



Mary L. Shannon, *Dickens, Reynolds, and Mayhew on Wellington Street: The Print Culture of a Victorian Street*

Mary L. Shannon. *Dickens, Reynolds, and Mayhew on Wellington Street: The Print Culture of a Victorian Street*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. xviii, 261p. ill. ISBN 9781472442048. £65.00 (hardcover).

As someone who designs guidebooks for different UK cities (in the *Art Researchers' Guide* series), and who studies Victorian book illustration, I appreciate this well-researched volume by Mary L. Shannon on different levels. Shannon writes a social history of a specific part of London and Melbourne told through key figures of nineteenth-century literature and publishing. She not only records where the likes of Charles Dickens, G.W.M Reynolds, and Henry Mayhew worked, socialised, and went to be entertained, but she also maps a typography of invisible networks that encompass Britain's print culture intersecting a greater Empire. Like any useful guidebook which gives you a flavour for the journey you are about to undertake, this work has illustrations, street plans, as well as photographs, and its text speaks in a distinctive and entertaining voice. This guide helps visitors see overlooked artefacts and half-hidden geographical features, with the aim of preparing readers to explore a specific time period and its worldview. Destination: 1843-1853.

During this decade, in addition to 13 booksellers and book publishers, more than 20 periodicals and newspapers were based on Wellington Street. Among them: the *Examiner*, *Anthenaeum*, *Punch*, *The Morning Post*, *Puppet Show*, *the Literary Gazette*, *The Railway Chronicle*, and *Spectator*. Shannon cites and provides examples from an exhaustive list of nineteenth-century primary sources including: post office directories, maps, newspaper articles, biographies, plays, novels, letters, and of course popular guidebooks. She makes an overwhelming case for why Dickens, Reynolds, and Mayhew were able to write with insight about the plight of the poor and the darker side of human nature. Because they witnessed and participated in the vibrant social milieu of Wellington Street—which throbbed with political passion, with the creative energy of the entertainment district, and the animated “masses” who went about their daily lives near them. Physical proximity to diverse groups of ordinary people greatly influenced our writer-editors and their literary output.

The structure of Shannon's book is precise; it would have delighted Victorians and satisfied their compulsive need to establish “some order” on everything around them. The book is



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divided into six chapters, the four middle chapters into: morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Each section manages to do something very complex. “Morning” on Wellington Street discusses Charles Dickens and his work editing *Household Words*. “Afternoon” covers Reynolds and his works like *The Mysteries of London*, but also Reynolds’ mentions in the press related to Chartism and working class movements. “Evening” illuminates Mayhew and his time working on *Punch* magazine, but ties that into the local theatre district and the construct of a writer/editor as showman. Finally, the chapter “Night” reaches out into the British Empire, analysing the print network’s structure on Collins Street in Melbourne and comparing and contrasting that with its role model established on Wellington Street in London. As we, the readers, move “in and out of days” across time and space, Shannon ties together all the threads she has revealed to us—threads we need to navigate an intricate labyrinth.

The guidebook metaphor aptly describes this work. Yet it can also be extended to contain the personal experience of being hosted by a physical tour guide with encyclopaedic knowledge leading us around. There is drama in human interaction. Is the guide who is narrating our journey through dens of criminals, drawing rooms of nobility, sites of prostitution, and the workspaces of the working-class poor, the *Resurrection Man* whom we should not trust? Or a benevolent reformer who wants to improve the lot of those around us? The noble hero who wants us to understand and help, and not gawk at the misfortunes of others? The fact that Shannon’s book can paint such a vivid picture of the nineteenth century, on human terms as well on a geographical scale, marks it as highly engaging book, and as a work of excellent scholarship.

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