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Tom Chivers and Martin Kratz, eds., *Mount London: Ascents in the Vertical City*, hardback, 214 pages, 1 map, London: Penned in the Margins, 2014. ISBN: 978-1908058188; £12.99.

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Tom Chivers and Martin Kratz's *Mount London: Ascents in the Vertical City* is an 'anthology of urban explorations' (7). Through literary encounters with urban space, the collection sets out to find London's topographical, imaginary and virtual ascents. As the editors explain in their introduction, the tensions between the material city and its underlying topography provide the starting point from which the authors make contact not only with London's geography but also with its historic and social layers. As they write about climbing London's hills, the authors highlight the encounter between individual and landscape. Just as mountains are often associated with the sublime and with mythic narratives, London is revealed to be a place of narratives rooted in personal and collective memory. A map of London appropriately provides the structure for this anthology. The various essays are thus clearly connected to urban space, and the overall route of the book is mapped from north to south, east to west. These autobiographical essays explore seventeen hills, three towers, two heaths, one field, one mount, one staircase and one palace as the writers reflect upon London's—and their own—past, present and future.

The contributions are by writers, poets, literary scholars and playwrights seeking a personal encounter with urban space through an exploration of the city's elevations. As Michel de Certeau notes in his reflections on space in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, perception is linked to the spectator's specific location. On street level, pedestrians actively produce space—and thus write a text—that is illegible from the horizontal plane. However, the vertical perspective implies a bird's-eye view, as well as distance and creative power (de Certeau 1988: 92–3). The texts of *Mount London* are not limited to the position of the creator or voyeur, but do aim at tackling London's

verticality. This shift in perspective allows both author and reader to perceive London's historical and topographical layers more deeply. While the theme of ascent posits the author as mountaineer, this raises questions not only about locating the narrative voice in terms of perspective and authority but also about the legibility of urban space. Experiencing and narrating the palimpsest of London from such a different vantage point manifests its manifold and ambiguous facets.

Taking as her starting point both its elevated position and the associations of hills with burial and sacrificial rites, Katy Evans-Bush explores the historic layers of Stamford Hill and its multi-faceted history. Focusing on Jewish migration from the 1760s and after, the author foregrounds change and memory in urban space and its rich and polyvalent social dynamics. In his contribution, Alan Cunningham draws upon an outsider's perspective of Ludgate Hill as he relates his memories of strolling like a flâneur along the hill during his youthful London visits to his more recent experiences of urban space.

In her piece on Dartmouth Park Hill, Sarah Butler starts from de Certeau's reflections on the elevated perspective as she describes movement as a form of interaction. When walking the city the narrator engages in an act of claiming space which enables her to view the urban network through the lens of personal history and to locate herself within London's polyphonic narrative. Intertwining social and personal history also stands at the centre of Amber Massie-Blomfield's essay on Gipsy Hill. The author's recitation of street names actualises the history of the Romani people in urban space (192), thus uncovering a history of persecution and resilience and conjuring up the narratives of her own family history.

In 'Snow Hill', Tom Chivers searches for a buried history within the urban network and characterises London as a 'city of digression' (93). The abandoned underground station, Snow Hill Station, represents the ephemerality of historic relevance. Just as the Snow Hill ghost station is barely noticeable from the train, the ascent to the spectral Snow Hill is also easily missed. Exploring the topography demands the same kind of active engagement as uncovering the hidden layers of history.

In the first of his two contributions to the anthology, Martin Kratz writes about ascent from below. While climbing the 320 steps of the Hampstead Underground Station emergency exit, the author emphasises the interaction of body and space. Different sounds and their varied sources accompany the climb. On the way up, urban sounds fade away, except for the monotonous sound of his own footsteps. For Bradley L. Garrett, in 'Battersea Power Station', climbing the chimneys of the power station is linked to desire and longing and also sparks his reflections about the connections between body, nature and urban architecture. David Cooper's 'Telegraph Hill' dislocates the narrative voice in a 'life of pleasingly polarised geographies' between the Lake District and London (147). He visits the city only for research so his experience of London is condensed and his sense of urbanity fleeting. His entry into urban verticality comes when he visits his parents' favourite place in London—Telegraph Hill—with his father. Yet the ascent is anti-climatic as the drizzle obscures the famous view from the hill. In his essay on Windmill Hill, Matt D. Brown engages in

narrative archaeology: he focuses on the hill as a man-made structure, linking the history of the neighbourhood to the processes of building and destruction.

S. J. Fowler's piece on Hampstead Heath foregrounds physical engagement with London's topography as a jogger enters into competition with the landscape. Tom Chivers's second contribution examines the artificiality of Stave Hill's thirty-foot high grass mounds. The man-made structure is contrasted with Rotherhithe Peninsula's flatness, and human mobility is reflected in the history of Rotherhithe and the East End as entry and exit points for migration. As Liz Cookman climbs Lavender Hill, a natural glacial hill, she reflects upon the dense network of buildings that block her view.

The virtual character of London's hills is important to Edmund Hardy's exploration of Forest Hill. Here, verticality becomes a mere idea as the narrator chooses a conceptual approach in his engagement with geography while searching for possible peaks in the physical topography and historic periods alike. In her essay on Blackheath, Chrissy Williams highlights the contrast between the intended ascent and the actual experience of feeling exposed in the openness of the heath.

As a runner in a public race on Parliament Hill, Helen Mort narrates the experience of the city from the perspective of young outsider imagining a future life in London. Raising questions of social location and belonging, Iuana Ellams examines the Notting Hill neighbourhood from the perspective of a teenage immigrant. Karen McCarthy Woolf narrates Brixton Hill in twenty-six numbered paragraphs as she connects cityscape and personal family history. The history of community leader Olive Morris is intertwined with memories of the narrator's father, thus merging personal fragments of memory and urban social history.

Mary Paterson addresses the reader directly in her instructive essay on Denmark Hill, which she portrays as being in a state of transition throughout the centuries, from a royal hunting ground to a present-day neighbourhood dominated by different types of families. Transition also plays an important role in Gareth E. Rees's ascent of Spring Hill. The recent gentrification of Hackney provides the background to the narrator's exploration of historic processes of change from, for example, a mainly Caribbean to an orthodox Jewish neighbourhood.

A literary engagement with urban topography stands at the centre of Tamar Yoseloff's essay on Mount Pleasant. Walking from Gray's Inn Road to Islington enables the author to link self to space and the city's past to its present, generating a poetic response. As poem and essay intertwine, a text as hybrid as the city emerges. Drawing on references to H. P. Lovecraft's work and to the TV series *Doctor Who*, Justin Hopper highlights the uncanny and uses the immediacy of present tense narration to describe his walk on Horsenden Hill on a foggy winter day. Joe Dunthorne's view on the Shard from his London apartment initiates his reflections on the menacing character of the high-rise. The spear-like structure and its inaccessibility emphasise the skyscraper's threatening aspect. The literary associations, linking the building to J. R. R. Tolkien's Mordor, also stress the Shard's foreboding character.

In his second text in this anthology, Martin Kratz focuses on the imaginary qualities of topography. Richmond Hill becomes the narrative voice of the text and reflects, in epistolary form, on the human presence in space. Tim Cresswell's piece on

Northala Fields is a purely imaginary ascent to the never-finished Watkin's Tower. This then leads the narrator to actually climb the four grassy mounds on Northala Fields that were built from construction rubble from Wembley Stadium. Gemma Seltzer responds to the idea of urban verticality through her search for the highest point in Crystal Palace Park. The virtual character of city ascents is highlighted here because she finds her desired access points in no-longer existing structures, which can only be roughly located in the topography of the park. The narrator presents her inquiries into this imaginary topography in three chapters, representing three different walks with three different imaginary peaks. The text does not aim at a definitive conclusion to the narrator's search; rather it stresses openness and impermanence as the most prominent features of London's hills.

In its multi-faceted approaches, *Mount London* unfurls a panorama of literary encounters with urbanity as diverse as the city itself. Ranging from historical and archaeological approaches to poetic responses to London, the texts focus on the interaction of body, self and city. Walking the city is presented as akin to the mountaineer's experiences, with a similar exhortation to maintain a heightened awareness of one's surroundings. The contributions thus present the reader with innovative, exhilarating—and sometimes dark and challenging, but always rewarding—access points to engage with the city's topography, history, social structure, and literary and cultural traditions.

Works Cited

de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Note on Contributor

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