of modern art. Yet part of this paean to the Millennium is the old machinery of the power station, left in place. Standing in the Tate Modern, looking at these mammoth turbines — ruins of technology and the city if ever there were any — it is hard to grasp what one is seeing: testament to the past? newly discovered art object? To Nead, perhaps, an emblem of the archaeological nature of the modern city: the old and the new, the past and the present embedded within each other and, most crucially, seen.

And that is where I will leave it. Not that this is the end; it is only a stopping point. Like the newspaper — that profoundly urban form that both grew out of the rise of the modern city and was one of the most important formative elements of it — a new version of the Victorian city will appear on the streets tomorrow — and the tomorrow after that.

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