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Mary L. Shannon, *Dickens, Reynolds and Mayhew on Wellington Street: The Print Culture of a Victorian Street*, hardback, 261 pages, London: Ashgate, 2015. ISBN: 9781472442048; £65.

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In this fascinating, meticulously-researched (and somewhat densely-written) book Mary Shannon focusses on Wellington Street, off the Strand, as having been the heart of London's 'print networks', with particular reference to the period 1843–1853 and devotes one chapter also to its Australian offshoot, Collins Street in Melbourne. She shows that during her chosen decade more than twenty newspapers and periodicals had their offices on Wellington Street, including *Punch* (briefly), *The Examiner*, *Reynold's Miscellany*, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, Dickens's *Household Words* and Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. Newspapers, magazines, periodicals of all kinds create 'imagined communities' of readers but here in Wellington Street was to be found an actual face-to-face community involving, as described by Edgar Browne in his *Phiz and Dickens*, 'a constant intercommunication between authors, artists, engravers, printers, and the like'. Dickens and Reynolds must have often passed on the street, but did they acknowledge each other? It seems highly unlikely that Dickens would have given the time of day to one of the chief plagiarisers of *Pickwick Papers*, whom he would also have regarded as little better than a pornographer, but there seems to be no evidence one way or the other. More significant, from a literary point of view, is Shannon's persuasive contention (illustrated by a brief case-study of *Bleak House* in her final chapter) that the close juxtaposition of their offices makes 'a significant backdrop to the fascination with connections and coincidences in work by Dickens, Jerrold, Mayhew, Reynolds and Sala, as well as R. H. Horne and Marcus Clarke [the latter two writing in Melbourne]' (7).

Concerned to explore 'everyday working and social practices for mid-nineteenth century journalism' (12), Shannon structures her book into four chapters: 'Morning', 'Afternoon', 'Evening', and 'Night'. In the 'Morning' chapter she evokes, with help from Mayhew, what must have been the considerable bustle of early-morning life on Wellington Street with street-hawkers of various wares, horse-drawn vehicles rattling along, and so on. Dickens, standing at the window of his *Household Words* office, 'would have looked out at the offices of people with whom he had collaborated, at his competitors, and at premises such as the Lyceum [with its display of playbills] and Lacy's bookshop, which represented leisure industries that competed with printed matter for the leisure hours of the middle and working classes' while—not within sight but less than five minutes' walk away—was another print centre, Holywell Street, 'a hotspot for the radical and pornographic book trade' (56). Shannon's close focus on the immediate topographical surroundings of the *Household Words* office certainly sheds an interesting new light on Dickens's 'Preliminary Word' in the first number of his new magazine by giving a concrete topographical context to his much-quoted words:

Some toilers of the field into which we now come have been here before us, and some are here whose high usefulness we readily acknowledge, and whose company it is an honour to join. But, there are others here—Bastards of the Mountain, draggled fringe on the Red Cap [alluding to Reynolds's republicanism], Panders to the lowest passions of the basest natures—whose existence is a national reproach. And these, we should consider it our highest honour to displace. (Reprinted in Slater 1996))

In her second chapter, 'Afternoon', Shannon begins by focussing on the mass demonstration against the introduction of an income tax held in Trafalgar Square in March 1848. This great gathering was addressed by Reynolds in a speech in which he was strongly supportive of the new French Republic and highly critical of English oligarchical power. When he returned to Wellington Street, only a fifteen-minute walk away, he was followed by a considerable portion of the crowd and made another speech to them from the balcony of his house there, which was both the office of his newspaper and his private residence. 'His imagined network of readers', Shannon comments, 'had turned, he hoped, into real protestors there outside his building' and she argues that he can here be seen to be using urban space 'as a continuation of radical fiction' (70). Reynolds returned the event to radical fiction, in fact, by publishing a detailed report of his speech not in *Reynolds's Miscellany* but as a footnote to his long-running, scabrous feuilleton *The Mysteries of London*. In the *Mysteries* he manages to combine revolutionary politics with near-pornographic melodrama in his depiction of the two extremes of London life, on the one hand the slum-dwellers and criminals and on the other the wealthy classes both aristocratic and non-aristocratic. Wellington Street and the Strand area touched geographically, as Shannon shows, on both of London's social extremes, being so close to the rookeries of St Giles but also easily accessible from St James's'. The second part of this 'Afternoon' chapter takes the form of a detailed and informative discussion of Reynolds's vastly popular and long-running *Mysteries*, read, as she shows by middle-class as well as lower-class readers, and remarkable for its combination of sensationalism, erotic titillation and Radicalism. It is much enhanced by the reproduction of some of the original

illustrations to the work which vividly portray the great contrast between the two worlds.

Shannon's 'Evening' chapter focusses on all links between page and stage physically present in Wellington Street. Located there were (and still are) two great theatres, the Lyceum, just across the street from Dickens's *Household Words* office, and, further north, Covent Garden. Also in the immediate vicinity were the Drury Lane Theatre and the Adelphi, the latter particularly celebrated for its melodramas. Next door to the *Household Words* office was Lacy's theatrical bookshop where texts of plays could be bought. The theatres were places where the editors and writers of newspapers and journals could meet face to face with members of their imagined print communities. The two professions, theatre and journalism, had also in common the fact that many who worked in them worked until late in the evening and would then resort to one of 'the many taverns, coffee houses, or supper rooms close by' (128). Commenting on this leads Shannon into some discussion of the world of so-called 'Bohemia' located in such places and frequented by actors, editors and journalists like 'Dickens's young men', as they were familiarly called, George Augustus Sala and Edmund Yates, and of the various clubs and societies that were formed in this world. Perhaps her most interesting discussion, however, relates to her detailed exploration of the link between page and stage through 'the trope of writer-as-showman' (134). This was most famously used by Thackeray in 1847 at the beginning of *Vanity Fair* but a version had been featured earlier in the vignette title-page of the first series of *Sketches by Boz* showing Dickens and Cruikshank ascending by balloon to float over London and 'provide a bird's-eye view of the community' (134). Shannon goes on to discuss the frequency with which journalists also wrote for the stage and notes what a large influence writers connected to Wellington Street had on London drama in the 1840s and 1850s: 'Reynolds, Jerrold, and Mayhew all had their most well-known London writings turned into popular plays' (140). She might also have noted here that Douglas Jerrold had no less than half-a-dozen original dramas staged in the West End during the period she is covering. The chapter concludes with a very interesting discussion of Jerrold's son-law Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. Drawing on Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's 2010 introduction to his edition of *London Labour*, Shannon highlights the 'theatrical style' of Mayhew's interviews with his subjects in *London Labour* and the way he got his interviewees to 'perform for the reader' (155), also to the 'imagined national network of readers, correspondents, and informants' (156) that he established through the 'Answers to Correspondents' section of his serial publication of *London Labour*.

In her final chapter, 'Night', Shannon discusses the attempted replication of the journalistic/literary culture of Wellington Street in Collins Street, Melbourne. She draws primarily upon the work of two émigré journalists, Richard Hengist Horne and Marcus Clarke. Horne, who emigrated to Melbourne in 1852, had been a prolific contributor to *Household Words* and in his new location he could, Shannon writes, 'aspire to the status of Dickens, as the influential focal point of a print network' (177). She pays particular attention to his involvement with *Melbourne Punch* which was founded in 1855 and had its office on Collins Street. This journal, she notes, became the focus for the personal and professional networks that developed in Melbourne and were centred on Collins Street where, as happened in Wellington Street, links of

business, friendship and marriage became interwoven. Marcus Clarke, whom Shannon calls 'a self-conscious child of Wellington Street' (200) and who was later to write what John Sutherland in his *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* has called 'the finest Australian novel of the nineteenth century, *His Natural Life*' (published 1875), arrived in Melbourne in 1863. He began writing sketches of Melbourne street life that in many respects echoed Sala's London sketches as well as comments made by some of Mayhew's characters. Shannon discusses one of these sketches, 'A Night at the Immigrants' Home', in some detail and in so doing she is able to show those qualities in Clarke's writing that serve to distinguish it from comparable work by Horne or Mayhew.

This, as I hope this review has made clear, is a work of impressive research (though not, one must add as thoroughly indexed as it might have been) in which intensive and meticulous historical, biographical and topographical research come together. The result is to provide us with a valuable addition to our knowledge and understanding of the way in which certain notable print networks, both in London and in Melbourne, were operating in the mid-nineteenth century.

Reference

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