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Introduction

> [T]he city and the urban environment represent [humanity's] most consistent and, on the whole, [its] most successful attempt to remake the world [it] lives in more after [its] heart's desire. But if the city is the world which [humans] created, it is the world in which [they are] henceforth condemned to live.
>
> Robert E. Park, "The City as Social Laboratory" (1929)

The history of the city in literature is as lengthy and rich as the histories of literature and cities themselves. The Royal Library of Ashurbanipal's seventh-century BCE holdings are estimated at 25,000 volumes, a diverse and multilingual collection of approximately 1,200 distinct texts comprising 200,000 verses.[1] Among them was the oldest surviving epic, *Gilgamesh* (ca. 2150–2000 BCE), which opens with praise for the eponymous king who "built the wall of Uruk-Haven / the wall of the sacred Eanna Temple, the holy sanctuary / ... which gleams like copper."[2] The still-earlier tale of Inanna and Enki (ca. 2500 BCE) is a myth of urban succession in Sumer. Uruk replaced Eridu as the principal city in southern Mesopotamia, the narrative tells us, after the god Enki feted the goddess Inanna on her arrival in Eridu and, while he afterward slumbered, she returned to Uruk with his drunken gift of *me*, or divine decrees that comprise the foundations of civilization.[3]

As these examples begin to suggest, literary forms such as epic, myth, drama, encomium, and eulogy have been building blocks of civil religion, civic history, and collective identity for millennia. Homer's *Iliad* (eighth century BCE) recounts the destruction of the Anatolian city of Ilium (Troy) by assembled Greek forces four centuries earlier. Greek drama was a form of civic spectacle. Comedy frequently addressed topical matters. Tragedy "mediat[ed] the old heroic ethos ... to the democratic world of the *polis* which provided its primary audience," Peter Burian argues; its staging of dispute and dissent "*participate[d]* in democracy" by calling attention to the "commitment to free expression" as a fundamental element of Athenian civic ideology.[4] Greek philosophers deepened the discussion in practical and speculative texts of political (affairs of the polis) philosophy. Eight centuries after Homer, Troy's fall became the incident that set in motion the events of *The Aeneid* (19 BCE), Virgil's epic of Rome. From legends of Aeneas's

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journey and his association with the city's founding, Virgil wove this poem of the Trojan hero's voyage to Italy, his martial triumph, and the founding of the Roman lineage through his son Iulus. In thereby claiming for Rome the legacy of Greek civilization, and offering in the person of Aeneas a new model of heroic virtue based more firmly on civic duty than on individual honor, Virgil brought Troy into Roman culture as a symbolic city, a kind of city that, we shall see, has a long and significant history in city literature.

Many of these ancient texts are still consulted for what they tell us about cities and citizenship, even if the continuity between ancient and modern cities is a matter of some dispute. Raymond Williams argued in *Keywords* (1976) that the word *city* was used "to distinguish urban areas from rural areas" only from the sixteenth century, and that only in the early nineteenth century is "the city as a really distinctive order of settlement, implying a whole different way of life, … fully established, with its modern implications."[5] Yet while the scale, spatial extent, and material conditions of cities indeed changed profoundly with the Industrial Revolution's onset, neither the social and spatial changes wrought by industrialism nor the history of the word *city* erases the social, economic, and cultural continuities between ancient, early modern, and contemporary cities.

If modern cities are regarded as concentrators of diversity and proving grounds for rights and freedoms, Athens itself was "a vast city, a Mediterranean crossroads with an ethnically diverse population, including naturalized citizens with prominent political careers. And while Athens was less diverse culturally than a modern nation, it was in some ways *more* diverse socially and intellectually."[6] Alexandria, as Susan Stephens observes in Chapter 2 of this volume, was by 200 BCE a megacity of 300,000 people – Egyptians, Greeks from many city-states, and a diasporic Jewish population, each group identified with a different quarter of the city.

The "functional specialization of man and his work," a hallmark of industrial production that "makes each man the more directly dependent upon the supplementary activities of all others,"[7] is found in ancient cities. Lewis Mumford noted that in Egyptian civilization, "it was possible … to spend an entire life in a fractional occupation." To bolster his assertion that "the worker was [already] a uniform replaceable part in a complex social machine," Mumford cited evidence as diverse as "The Satire on the Trades" (ca. 1900 BCE), second-millennium BCE records detailing the division of labor on expeditions to quarry stone for the pyramids, and Herodotus's fifth-century BCE observations on specialization in Egyptian medicine.[8]

The effects on cities of changing cultural, social, and economic conditions, and on the representation of cities by these same changes and developments in literary history, are addressed by this *Companion*'s chapters and account

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for their chronological arrangement. Rather than rehearse that history, this introduction offers an overview of the forms of the literary city we will encounter. Michel de Certeau's well-known distinction between the city as seen from above and without (a God's-eye view) and the fragmentary city seen and experienced at street level by an individual person is repeated in literature as a distinction between literary cities presented as totalities by narrators who look out (or down) on the urban scene, and the limited perspective of a character or characters in the streets.[9] The city-as-totality has three principal manifestations. Symbolic cities stand for ideals. They may be historical cities that have become emblematic of ideas, as Athens has come to stand for democracy through its repeated invocation as an ideal of democratic form, or fictional ideals like the utopias discussed in Chapter 1, or the city on a hill of Puritan and, later, American political rhetoric. Literary texts that map the social, economic, and cultural geographies and relations of actual cities, whether presented under their own names or pseudonymously, supply a second form of city-as-totality. The cities in realist novels (Stuart Culver's subject in Chapter 6) are the most obvious representatives of this mode. The category also includes historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon to name fictions that incorporate historical events and persons into narratives that function both as historical fictions and as a questioning of the possibility of accurate historical representation.[10] We encounter several such texts in Caroline Herbert's chapter on postcolonial cities. Occupying a position between these two forms are cities whose forms are systematically distorted to convey a particular mood or quality. The urban gothic, urban sublime, dystopian city, and certain modalities of the nocturnal and postmodern cities are principal exemplars.[11] The city focalized through a character's perception is necessarily a fragmentary and subjective experience of the city built from perceptions, emotions, and memories. While this mode never presents the city in its totality, Arnold Weinstein shows us in Chapter 10 that many modernist authors sought to render a more complete, but still subjective and non-totalizing, account of their cities by presenting the city from multiple, spatially dispersed perspectives.

Symbolic cities figure prominently throughout our first three chapters, which treat the cities of ancient and early modern literature. The critic Harry Berger, Jr., perceptively argued that the function of idealized worlds is not only to seduce with their promise of happiness, but also to expose their own shallowness and untenability, thus to return readers to their lives with a critically enhanced perspective on both the world they inhabit and their own desires.[12] In his discussion of ideal cities, Antonis Balasopoulos demonstrates that the Greeks knew this truth. They recognized the inevitable opposition between, on one hand, their "ontological and political investment" in

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a perfectly ordered, harmonious, and just city, and, on the other hand, the inescapable facts of heterogeneity and transmutability, the very things that make us human. So the "best" place (the *eu-topos*) is unsuited to us; it is *ou-topos* (no place), as Thomas More's punning title, *Utopia*, signals. Even as the ideals it embodies and the desire it excites tell us something fundamental about our condition (and inform so much of the literature of the city), the "best" city reminds us of why, as the pioneering urban sociologist Robert E. Park wrote, our actual cities are where we are "condemned" to live. The utopias of Renaissance writers, Balasopoulos goes on to show, were properly literary texts, fictive ethnographies that incorporate verbal play and ambiguity and therefore require interpretation.

The ancient cities of which Susan Stephens writes in Chapter 2 are more than historical cities. Athens, Alexandria, Rome, and Jerusalem – all continuously inhabited for millennia – are also proper names indelibly associated with civic forms. *Athens* and *Rome* have for centuries been shorthand for democratic and imperial civic orders. Alexandria and the earthly city of Jerusalem (as distinguished from Augustine of Hippo's heavenly Jerusalem) have a more contemporary interest, Alexandria as a city of many cultures from the time of the Ptolemies, and Jerusalem as the archetypal diasporic city associated with loss and memory. Her discussion combines attention to literary depictions of the four cities by ancient authors with a focus on what these cities, as symbols, mean today.

Karen Newman's ensuing discussion of medieval and early modern Europe's cultural capitals notes that the symbolic city remains important throughout these centuries. Not only do figurative cities such as the City of God and the city on a hill loom large, but those cultural capitals each laid claim to be the rightful inheritor of the virtues and powers the ancient cities symbolize in part through modes of spectacle, pageantry, and rhetoric adopted from ancients. Nonetheless, it is in these same years that the urban types and in-the-streets writing we that associate with modern city literature emerge, as she also shows, in authors such as François Villon, Isabella Whitney, and Nicolas Boileau.

The modern history of the literary city itself begins with an ideal – perhaps a myth – of urbanity that is Alison O'Byrne's subject in Chapter 4. The public sphere is that part of public life in which people come together to discuss, debate, and seek consensus about a range of social and cultural matters. In eighteenth-century London and other cities, the public sphere encompassed the theater, the periodical press, and the coffeehouses where the products of the theater and the press were assessed. The hero of London's public sphere, "Mr. Spectator," was the joint authorial persona of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, whose six-day-a-week paper, *The Spectator*, published 555

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issues from 1711–12; its tenth number boasted a circulation of 3,000 and a readership of 60,000, approximately 10 percent of the city's total population.[13] Whether Mr. Spectator's advice and behavior were descriptive or prescriptive is debated, O'Byrne explains. Either way, London was a city of renown for good or ill, the destination for a young man on the make who was set afloat in a sea of strangers, and (like other cultural capitals) the point of reference for the period's debates about the personal and political morality of trade and luxury. In this milieu, character was represented and performed in the course of daily activity; Londoners and visitors alike had to learn how to read its conventions and divine underlying intent. All the while, O'Byrne observes, a counter-literature of the period satirized these urban ways as so much confusion, deception, and pretense; many of the character types in these fictions are brought forward from ancient comedy.

From this period forward, we accumulate a rich literature devoted to the depiction of actual cities and the modes of life they support, a body of texts that exemplify architect Robert Venturi and planner Denise Scott Brown's axiom, "A city is a set of intertwined activities that form a pattern on the land."[14] The built landscape is the most basic of these patterns on the land. Its creative destruction – the reshaping of the landscape in pursuit of profits, surveillance, social control, or some other goal – is the ongoing result of social, political, and economic processes. Elements of design and ornament communicate values, and structures themselves support, solicit, and curtail modes of individual or collective behavior, as we realize when we imagine the disparate effects of creating a public park or a private shopping mall in the middle of a city.

Exploring the interplay of urban environments and human behavior is one of the things that city literature does best, whether in fictions that map social spaces and interactions, utopian and dystopian speculations, or all manner of reformist projects built on foundations of sentiment, sensationalism, "experiment,"[15] or social and political theory. Robert Park honored the literary history of the city in 1925 when he remarked sociologists' debt "to writers of fiction for our more intimate knowledge of urban life."[16] Yet to conclude that the worth even of urban realism inheres in its documentary record surely is to misvalue it. Some authors may strain for documentary fidelity, and later literary tourists may follow the peregrinations of fictional characters through a city's actual streets, but this reality-*effect* neither grants the text a documentary validity nor accurately identifies the primary function of the literary text.[17] We do better to regard literary city-texts as selectively composing – they may also deform and thereby defamiliarize – the known in order to stage the *process* of making sense of the city, whether it is perceived from above or within. City literature invites the reader to see

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the patterns out of which the city is constituted, or to experience the life of the city, and to do the work of making sense of it. At its best, the reading experience is a recursive process that tests the reader's own assumptions and conclusions about the ways of cities and their inhabitants.

City literature is, however, part of the documentary record of urban thought throughout history. What the geographer David Harvey remarks of Honoré de Balzac's Parisian novels and stories is true of city literature more broadly:

> [It] provide[s] innumerable acute observations on urban life (a documentary source, however dubious as a record of actual facts, of some importance). [It] record[s] much about [the] material world and the social processes (desires, motivations, activities, collusions, and coercions) that flowed around them. [It] explore[s] different ways in which to represent that world and help[s] shape the popular imagination as to what the city was and might be about... [It] help[s] make the city legible.[18]

By the late nineteenth century, indeed, many literary authors wrote with acute awareness of the developing social-science literature of cities that modeled the city as a structural or functional totality. In Chapter 6, Stuart Culver examines the interplay between social science and the novel. Selecting texts that go beyond mere exemplification of a theory, he shows the novels "experimentally" testing the theories' validity against characters' motives and behavior, and exposing the inability of theory to contain and to order the messiness of everyday life. His discussion covers the effects – both alienating and liberating – of replacing more intimate bonds of organic community with the instrumental relations of the *Gesellschaft* world; contract as the foundational principle of social interaction; imitation as a mode of social reproduction (often expressed through consumer activity); the tutelary role of the press, civic organizations, and other urban institutions as agents of social control; and the blasé affect that insulates city dwellers against the shocks and surprises of urban life.

One of the greatest challenges facing urban social theorists and reformers has been poverty and the situation of the working classes. Bart Keunen and Luc De Droogh tell us in their chapter on urban economic outsiders (Chapter 7) that those outsiders' narrative function in the literature of the city pivots on whether they are destined to become fully integrated into the social order that their expropriated labor supports or to challenge it. The outsiders' role is further conditioned by other dimensions of identity: native-born workers and immigrants, members of the dominant ethnic strain and racial or ethnic minorities; each group faces different obstacles to full integration and represents a different kind of threat to the existing order. Keunen and De Droogh identify four principal narrative positions

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that economic outsiders have occupied over the past two centuries: Romantic underdog, moral problem, oppositional social force, and alienated individual with only a vague sense of class identity. Each of these roles asks readers to adopt a different mode of cognitive and affective understanding, and each reveals a different fate for the outsiders and truth about the society so constituted.

The literature of European overseas colonization simplifies social relations into those of two antagonistic classes: the colonizer and the colonized subject. Narratives of amelioration and integration are inapplicable to colonized peoples, while under a racial caste system, status as alienated (or any other kind of) *individuals* is unavailable to the colonized person.[19] Dominance and submission mark everything about the colonial city, from its social relations, to its built landscape (even down to its materials and amenities), to its inhabitants' freedom of movement, as Seth Graebner shows in Chapter 14. The spatial patterns of native and settler quarters likewise express fundamentally different beliefs about human nature, collective life, and the purposes of cities. The experience of domination and dislocation weighs on the consciousness of colonial subjects, leaving resistance and revolt as the only *authentic* options. Post-independence, as Graebner observes and Caroline Herbert develops in relation to postcolonial cities in Chapter 15, the markers of segregation that have been designed into the urban landscape resist effacement. But as Herbert shows, for that very reason they can be enlisted in efforts, literary and otherwise, to work through the historical trauma of colonization and its legacies, and to voice once-silenced viewpoints. The weaving of suppressed or otherwise lost stories into "official" histories accounts for the complexly textured – and fissured – historiographic metafictions of the postcolonial city that are her subject.

Herbert also reminds us of the variety of colonial situations during the "colonial era" (the 1500s–1900s) and the complex geography of the postcolonial order when she discusses Michael Ondaatje's novel, *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987). Ondaatje is a naturalized Canadian citizen born in Sri Lanka, an island colonized by Portuguese, surrendered to the Dutch, and under British rule at the time of his birth. *Skin* is set in postindependence Toronto and features Nicholas Temelcoff, a laborer who migrates from post-Ottoman Macedonia. Macedonians had enjoyed limited autonomy under the Ottoman millet system,[20] whereas in Toronto – a settler city whose colonial elite remained in power after Canadian independence, and where ethnic outsiders were officially invisible and often deported when their labor was not needed – Telemcoff is in many ways a colonial subject. Thus, the Canadian and Macedonian situations differ from each other, and both differ markedly from contemporaneous European colonial projects in Africa and Asia.

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The dismantling of the colonial order, ever more forced displacements and willing departures for new lands, and cheaper, faster transportation that makes periodic returns to the homeland possible for a larger number of migrants have globalized the populations of the world's major cities. The many kinds of compelled and voluntary movements call forth a taxonomy to classify the variety of intentions and durations of resettlement, and the imagined connections of migrants to their home and adoptive lands, which Azade Seyhan surveys in Chapter 16. Such mobility has not necessarily made refuge and resettlement easier, Seyhan reminds us in her discussion of people who inhabit cities but not nations, whether they do so as cosmopolitans moving among cities, migrants, diasporans, refugees, or something else. These urban denizens give a new layer of meaning to the old idea of the city as a congregation of strangers. They also make the city "strange" in the attempt to make it familiar, as they project images, memories, and idealizations of their homelands onto new urban landscapes in order to make them more livable. Focusing on two writers, Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Lion Feuchtwanger, and characters in Kate Braverman's novel, *Palm Latitudes*, Seyhan highlights the diversity of situations and some of the factors that determine migrants' fates as they live in the cognitive space between languages and cultures, attempt to translate not only words and customs but also memories and landscapes, and try to preserve some core of identity through their displacements. Özdamar embraces German in Berlin despite its having, for her, no childhood, while Feuchtwanger continued to write in German after being granted asylum and settling in Los Angeles for good in 1941. Both authors found that translation offers enrichment of thought and feeling as well as dilution. In stark contrast, Gloria, a character in *Palm Latitudes* (1988), is economically and racially marginal, and she remains linguistically and culturally estranged. Like so many migrants who find themselves confined to ghettos and interstitial zones and struggling with a new language and culture (and unlike expatriates, who are insulated from these problems by wealth or other forms of privilege), Gloria and her fate remind us how elusive and even illusory the "freedom of the city" remains.

In texts whose urban forms are designed to convey a mood, the city is subjected to a systematic distortion that emphasizes particular qualities, usually of a dark and sensational nature, even if the narrative offers its city as an accurate depiction of reality. The melodramatic novel of urban reform was initiated with *The Mysteries of Paris*, Eugène Sue's episodic story of an aristocratic hero, a righter of wrongs who first appeared in daily feuilletons in the Parisian *Journal de débats* during 1842–3. Sue's example was quickly followed by George W. M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844), *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1849) by Ned Buntline (pseudonym of

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Edward Judson), and George Foster's *New York by Gaslight* (1850). Earlier than the New York efforts, George Lippard's over-the-top urban gothic, *The Quaker City, or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), "exposed" debauchery and criminality among the Philadelphian elite who meet in the titular mansion for rituals of seduction, rape, and murder under the accommodating eye of its caretaker, Abijah K. Jones, familiarly known as Devil-Bug.

The cover of darkness is a staple of these novels. James R. Giles's chapter on "The Urban Nightspace" (Chapter 8) shows us a city riven with lawless, Dionysian energies. Confined to the city, Dionysus is diseased and distorted, manifest in ways that expose the city's sadistic unconscious. These texts of the diseased, nocturnal city nevertheless contribute to social cartography as they show social "extremes meet[ing] by way of the passions. Vice indissolubly welds the rich to the poor" through the cash nexus that reduces marginal individuals to commodities.[21] Giles crucially expands the domain of the Dionysian to include other subversive forces that traverse the night; he specifies the forces of revolution and reaction in Roberto Bolaño's *Amulet* (1999) and the various isolatos and confederations of the disinherited who traverse Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965). One thinks, too, of *The Secret Agent* (1907), Joseph Conrad's corrosively ironic novel of London's anarchist circles, whose title character keeps a "legitimate" business in pornographic postcards and other paper goods as a cover. In all of these cases, the urban nightworld is the milieu of what is repressed by the collective fantasy that passes for social reality. Thankfully, the nighttime city occasionally supplies a warm bedroom and human contact, as we see in a scene from Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and Frank O'Hara's poem, "Present" (1964).

Another Romantic modality, the sublime, was transposed to the city at the turn of the previous century to convey the perceptual and conceptual incomprehensibility of its spatial extent, social and ethnic fabric, and industrial and economic processes. Christophe Den Tandt shows in Chapter 9 that the urban sublime draws its organizing tropes from biology and physics (as did most contemporaneous social-science discourse), and it portrays a city in constant transformation, coursing with the current and currency (as power, the two are often conflated) that drive the industrial machinery and the urban economy. The human subject, meanwhile, is dissolved into the dark, bestial force of the crowd. Nathanael West memorably called on the urban sublime at the climax of *The Day of the Locust* (1939), when in the midst of a swarming crowd outside a movie theater, Tod Hackett at last is "able to think clearly" about his own vision of the urban sublime – his painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles." Yet as Den Tandt predicts, West's modernist take on the urban sublime exhibits revulsion toward a necropolitan city

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filled with "people who come to California to die," rather than teeming with forces of life, as the naturalists' city is.[22] The urban sublime returns to life, Den Tandt observes at the chapter's close, in versions of the postmodern city that are taken up by Nick Bentley in Chapter 13.

In literary and especially popular fiction, sublime terror gave way to an unambiguously dystopian vision that, as Rob Latham and Jeff Hicks demonstrate in Chapter 10, emerges in response to the utopias of literature and urban planning as much as from fears of war and ecological crisis. Tropes of the sublime undergo significant twists, they show: as the city expands, personal space contracts. Life swarms through the city, but in the form of disease. Technological marvels that allow us to see at scales unimagined become an omnipresent surveillance apparatus that watches us. Technology loops backward in the subgenre (and design aesthetic) of steampunk; the future city and its denizens are imagined as stitched together out of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrial technologies. The authors follow the dystopian genre's literary history through magazines, graphic novels, comics, and *manga*, as well as conventional novelistic fiction.

Latham and Hicks note that a dystopian sensibility infects contemporary literary cities outside the genre. Bentley opens his chapter on the postmodern city with the iconic landscape of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) – sublime in its opening panorama of pyramidal skyscrapers and fire-belching refinery towers, dystopic in the cramped swarm at street level; recognizably Los Angeles, yet systematically distorted to represent the depredations of global neoliberalism. Bentley discusses three key modalities of the postmodern city of fiction, the first of which one might call the consumer sublime. This world of hyper-consumption might seem the very opposite of a dystopia because it promises that through the manipulation and combination of fashion's signs one may become one's desires. Yet the seemingly infinite options for outfitting an identity are, these texts remind us, actually a form of managed consciousness. What differentiates the modern dystopia from this postmodern urb, then, is simply the replacement of the pure seriality of the man who is but a number with the illusion of freedom created by a spectacular array of types and taste cultures. Actual creativity seems reserved for those who engage with what Bentley calls "the play of traces" – a sublime excess of signification – and recycle urban leftovers into genuinely expressive forms. A second mode of postmodern city fiction that he discusses shares this interest in signs that refer to no stable, underlying reality. In such novels as Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* (1990) and Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1985–6), the city is an unreadable, often self-referential, palimpsest whose patterns, meanings, and connections are invented rather than discovered; metaphorically or literally, it is often the site of two or more cities. The

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