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Edited by Lawrence Manley

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Introduction

Noting that ‘the literature of London ... to a large extent ... also represents the literature of England’ and that ‘English drama and the English novel spring out of the very conditions of London’,¹ Peter Ackroyd states a maximal case for the pervasive influence of London on English literature. A correspondingly maximal case for the influence of English literature on the experience of London was offered by John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), when he said that ‘every street corner’ of London was ‘peopled by ghosts from literature and history’.² In keeping with these claims for the reciprocal influence of London and literature, it is the premise of this volume that to study the representation of London in English literature is to explore not only variations on a compelling and pervasive topic but a defining element in what has been called the ‘topography’ or the ‘atlas’ of English literature.³ Just as, for reasons explained below and discussed throughout this volume, ‘the *idea* of London is central to the self-image of the British people’, and just as the idea of London ‘deeply penetrates the rest of the world’s view of British life’,⁴ so, through manifold instances, the imaginative representation of London has helped to shape British literature and, to a significant extent, world literature in English.

Although the chapters gathered in this volume are organised by a chronological sequence typical in the study of English literature, they are powerfully informed by spatial or geographical methods recently developed in the humanities and social sciences. Recognising that literature is, among other things, what Malcolm Bradbury has called ‘a mapping of the world’,⁵ they concern themselves with the ‘place-bound’ aspects of literary expression,⁶ with the psychogeographical traits of literary forms and genres, and, over time, with the recurrent ideas, memories, and emotions that characterise the imagination of London in literature. They proceed from an understanding that the spaces we inhabit are neither simply physical nor static, that they are, rather, phenomenological, defined as much by varieties of mental experience and changing social practices as by physical location.

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In keeping with this dynamic way of thinking about space, the chapters in this volume are distinguished by the manner in which they combine, in varied permutations, theories and methods derived from the social sciences and concerned with the nature of cities and urban life; historical consideration of the particular developments and circumstances that account for the changing identity of London; and literary-critical analysis of the techniques, themes, traditions, and innovations that characterise the significant body of English literature in which the representation of London plays an important role. This combination of perspectives and methods is demanded by the nature of the problem, since the London that is imagined through literary representation (a space in literature) is inseparable from the London that shapes imagination (or literature in space).⁷ The urban environment in which (and in response to which) so much of English literature has been written has itself been constructed in many respects *by* its representation in that literature – by the ideas, images, and styles created by writers who have experienced or inhabited it.

The city, urbanisation, and the imagination

To understand this paradox, and before discussing London as a city in particular, it will be useful to examine some key aspects of the way that modern thinkers have described ‘the city’ and the process of urbanisation in general. Theories of the city may focus (as they did in the classic work of Max Weber) on the combinations of institutions, structures, and forms of relationship (such as markets, laws, administration, and provisions for security) that establish the conditions for the stability, freedoms, and opportunities of communal life. Alternatively, theories may focus on those aspects of political economy – such as the flow of goods and the accumulation of capital (including intellectual capital) – that enable cities to establish dominance over their surroundings. Some theories describe the laws of urban ecology, i.e. the patterns of settlement, growth, and differentiation that characterise cities according to their various types and developmental phases. But in addition to these considerations, a principal concern in the field of urban studies during the past century has been the nature of ‘behavioral urbanization’,⁸ the process of human adaptation whereby evolving moral and behavioural technologies – working alongside institutional, demographic, and infrastructural developments – have helped to organise and equip populations for cohabitation and cooperation in settlements of almost inconceivably massive scale. Thus, according to Robert Park, one of the founders of the so-called Chicago School of urban sociology, the city is ‘something more than a congeries of individual men and social conveniences’ and ‘something

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more ... than a mere constellation of institutions and devices'. It is, rather, 'a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition'.⁹

If the city is a state of mind or a body of custom, then the customs that constitute the city are susceptible to sharply opposed variations. On the one hand, going back to the Hebrew Bible and to Cain, the first murderer and the first man to build a city of refuge apart from the God whose retribution he fears, the creation of the city and its ways of life has been seen to rest on forces of compulsion, violence, and inhuman sacrifice.¹⁰ Hence the Psalmist speaks of violence and strife in the city.

Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief
also and sorrow are in the midst of it.

Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from
her streets. (Psalm 55:9–11)

Friedrich Engels, observing that 'the inhabitants of modern London have had to sacrifice so much that is best in human nature', saw 'in the frantic bustle of the great city' 'the disintegration of society into individuals' and 'human society ... split into its component atoms' by the modern capitalist system.¹¹ On the other hand, theorists have also emphasised the compensatory freedoms and enlarged human capacities that come with assimilation to urban life. Max Weber, citing the German proverb 'Stadt luft macht frei' ('city air makes free'), saw in the structural conditions of medieval and early modern European cities the basis for individual creativity and social innovation. Georg Simmel, Weber's student, explored more extensively the ways in which the 'quantitative aspect of life is transformed directly into qualitative traits of character' at the point where a city transcends its visible expanse and 'becomes the seat of cosmopolitanism'.¹² Beginning with the 'objective' and 'rational' nature of the money economy and the quickened pace of life that drives the metropolis, Simmel identified impersonality, intellectuality, reserve and the calculated indifference of the '*blasé* attitude' as belonging to the state of mind of the modern metropolite. But 'what appears in the metropolitan style of life directly as dissociation', he went on to explain, is in reality 'only one of its elemental forms of socialization', since it 'promotes differentiation, refinement, and ... growing differences within the public'. The result is a detachment from tradition and the development of an 'individual freedom' expressed 'in the working-out of a way of life'. Whereas for Simmel this 'elaboration of individuality' involved a disconnection from others and, in the face of the numbing tempo of urban life, a purely subjective freedom to pursue 'tendentious peculiarities' and

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the ‘specifically metropolitan extravagances of mannerism, caprice, and preciousness’, Park saw in the extraordinary complexity of urban life, with its multiple demands, affiliations, and commitments, the impossibility of being dominated by any single code of behaviour and thus the opportunity for creative deviance through the multiple alliances formed in the city’s varied ‘moral regions’:

In the long run every individual finds somewhere among the varied manifestations of city life the sort of environment in which he expands and feels at ease; finds, in short, the moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulations that bring his innate dispositions to full and free expression ... Neither the criminal, the defective, nor the genius has the same opportunity to develop his innate disposition in a small town that he invariably finds in a great city. (p. 126)

The role of the city as a stimulus and arena for human development is a primary reason for its cultural significance and thus for the important place in urban theory for the analysis of the city’s cultural life. Thus Henri Lefebvre, a force in the recent ‘cultural turn’ of urban studies, emphasised that ‘the production of space’ involves an ongoing triangulation of the spatial practices of a society (the routines and networks that unfold in geographical spaces) with both ‘representations of space’, as these are abstractly conceptualised by planners and other authorities, and the ‘representational spaces’ or imagined, symbolic, and associational frames through which space comes to be inhabited psychologically by individuals. Whereas concrete ‘spatial practices’ and abstract ‘representations of space’ define the ways in which space is perceived and conceived, ‘representational spaces’ render

space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do more than describe. This is the space ... which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.¹³

Lefebvre thus creates, in his theory on the production of urban space, an important domain for culture. For Walter Benjamin, whose work has also been similarly important for the cultural turn in urban studies, the meaning of urban life is embodied in the interaction between the physical spaces of the city – its architecture and its many distinctive spaces – and the mental life of those who experience them. In its built forms, its mixture of styles and functions, each city becomes a repository of the traditions, fantasies, and unconscious commitments that govern its life. As a result, ‘reading the urban text’ is for Benjamin ‘not a matter of intellectually scrutinizing the

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landscape: rather it is a matter of exploring the fantasy, wish-processes and dreams locked up in our perception of cities'.¹⁴ Though Benjamin understands these fantastic dimensions of urban life largely through their negative effects, in terms of the manipulation of consciousness by the mechanisms of mass culture and capitalism, media and advertising (which adjust 'reality to the masses and ... the masses to reality'), he also recognises, in imaginative writing and critical thinking, possibilities for understanding the role of cultural fantasies in the process of urbanisation.¹⁵

This way of approaching the culture of cities, then, points to numerous roles for the imagination and the arts, including literature, in the creation of urban life. It illuminates the ways in which literature contributes to collective images of the city, to the formation of urbanites and their behaviour, and to the uniqueness of the individual imagination amid urban surroundings. It is to our understanding of the last of these that Michel de Certeau contributes in his account of 'Walking in the City', where he contrasts the 'planned and readable city' of cartographers, planners, and government authorities to the expressive nature of the 'migrational or metaphorical city', a city that is formed by the individual movements and experiences of 'the ordinary practitioners of the city' as they 'follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it'. Applied to the conscious process of literary expression, de Certeau's model for the individual appropriation of the urban environment, and for the transformation of geographical place into cultural space, can serve also as a model for the representation of the city in literature, for its creation of 'a second, poetic geography on top of' – but never in isolation from – 'the geography of the literal' and the collective.¹⁶

Much of the theory discussed above was developed to account for aspects of modernity and the modern metropolis, but where literature is concerned it may be usefully extended backward in time and adapted to the changing techniques of the literary medium. The interplay of collective with individual, objective with subjective, is perhaps the central problem engaged by the city in literature. Julian Wolfreys, playing on the double meaning of 'invention' as both 'that which is found' and 'that which is created', speaks of the 'impossible ontology' of the city in literature, an entity with links to an objective, historical existence and to a collective, cultural tradition that is nevertheless always singular, *someone's* (and *some one*) imagined London.¹⁷ The essence of the problem explored by the chapters in this volume can be found in Jonathan Raban's observation that

Cities ... are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try and impose a personal

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form on them ... The city as we might imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.¹⁸

London and English literature

The particular significance of London and its role in English literature is perhaps most easily summarised by way of statistics, beginning with the observation that 'London has dominated the settlement hierarchy of England and Wales for more than a thousand years and now accounts for between 25% and 40% of the population of these two countries.'¹⁹ The problem of setting fixed boundaries for London, a definitional problem discussed more extensively below, contributes to the fuzziness of such statistics, but their import is clear: the history of London is undeniably the story of its domination of the rest of the nation. Already three times as large as Bristol, the second-largest English town in the fourteenth century, London had become by 1520 ten times as large as Norwich, then in second place.²⁰ By 1600, when London's population roughly tripled that of its ten largest rivals combined and when the high mortality rates in the city required that London's expansion be sustained by steady in-migration, one-eighth of the English people lived as Londoners at some point during their lifetimes. London was home to roughly 10 per cent of the population of England and Wales in 1750, to 13.2 per cent in 1851, and to 16.4 per cent in 1901, or nearly one in six.²¹ The growth in London's proportion of the national urban population was reversed by the growth of the industrial towns during the early nineteenth century, although this too was arguably a function of the development of transport, commerce, and finance centred in London, and of London's role in driving a more general process that has been called 'the urbanization of the human population', the process whereby societies become *predominantly* urban.²² By 1900, when London had already been for a century the largest city in the West, Britain became by this definition the world's first 'urbanised' society, and it remains today, with the Netherlands, the most urbanised society in Europe.

Although the population of London peaked above 8 million on the eve of the Second World War, the pattern of declining population and economic stagnation that characterised the later twentieth century began to reverse itself in the 1990s, and, in contrast to former industrial towns in continuing decline elsewhere in the UK, London's population once again began to grow. Information technology and the emergence of a global economy contributed

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to 'a new geography of centrality and marginality' favouring services over manufacturing and technology over manpower.²³ As a result of these economic changes, though it had slipped in rank below the two dozen most populous of the world's cities, in 2007 London was ranked above its chief competitors – New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong – as the world's most economically important city. Hosting 25 million visitors per year, it anchors a metropolitan region that generates 75 per cent of the nation's wealth.²⁴

Throughout its history as capital, market, *entrepôt*, imperial metropolis, and global city, London has developed through a paradoxical combination of centripetal and centrifugal effects: consolidation and cohesion at the centre have always been linked to expanding influence at the peripheries, to increasing heterogeneity, mobility, and specialisation within a national and multicultural public. Several factors contribute, then, to the fascinating *in*definition of 'London' and to the indefinite extension of its influence – its domination of the national economy and, in connection with this influence, an identity, as capital, that 'has always been straddled between locality and nation';²⁵ tentacular vectors of growth that for centuries have given London its physical character as a 'monster' or 'monstrous city' (as Defoe, Smollett, and Mayhew, among others, described it);²⁶ a history of relatively weak governmental systems – from the ancient 'City' and Corporation outstripped by its suburbs to the London County Council (1889), the Greater London Council (1965–86), and the Greater London Authority (2000). Formal jurisdictions have rarely matched up with the realities of the city's changing life. But the malleable and heterogeneous definition of London is also a consequence of its role in English literature, where a composite formed from an immense variety of inevitably singular and partial perspectives has extended its influence through a verbal medium of indefinite spatiotemporal extension.

Indeed, as the chapters in this volume attest, literature and other technologies of communication were themselves inseparably linked to developments in London – to the clerical culture of courts, schools, scriptoria, and manuscript circulation that developed there in the later Middle Ages (Hanna); to the production, in the early modern period, of printed books by the national monopoly of the London Company of Stationers; to the public theatres and the cultures of ceremony and performance that developed in early modern London (Howard, Rosenthal); to the culture of journalism, conversation, and persuasion that, in connection with the London printing trade and the city's coffee houses, formed 'the practical core of the rise of public reason' and a national 'public sphere' (Johns); to the growth of a 'cultural marketplace' of diversifying styles, genres, and *decora* that created new opportunities for burlesque, parody, and pastiche (Hammond); to a culture

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of improvement, instruction, and self-cultivation, whose nonfictional genres (topographies, travelogues, diaries, and periodicals) helped to shape the techniques of fictional narration and the canons of realism (Wall); to a mechanising and industrialising landscape, whose constant motion, nocturnal activity, polluted atmosphere, and miasmal slums transformed the techniques of visual and verbal communication (Sharpe, Bodenheimer, West); and to the development of broadcasting and film industries, centred in London but reaching throughout the globe (Mellor, Ball, McLeod, Donald). In the course of exploring how London is represented in works of English literature, the chapters in this Companion have much to say also about how and why London helped to produce that literature and why London became a presence in so much of it.

London *in* English literature

The earliest literary representation of a city, the Egyptian hieroglyph *niw.t*, depicts a cross within a circle. The medieval economic historian Robert Lopez, seeing in this hieroglyph an intersection or crossroads enclosed by a protective moat or wall, took it as a definition of a fundamental dialectic: ‘Communication plus togetherness, or, a special aptitude for change combined with a peculiar feeling of identity: is not this the essence of the city?’²⁷ But in addition to the pattern that fascinated Lopez – the way that intensified exchange and collective identity create each other – one might see other features of the city in this symbol. The crossroads that converge inward at the centre of the circle, for example, imply extension outward as vectors for bi-directional movement beyond the walls, thus pointing to the hinterlands to which the city is linked in countless ways. In their segmentation of the quartered space within the circle, the crossroads also differentiate and divide, reflecting the processes of specialisation and disassociation that shape the urban environment, economy, and populace. At their point of intersection, the converging lines produce a singular, privileged site or *punctum* that can imply connection to a vertical dimension and to the accumulated, subterranean layers of the past and to the heavenly powers that make the city, as both burial tumulus and temple, a sacred space. The intersecting lines might also suggest the crosshairs of the *Lotfernrohr* 7, the Luftwaffe bombsight, or the converging courselines plotted on the charts of military planners. When it takes representational form, then, the city is almost by definition a ‘heterotopia’,²⁸ a space in which many different spaces, and many different times within these spaces, can be superimposed. As the chapters below demonstrate, the London of English literature, in and through the countless works that depict it, is just such a heterotopia.

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As Ralph Hanna explains in the chapter that opens this volume, the London represented in later medieval English literature was in several respects a ‘liminal’ space, i.e. an emerging *conception*, first of all, whose marginal position in late medieval literature mirrors the emerging influence of the city itself (a community of roughly 50,000 souls at the death of Chaucer in 1400). Defined primarily by its defensive walls and by the jurisdictional limits of its civic freedoms, the City, consisting of merchants and other commoners, was the social and imaginative ‘other’ to the dominant estates of clergy and nobility and thus to the primarily religious and chivalric tenor of much medieval literature. ‘Much more aware of London’s edges than its contents’, medieval literature thus concerned itself with the paradox that the new powers concentrated within London’s boundaries (powers celebrated in the ceremonies and hierarchical arrangements of London’s guilds) were also powers that threatened at every turn to usurp those boundaries – in the city’s economic encroachments on its hinterlands, for example, in the ‘magnat’ ambitions of its leading merchants, in the mixture of rapprochement and contention that characterised the city’s relations with the crown, and in the predation of merchandising on the lavish habits of aristocrat *dépense*. If the comic fate of the hapless hero of *Bevis of Hamtoun*, an intruding knight hemmed in by the narrow lanes, locked gates, and chained passageways of the well-policed municipality, points toward the transformation of chivalry by the comedic and mock-epic potential of the city in literature, the perception of Langland’s Conscience that the order of merchandising is an order of *misrepresentation* and falsehood points to the fascinating incompatibility of urban life with the ideal of ‘trouth’ espoused in the mainstream of medieval literature and culture. This is perhaps a way of saying that the depiction of London is a threshold that marks the beginning of the end of medieval literature.

If so, it is also, as Jean E. Howard demonstrates in her chapter on the roles of London on the early modern stage, a threshold opening onto the ‘performative élan’ of early modern social and theatrical life. The playwright Thomas Heywood famously declared in his *Apology for Actors* (1612) that ‘playing is an ornament to the Citty’,²⁹ and in 1631 Edmund Howes could boast that there had been seventeen stages or common playhouses ‘new made within the space of threescore yeeres within London and the Suburbs’, among them the Theatre in Shoreditch (1576), the Curtain (1577), the Rose (1587), the Swan (1596), the Globe (1599), and the Fortune (1600).³⁰ By 1595 an estimated 15,000 people per week were attending performances in London. The rise of theatricality and especially the representation of London life on stage, Howard explains, were inseparable from the demographic and economic changes of the period – the rapid growth of London (200,000 by

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1600), the transformation of the medieval craft guilds into international trading consortia, and the new social mobilities that ‘put pressure on the traditional status system’. Destabilised relations between city and country, merchants and gentry, denizens and strangers, husbands and wives, masters and servants all contributed to narratives and social types through which the stage attempted to render the bewilderments of urban life intelligible. Yet no master-narrative emerged; rather, Howard demonstrates, different genres supplied a variety of scenarios, each of them marked by its own complexities and ambivalences: ‘citizen’ plays like *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1600) and Heywood’s 1–2 *Edward IV* (c. 1599) offered pseudo-historical portraits of the heroic exploits and civic benefactions of legendary Londoners while also raising anxious questions about the relationship of royal power and aristocratic privilege to merchant life; domestic tragedies dealing with real-life crimes like the murder of George Sanders by his wife’s lover or the gruesome dismemberment of the Chandler Thomas Beech by his innkeeping neighbour Thomas Merry juxtaposed the criminality and danger of contemporary London with the reassuring presence of civic surveillance and justice; city comedies by William Haughton, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, and others, built around erotic and financial intrigue, raised without answering the question of whether rectitude or clever performance, morality or materialism, were the key to happiness and success.

If the commercial stage was one innovation of early modern London, the printing press was another. Taking note of the 50 to 100 million volumes printed by London presses during the politically tumultuous period between 1642 and 1700, Adrian Johns examines the civic and intellectual awareness that, in the decades of the English Civil War, Interregnum, Restoration, and Glorious Revolution, made Londoners confident in their ‘ability and indeed right to engage in judgment on all conceivable topics’. By examining the localised dynamics of the book-trade, the importance of the bookseller’s shop and the coffee house, and the increasingly rapid tempo of serial news publication and political pamphleteering, Johns shows how a transcendent regime of print and public reasoning – a ‘public sphere’ in the terms of Jürgen Habermas – emerged from local knowledge, face-to-face relationships, and the London publisher’s workplace. If there is a single literary image that captures the London of Johns’s essay, it is ‘this vast city ... the mansion house of liberty’ praised in Milton’s *Areopagitica* (1644), where writers and thinkers are ‘sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas’ while countless others are ‘as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement’. In keeping, however, with Milton’s view that intellectual and moral ‘trial is by what is contrary’ Johns stresses that ‘London was not a single entity, then or